



October 23, 1997

Interdepartmental Correspondence

To: Dean Marsha Landolt, Graduate School  
Dean John Simpson, College of Arts and Sciences  
Divisional Dean Susan Jeffords, College of Arts and Sciences  
Dean Fred Campbell, Undergraduate Education

From: Victoria Lawson, Chair

Re: Response to the Report of the Ten Year Review Committee on the Geography Department

This memo is our response to the June 1997 Report of the Review Committee and their evaluation of our graduate and undergraduate programs in Geography.

The students, staff and faculty of the Department of Geography found this review process extremely useful in prompting us to take a serious look at our programs, achievements and our needs. Our preparations for the site visit in May, 1997 led us to take stock of the last ten years, and to begin a valuable discussion of our priorities, standards and future directions. As I noted in our response to the TA Review Report, we feel that this and the report discussed here have provided us with useful advice about how to build on our existing strengths. In addition, we have received clear guidance on how to make continued improvements to our graduate and undergraduate programs and in faculty contributions to the University and beyond.

There is a high level of agreement between the Committee members and the faculty in terms of their assessment of our program. We are very gratified by the positive tone of the review and the recognition and appreciation of the changes we have been making in the Department over the last several years. We feel that the Department has reached an unusual level of visibility in the University community and this is another recognition of our achievements. Specifically, the Department was featured as one of three case studies at the Regents work session in July of this year and the innovations and ideas that we have been developing were very well received. Further, the Department was cited by President McCormick in his October 1997 address as an example of,

"...where faculty and students are engaged in an ongoing process of reshaping their curricular and teaching methods. The Department now puts heavy emphasis on service learning, on guiding majors to formulate plans and goals, on technology based instruction and on collaborative student teams and projects. What there has not been is a major infusion of

new resources. The Department could unquestionably do more and go faster with such an infusion ..."

In short, the Department has made some first-rate appointments over the last ten years, we have been innovative and willing to transform our undergraduate program, and are now actively grappling with the suggestions regarding our graduate program in the review report.

In the rest of this memo, I would like to detail the steps we are already taking to respond to the suggestions for improvements made in the report. In addition, I stress the need for the college and the graduate school to assist us in this work as we need support for our initiatives in order to meet our goals. I should note that this support may take a variety of forms such as increased flexibility in determining faculty workloads and appreciation for the contributions to education that come from one-on-one training.

#### *State of the Department Overall.*

Overall, the Department received a very positive evaluation and we agree about the steps that must be taken to ensure that this success continues.

- We are working to make improvements in the level of funded research in the Department. We currently have significantly more grants and contracts \$/faculty FTE than other social science departments on campus (\$19,922 median in Geography and \$7,461 median in the other social sciences Table 8.1 Self-Study), but we are working to improve this performance. The most tangible example of this is our current initiative to hire Stephanie Chang as a Research Assistant Professor. Dr. Chang would fund her position through securing grant monies and so would dedicate her time to funded research.
- We are concerned about our ability to maintain our high quality faculty here at the University of Washington given that our salary levels are seriously below peer departments. As noted in the report, "[M]ean nine month full professor salaries are approximately \$20,000 lower than the mean for the top ten ranked Geography Departments nationally, and there is extreme salary compression." This is a serious issue which affects faculty morale and retention. We request urgent attention to this matter from the College and the University.

#### *Undergraduate Program*

- The undergraduate program received a very positive review. We are responding to their suggestions in the following ways:

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Current Action</b>	<b>Future Plans</b>
Improve or eliminate capstone requirement	Department in first phase of designing and implementing an outcomes assessment procedure that will help us determine and design appropriate capstone courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum inventory</li> <li>• Outcomes assessment</li> <li>• Certificates of mastery in each track.</li> </ul>
Sequencing of courses to build on foundations courses	Outcomes assessment project as outlined above. One aspect of this project will be to inventory skills taught at each course level.	New curricular paths and innovative course offerings, based on outcome of assessment project
Make better use of Collaboratory and Internet/WWW	<p>FIPSE grant application to integrate curriculum with web-based materials, undergraduate research</p> <p>Stepped-up use of collaboratory for individual class sessions</p> <p>Curriculum Committee undertaking year-long assessment of ways to integrate WWW resources and student collaboration into learning process. Inherently bound up with assessment project</p>	<p>List of optimal uses of Collaboratory..... measurement of learning outcomes and how they are affected by collaboration and web-based materials.</p> <p>Develop a departmental research web/intranet for courses centered on interactive undergraduate research</p>
Peer tutoring to reduce congestion	No action as yet, except to request additional TA s for GIS courses	Identify monies to pay for peer tutors
Uncover more non-GIS internships	None—no staff for research	See below
Get timelier internship information to faculty	Posting on e-mail list-serv and bulletin board	Ideal would be the conversion of the current graduate student advising slot to a full-time professional adviser with career development responsibilities

