### Department of Geography

#### 2004-2005 Undergraduate Assessment

**July 2005**

| Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives | 1. to acquire broad knowledge of geography concepts  
2. to acquire geographical perspective to integrate knowledge from a variety of sources in order to understand the interaction between human and physical processes that shape culture, society and the environment.  
3. to acquire basic skills:  
   a. field observation and measurement  
   b. methods of spatial data storage, analysis, and representation in the forms of maps and GIS  
   c. area specialization  
4. to acquire critical thinking, problem solving and effective communication |
|---|---|
| Where are the SLOs published? | • UH Manoa Catalog  
• Handouts/brochures given to all majors and minors |
| How does the curriculum produce SLOs in students? | • Core classes give fundamental concepts and methods in geography that encompasses the human and physical branches of the discipline.  
• Distribution classes: at least one upper division class from each sub discipline:  
  o Human geography  
  o Physical geography  
  o Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific regional issues  
  o Methods in spatial information management  
• Small upper division classes  
• Interactive/field component in some (core) classes |

### Assessment

| Data gathering methods | • Reflective essays in capstone seminar (GEOG 390)  
• Informal communication and networking throughout the time majors are at UH (via email list, annual gatherings)  
• Brainstorming meeting to provide feedback to the Department held at end of capstone seminar party.  
• Exit interview and continuous communication after majors leave UH |
|---|---|
| The nature of data obtained in the assessment | • Reflective essays and informal communication revealed students’ experience in the program and their attitude toward the department and its faculty  
• Information on their post-graduate career provide indicators |
Regarding the skills and content that students attain from our program:

| When data were collected | • Capstone seminar (GEOG 390) is offered every Spring semester and is required for all majors (must be taken within 2 years prior to graduation)  
|                          | • Exit interview before a student graduates  
|                          | • Departmental gatherings/parties at the beginning of Fall semester, Winter celebration, and end of Spring semester |

| What population was covered | Geography majors and minors |

| The actual subjects | All majors and a few minors who took GEOG 390, 2002-2005  
| Graduating majors |

| The size of assessment sample | 60 students (43 men and 17 women) |

| Response rate | • 100% for reflective essay  
|              | • approximately one third for post-graduate information |

| Who examined the data | • Undergraduate Faculty Advisor (Shen, 2001-2002; Wingert 2003-present).  
|                       | • Faculty teaching GEOG 390 (McDonald 2002-2005)  
|                       | • Department Chair  
|                       | • Department Curriculum Committee |

| Where data were collected | • In class or as take-home essay that was part of GEOG 390 class requirement, near end of semester  
|                          | • Exit interview by UG Advisor in faculty office |

**HIGHLIGHT OF RESULTS**

| Reasons for choosing Geography majors | • Majors rarely wish to study Geography upon entering university  
|                                        | • Majors often have experiences in other schools prior to UH.  
|                                        | • Majors often discover geography by taking a course with an inspiring instructor. |

| Program requirement | • Majors are proud of broad competencies and skills achieved, though almost all find one part of the requirements a personal stretch.  
|                     | • Majors may complete department requirements, but whether they graduate is unknown to the department. |

| How SLOs were achieved | • Goal 1 – broad knowledge of geography concepts  
|                        | Almost 100% achieved according to self-reflective essays.  
|                        | • Goal 2 – integrate knowledge to understand human-physical interaction  
|                        | Almost 100% achieved according to self-reflective essays.  
|                        | • Goal 3 – have basic skills in field measurement, spatial mapping, and area of specialization |
Almost 100% achieved according to self-reflective essays. Students appreciate field experiences in classes. Most have had a field trip in systematic courses, on Oahu or to Big Island. Many say hands-on learning is most effective.

