

## **GRADUATE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### **Department of Geography, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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**Date Updated/Submitted** September 2012

#### **1.0 NATURE OF THE PROGRAM**

The graduate program in geography at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa provides a broad and flexible academic program that explores the human and environmental systems that shape the surface of the Earth. The discipline investigates the interaction of culture, society, ecology and physical environments that characterize particular places and studies how these relationships vary across space. The Geography graduate program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa focuses on three interlocking sub-disciplines: human geography, environmental geography, and geographic technologies. Human geography investigates the cultural, economic, and political processes that shape human experiences on the Earth; the relationship between the environment, society, and culture; and the nature of place in the Asia-Pacific region. Environmental geography engages in a systematic study of the Earth's physical environment (atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere) and considers the challenges associated with natural resource management and global environmental change. Geographic technologies include the study of cartography, geographic information systems (GIS), and remote sensing science. Students who pursue graduate research in the Department of Geography obtain a holistic understanding of the world and a set of methodological tools that can be applied to a wide range of domestic and international career opportunities. Geographers conduct research at educational institutions, and are also active in environmental planning, natural resource management and social policy development with all levels of government, private firms, non-profit organizations and international agencies. Hawaii's unique historical, socio-cultural and environmental context also provides a fascinating setting for research on issues that affect the wider Asia-Pacific region.

## **2.0 ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

Assessment is critical to the success of graduate programs in the Department of Geography and to the achievement of high quality research at the University of Hawaii. The primary objective of assessment is to insure and improve the quality of graduate training and professional development. In addition to this broad commitment to the provision of quality graduate education, and traditional assessment metrics such as completion rates and thesis/dissertation review and approvals, a number of specific assessment tools have been developed which provide a comprehensive framework for assessing graduate student success. These include:

- achievement of student learning outcomes;
- inventory of infrastructure for graduate training;
- quality of student experiences, and
- career placement both inside and outside academe.
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Each element of the graduate assessment framework elements is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this document, and supporting information is provided in attached appendices.

## **3.0 ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The Department of Geography has approved a set of common Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) for our M.A. and Ph.D. programs. These SLO will be used to assess student performance in both graduate courses and within traditional research evaluation points such as research proposal presentations, comprehensive examinations, and thesis or dissertation final oral defenses.

**SLO #1** The student demonstrates a mastery of relevant geographic theories and methods

**SLO #2** The student demonstrates a high level of oral and written communication skill

**SLO #3** The student demonstrates research creativity and originality

Faculty will individualize these SLO for use within individual graduate courses to serve as benchmarks for achievement that are student-centric and focused on the knowledge, skills and abilities that graduate students should develop in our graduate program. All courses regardless of

whether they are taught by regular faculty, cooperating or visiting faculty or lecturers will have defined SLOs that appear on each course syllabus. In accordance with standard assessment practices, learning outcomes must be observable or measurable by standardized evaluation metrics. Rubrics provide one tool for assessing different levels of mastery across desired learning outcomes, and the Department of Geography has developed a standardized *Graduate Student Evaluation Rubric* to evaluate graduate student research performance in proposal presentations, comprehensive examinations, and thesis or dissertation final oral defenses (see Appendix A). Student learning outcomes will be advertised in departmental brochures and on the departmental website, and the implementation of SLOs and rubrics to assess the SLO must involve the active participation of each faculty member in the department. Because of the coordination required to achieve full implementation across all courses and traditional research evaluation points, we do not anticipate full implementation of departmental-wide SLOs before the Fall 2013 semester. Progress in achieving full integration and coordination of SLO will also be monitored by the Department's **Graduate Program Committee** as outlined in Section 6.0.

#### **4.0 STUDENT AND ALUMNI SURVEYS**

The assessment of graduate student experiences and career placement both inside and outside academe will utilize a survey questionnaire sent to all recent graduates of the Department of Geography MA and PhD programs immediately prior to major programmatic reviews that occurs every five years. The questionnaire will include questions concerning satisfaction with their degree, current employment, value of their geographic training in their professional and personal lives, and any suggestions for potentially improving the Geography graduate program at the University of Hawaii. A short survey will also be conducted at the end of each spring semester in the GEOG 692 Graduate Seminar. This seminar is a required course for all graduate students, and data collected at this time can provide more a more current perspective on student experiences and satisfaction.

#### **5.0 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GRADUATE TRAINING**

The availability of quality infrastructure is an important component of graduate research training, and the Department of Geography will inventory all available facilities during the previously

discussed comprehensive assessment of our graduate program scheduled to occur on a regular 5 year cycle. This inventory will take the form of a survey sent to all geography faculties asking them to outline infrastructure available for graduate training. Questions focusing on infrastructure available for graduate training will also be included in the annual and alumni surveys conducted on annual and 5 year rotations that are discussed above.

## **6.0 TRANSFORMATIVE FEEDBACK AND PROGRAMMATIC ASSESSMENT**

The Department of Geography Graduate Program Assessment Plan is a dynamic document subject to regular modification to maintain and improve the quality and effectiveness of undergraduate education. The **Graduate Program Committee** led by the Graduate Chair will meet annually to review data collected in the Geog 692 Graduate Seminar, and to discuss minor revisions to the program or the assessment plan. In addition to these annual review and feedback mechanisms, the department will also conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the graduate program on a regular 5 year cycle. The programmatic assessment process will evaluate data collected during the preceding 5 year period to evaluate progress in achieving both broader program goals and departmental SLO. The 5 year programmatic assessment will include feedback mechanisms to insure that assessment is transformative in character and that continuous improvement in student learning outcomes is achieved. The Department of Geography's MA program is being substantially modified in 2011-2012, and the first major programmatic assessment will be scheduled for the 2016-2017 academic year to allow for a full evaluation cycle of the revised program.

## GRADUATE STUDENT EVALUATION RUBRIC

**STUDENT NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOPIC:**      Proposal Defense      Comprehensive Exam (written)      Comprehensive Exam (oral)      Final Oral Defense

**SLO #1** Demonstrate a mastery of relevant geographic theories and methodologies

**SLO #2** Demonstrates a high level of oral and written communication

**SLO #3** Demonstrates research creativity and originality

	UNACCEPTABLE	MARGINAL	ACCEPTABLE	EXCEPTIONAL	N/A
<b>SLO #1 Theory</b>					
<b>SLO #1 Methods</b>					
<b>SLO #2: Oral Communication</b>					
<b>SLO #2 Written Communication</b>					
<b>SLO #3 Originality &amp; Creativity</b>					
<b>OVERALL ASSESSMENT</b>					

**COMMENTS:**