## *Graduate Program*

The report recognized the quality of our graduate program, while also making constructive suggestions for improvement. The Department began discussions of these suggestions at our annual retreat in September 1997. As a result of those discussions, we have formed a Graduate Program Committee to review and propose action on many of the suggested improvements in the report. The faculty agrees with the suggestions made in the report and the addition of new faculty in the last academic year gave us the ability to act in a number of areas. The following details steps that we are taking.

- Revisiting our core course sequence and examining alternative ways to expand our core course offerings. For example, we are currently engaged in research on the courses and sequences offered by peer departments around the country as a first step in this process.
- Examining and recommending improvements in our advising of incoming graduate students. This includes revising our graduate student manual and also instituting workshops to guide students through their degree programs.
- Improving professionalization of our graduate students. We are considering ways to improve their professional preparation for a variety of career paths. With additional resources, we can send more students to professional conferences to give presentations on their research. We should note here that in each Microsoft Challenge, the faculty themselves donate substantial personal resources, in order to be able to fund student travel to meetings. This indicates our level of commitment to this issue, and our need for additional resources. We are also institutionalizing courses on grant getting and article writing in order to expand the numbers engaged in funded research and graduating with publications in hand.
- Improving our mentoring and feedback for TAs -- providing consistent, timely and constructive evaluations of their teaching performance, and overall preparation for professional teaching. Please refer to our response to the "1997 Review of Departmental TA Policies" submitted on Oct 15<sup>th</sup> for more details on these plans.
- Improving the flow of information regarding funding decisions by implementing a workshop dealing with the reappointment process for TAs and RAs to be held in Winter quarter.

## *Resource and Staffing Needs*

In summary, the Department has taken this review process seriously. We have taken a series of concrete steps to respond to the suggestions emerging from this process. Returning to the above quote from President McCormick, we need support from the College and the Graduate School to realize our ambitions. In this final section, let me identify the resources we need.

- *Technical support for computing:* we now have a 50% LAN manager, shared with the Jackson School. While this is a substantial improvement over our previous graduate-student arrangement, but the Department needs a full-time staff LAN manager. We still have enormous unmet burdens in terms of computing equipment, LAN.

management, site licensing and our work to expand collaborative, technology-based pedagogy, and a full time position would allow us to expand in the ways we intend.

- *Office Staff:* with the addition of new faculty in the last academic year, the Department has simply outgrown our level of staff support. We have an administrative assistant at 80% and one full-time program coordinator, both of whom are stretched too far. We currently have a half-time office assistant, but this is simply insufficient. We need an additional half-time office assistant in order to effectively deal with all of the office work. Ideally, this would be a person with fiscal training to support the Administrator in grants management.
- *Graduate Student Support:* there are two key issues here. First, we need additional TA positions in order to staff the high enrollment demands in many of our courses. While we appreciate the consistent, but ad hoc, support from the Office of Undergraduate Education, we need additional positions in order to be able to plan more effectively in both our undergraduate and graduate programs. Second, we appreciate the support that we have received from the Graduate School for graduate recruitment. However, we receive applications from the very best students across the country and we do not have enough long term funding opportunities to compete with peer departments at other top-flight universities. We request longer term funding packages (such as multiple year fellowships and TAs and also summer support for international students) in order to be able to compete on a national level for the very best applicants.
- *Space:* the Department is extremely short of space for graduate student offices, research space for faculty with funded research, office space for collaborating visiting professors and for emeritus faculty facilities. This lack of space directly limits the intellectual activities of the Department by making collaborative and funded research more difficult to undertake and making the Department an unattractive place for our active emeritus faculty, whose research activity would be extremely beneficial for our students.
- *Streamlining administrative procedures:* the College and Graduate School could reduce burdens on existing staff (which currently limit our productivity) by developing procedures to enable departments to download and manipulate various forms of data (such as budget data), rather than those data having to be reentered in our office. On a related issue, we strongly support the move by the College to provide some help in grant management, because this will remove some of the pressure on our Administrative Assistant.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the members of the Department highly value this review process. As I have laid out in this memo, we are now moving forward with a series of concrete steps to respond the Review Committee's recommendations. We now ask that the College and the Graduate School respond to our requests for support in these efforts.

Thank you for your attention.