- Goal 4 – have skills for critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication. Almost 100% achieved according to self-reflective essays. Students have improved writing, reading, critical thinking, ability to debate and present orally in major courses. Students appreciate active learning structure such as debates or projects. Students find sophisticated and challenging readings most memorable.

| Post-graduate career path | Students do not have a clear idea of their future career path.  
|                          | Those who work as research assistants or in a practicum have better sense of future jobs. |

**Actions to be considered by the Department**

| Program administration/requirements | Undergraduate Advisor to have one-on-one sessions with incoming/beginning majors  
|                                    | More efforts to have gatherings organized especially for majors  
|                                    | Can we make Geography known to more entering freshmen?  
|                                    | Do we have sufficient resources and means to evaluate transfer students?  
|                                    | Can we put information about major into every course? Can we staff lower division courses with inspiring instructors?  
|                                    | Can we increase the number of geography undergraduate majors?  
|                                    | Can we increase opportunities to satisfy WI and O classes in major?  
|                                    | Is integrating field research into all courses practicable?  
|                                    | Can the Department get a list of students attaining BA in Geography for each graduation date?  
|                                    | Can we build active learning into all courses?  
| Course                            | Can we build career information into all courses and events for majors?  
|                                    | Can we increase opportunities to satisfy WI and O classes in major?  
|                                    | Is integrating field research into all courses practicable?  
|                                    | Can we build active learning into all courses?  
|                                    | Can we build career information into all courses and events for majors?  

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|                            | Undergraduate Advisor to have one-on-one sessions with incoming/beginning majors  
|                            | More efforts to have gatherings organized especially for majors  

| Courses | Can we build active learning into all courses?  
|         | Can we increase opportunities to satisfy WI and O classes in major?  
|         | Is integrating field research into all courses practicable?  
|         | Can we build career information into all courses and events for majors?  
|
Geography Department Assessment

Initial Screening and Preprogram Candidate Assessment:

Geography offers two graduate degrees, MA [Plan A, thesis], and PhD. Screening for all applicants to our program is a four-step process: 1) applicants must meet or exceed minimum requirements established by UHM Graduate Division, particularly GPA and TOEFL scores for foreign students; 2) the Graduate Chair screens for suitable GRE scores, fit with expertise offered by the department as per Statement of Objectives of the candidate, three letters of reference [minimum of two academic letters], and for doctoral students a writing sample [typically the MA or MS thesis, published paper, or recent seminar paper]; 3) suitable candidate dossiers are forwarded to the Graduate Admissions and Awards Committee (GAAC), which is composed of four tenured or tenure-stream faculty and one senior PhD student. The GAAC forwards their assessment of the candidate (i.e., admit or deny) to the Graduate Chair for action. If a candidate is admitted an interim Geography graduate faculty advisor willing to work with the applicant is identified. The fourth step involves a preliminary knowledge assessment by the Graduate Chair, and an individual meeting with each candidate at the beginning of their first semester in the program. At this meeting the Graduate Chair identifies preprogram deficiencies that can be rectified by successfully completing required undergraduate (300 or 400-level) or graduate coursework. The typical areas of deficiency include, geographic technology (cartography, remote sensing, or GIS), quantitative methods, and either physical or human-cultural geography. Preprogram coursework is essential to establish a common base amongst our students, as many come from disciplines other than Geography.

MA Program:

The MA program comprises four interrelated components, amounting to a minimum of 31-credit hours.

1) The “Core” involves 7-credit hours of coursework designed to introduce students to the world of professional geography and to the faculty of the department. Adequate performance is considered as a ‘B’ or better grade. The three courses that comprise the Core include: a 1-credit faculty seminar series that introduces the students to current research conducted by the faculty, and new ideas in the discipline; a 3-credit course entitled “Concepts and Theories in Geography” provides the knowledge base for all Geography students, regardless of discipline focus; and finally, a 3-credit course that sets the framework for a professional geographer to conduct an appropriately designed research (thesis) project, i.e., “Research Design/Methods in Geography”. Assessment in the “Core” is based on written assignments, individual or group presentations, and development of a preliminary thesis proposal that is orally presented.
2) Each student identifies a field of specialization [15-credit hour minimum] from a list of 16 published fields. A coherent set of coursework, both in Geography and related disciplines, is established between the MA student and faculty advisor.

3) Students must take one 3-credit course in research techniques appropriate to their field of specialization. This might include, for example, cartography, remote sensing, geographic information systems, quantitative methods, field methods, experimental methods or bibliographic techniques.

4) The culminating experience for each MA student is 6-credits of thesis writing and completion of a thesis document that is reviewed by a minimum of three UHM graduate faculty. The thesis must demonstrate the student’s ability to formulate a research problem, to assemble and analyze relevant data, to draw appropriate conclusions, and to express findings clearly and concisely. It should be of publishable quality as judged by the advisory committee.

PhD Program:

The PhD program is highly selective, and admission is based upon demonstrated competence in previous work and promise of research/scholarly ability. The program typically requires a minimum of 59-credit hours of coursework [coursework taken at the MA level may be used in partial fulfillment of the requirement]. Several integrated components are defined below:

1) The “Core” for PhD students [4-credit hours] includes: a 1-credit faculty seminar series that introduces the students to current research conducted by the faculty, and new ideas in the discipline; and a 3-credit course entitled “Concepts and Theories in Geography”.

2) Each student identifies a major field of specialization [30-credit hour minimum] from a list of 16 published fields. A coherent set of coursework, both in Geography and related disciplines, is established between the doctoral candidate, faculty advisor, and committee.

3) Each student identifies a minor field of specialization [15-credit hour minimum] from a list of 16 published fields. A coherent set of coursework, both in Geography and related disciplines, is established between the doctoral candidate, faculty advisor, and committee.

4) Students must fulfill a research skills requirement including (a) one language, and (b) 9-credit hours in research courses [cartography, remote sensing, geographic information systems, quantitative methods, field methods, experimental methods or bibliographic techniques] or a second language. Language assessment is based on either completing two 300-level courses with a grade of ‘B’ or better, or by completing the Foreign Language Exam administered through the Graduate Division three times per year.

5) Knowledge assessment includes adequate performance in course work, and successful performance on written and oral examinations. For the written component, the minimum 5-member doctoral committee determines the exact format of the exam and the distribution of questions across the major, minor and general fields. Each of the
examining members of the committee must ask a question, or a series of questions, that require a maximum of three hours activity by the student. The exams will take no more than five consecutive working days to complete. Each member assessing the student’s response to their specific question or questions, and to any others they may have expertise in. If the majority of the committee is in agreement that the candidate has performed adequately the oral comprehensive examination will be scheduled, usually within 1-2 weeks after the written exam. The oral exam will take a maximum of three hours. Students should expect not only to be asked to clarify and elaborate on written answers, but to be asked other questions on their fields of specialization and general questions on philosophy and methodology of the natural and/or social sciences. The committee assesses the candidates overall performance on both examinations.

6) If a doctoral candidate is judged to have “passed” the comprehensive stage of the program they will then need to develop a dissertation proposal. The dissertation must constitute a significant and original contribution to knowledge. All doctoral candidates in Geography must defend their proposal before a public audience, typically during the annual Geography Colloquium series. This is followed by the 5-member doctoral committee formally approving the dissertation proposal. Once approved the student is eligible to register for Geog 800 [Dissertation Research], a 1-credit course.

7) The ultimate stage in assessment is completion and public defense of the dissertation. The successful dissertation will show evidence of a candidate’s ability to identify, organize and prosecute a substantial piece of research. It should demonstrate a high degree of writing skill, exhibit a profound knowledge of the field, and constitute a significant contribution to knowledge.

**General Assessment of Graduate Student Progress:**

The progress of each graduate student is assessed by the Graduate Chair throughout the academic year. Grade reports, supplied by UHM Graduate Division, for each student are examined twice per year. Additionally, a Spring Review is conducted by the Graduate Chair, to determine whether adequate progress towards degree completion is being made. If problems are identified the student and advisor are contacted and a plan developed to rectify the problem.

**Final Comments:**

The department is continually looking to improve the educational experience of the graduate student in Geography. One way is to continually review and modify the program components if deemed necessary. The MA program was thoroughly revised and approved by Graduate Division in the summer of 2002. Discussions have been ongoing between the Graduate Chair and the Graduate Program Committee in Geography to revise the doctoral program. Several areas of concern have been identified from numerous informal discussions between doctoral students and the Graduate Chair. A more formal feedback process needs to be established in order to move forward with revitalization of the overall PhD program.