

STUDENT EVALUATION OF THE GEOGRAPHY MAJOR 2004 SUMMARY REPORT

UNDERGRADUATE GEOGRAPHY EVALUATION

Background: In 2003, majors in the Department of Geography at UW-Milwaukee developed and pre-tested a protocol for evaluating the undergraduate major program. Geography students enrolled in the capstone course (416-600) were responsible for defining "outcomes/goals" for the major, identifying a suitable evaluation method, and proposing a method for reporting results. This report summarizes the results of the 2004 survey.

Outcomes and Goals: The outcomes and goals of the Geography undergraduate major, developed with input from both students and faculty, are as follows:

The Department seeks to ensure that each major.....

1. Will acquire a general level of understanding of the physical, environmental, urban and cultural processes that are responsible for the unique geography of the world.
2. Will acquire a high level of knowledge in one specific area of geography.
3. Will be connected to a personal advisor in their field of interest who advises them on their undergraduate requirements, internship and employment opportunities, and graduate school requirements.
4. Will have a functional understanding of various research methods and approaches, including quantitative methods (statistics), field study methods, GIS & related technologies, archival methods (archived documents & manuscripts), survey methods (questionnaire design & interpretation), the scientific method & testing, and advanced writing;
5. Will gain practical experience through exposure to internships and outside speakers in the field.

Assessment Approach: A survey containing questions related to the outcomes/goals (above) is filled out by majors in the capstone course on an annual basis to gather data for the evaluation. The faculty is also developing a rubric for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of majors in light of the Department's learning goals. This will include an evaluation of individual work in the capstone course, as well as a Departmental review of the students in that course as a whole.

Reporting: Students in the capstone course are responsible for summarizing the survey results and reporting them to faculty. Responses are grouped and students do not put their names on the survey form in order to keep their results anonymous. The results of the survey are also distributed to Majors via e-mail, along with a response to the survey prepared by the faculty. The results of the 2004 survey are attached.

Faculty Response: The Department is following up on many of the student recommendations. Specific action items are outlined in bold italics below.

STUDENT EVALUTION OF THE GEOGRAPHY MAJOR

As part of the continuing efforts of the Department of Geography of the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee to assess the success and performance of its major programs, each prospective graduating major student is asked to complete this questionnaire. Please answer the questions on this form with careful consideration. Your insights, taken in conjunction with those of your peers, constitute one of the most valuable sources of information that can be used to maintain and improve the quality of the Geography curriculum at UWM.

Please bear in mind the following points:

1. Direct your comments to your experience in the Geography major as a whole, not just to Geography 600.
2. Please be assured that your answers will have no bearing on your grade in this or any other course. Furthermore, the questionnaires will be placed in the custody of the department, not your instructor. The purpose of the questionnaire is only to gather information so please be honest. Your answers will bring no personal consequences on you.
3. Students in Geography 600 will be responsible for summarizing the results of the surveys and reporting them to the faculty (they can be reported by a graduate representative selected by the class)
4. Faculty will respond to student comments via e-mail and the results will be kept on file.

Year of intended graduation: _____

Please answer all of the questions. If you require more space for an answer, you may attach a separate sheet.

1. The department hopes that each graduating major has acquired a general level of understanding of the physical, environmental, urban and cultural processes that are responsible for the unique geography of the world. How do you evaluate your education within the Geography major in the regard?

- The Geography department of UWM requires that graduating seniors have a general understanding of Urban, Environmental, Cultural and Physical Geographical process. The survey revealed that all students felt that they gained a good general knowledge over the course of their four-year education. However, the knowledge is general and not specific enough. The different tracks in geography help students focus on one aspect within the field of geography but it seems that there is quite a bit of overlapping. Some students ask for more coordination between the tracks. In conclusion it can be said that the vast majority of geography students are satisfied with their education in geography.

The increase in Geography faculty will make it possible for the Department to offer more introductory and advanced courses in the specialty areas. Over the last two years, the Department has been reviewing and revamping its major tracks and started implementing these changes in fall 2004. During the review process, faculty examined issues related to course offerings, major requirements, and overlap among courses.

2. The department expects that each graduating major will have acquired a high level of knowledge in one specific area of geography. How do you evaluate your education within the Geography major in this regard?

Urban/Cultural Track: Students would like to see involvement in the urban community at an

Internship level; and at the course level, more information about the local urban community. Possibly add courses to solve the problem. Otherwise, preliminary courses prepared the candidates well for advanced level courses/degrees.

General Track: Very positive about knowledge due to broad course offerings. Would like the opportunity to get more focused on track or develop an upper level seminar to continue lower level seminar topics.

Environmental Track: Varied responses from: too broad to appropriate amount of emphasis. Would like to have had more courses outside major that give a geography perspective.

As mentioned above, the Geography tracks have been refined and more courses will be offered with the increase in faculty. Professor De Sousa has also produced a report with internship opportunities for Geography undergraduates that can be found in the main office and on the Internship board.

3. The department intends that each geography student is connected to a personal advisor in their field of interest who advises them on their undergraduate requirements, internship and employment opportunities, and graduate school requirements. How do you evaluate the department in this regard?

Positive Remarks:

- Excellent experience, internship was acquired through advisor
- Good communication, answered any questions well
- Student was able to build a relationship with advisor and did independent work for advisor

Negative Remarks:

- Department needs to stress importance of seeing an advisor
- Advisors were very busy and difficult to make appointments with
- Advisor did not show interest in directing the student

Also, many students did not meet with a geography advisor other than to declare the major. One student did not know that they had an advisor.

Faculty agreed that all undergraduate majors will get advice on technical issues from the Undergraduate Advisor. In addition, each major will be linked to a faculty member in their Geography track to help with course selection, internships, and career oriented questions.

4. The department seeks to ensure that each major have a functional understanding of various research methods and approaches. Please evaluate the department's effectiveness with regard to educating you on the following methods/approaches (circle n/a if the question is not applicable to you).

	VERY EFFECTIVE			NOT EFFECTIVE		
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
- Quantitative methods (statistics)	25%	25%	37.5%	12.5%	0	0

- Field study methods	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	0	0	37.5%
- GIS & related technologies	12.5%	37.5%	50%	0	0	0
- Archival methods (archived documents & manuscripts)	0	12.5%	37.5%	0	12.5%	37.5%
- Survey methods (questionnaire design & interpretation)	0	50%	25%	12.5%	0	12.5%
- The scientific method & testing	0	25%	37.5%	37.5%	0	0
- Advanced writing	0	62.5%	37.5%	0	0	0

COMMENTS:

- 1) GIS needs to better integrate lecture and lab classes.
- 2) Fieldwork courses should be more related to the specific track.
- 3) Quality of education received depends on instructor.
- 4) Lack of familiarity with advanced writing.

Two faculty members specializing in GIS joined Geography in Fall 2003, which has allowed us to expand our course offerings in this area. As for the other skills, faculty members will examine their course syllabi to enhance these components.

5. The department seeks to ensure that each major be exposed to internship experiences and outside speakers in the field. How do you evaluate your education within the Geography major in this regard?

--Students feel that there is a lack of support in terms of internships during the four-year degree

--It seems that internship opportunities arise mostly in the last year, if at all

--With regards to past speakers, most students wish that guest speakers not only come to the Capstone Friday afternoon sessions, but also to regular classes in Geography. One student raised an interesting point in saying that he wishes to listen to more geographers and professionals, not just professors.

In summary, most students think that the department is not active enough with regards to offering students internships, unless one has connections already to specific agencies or non-profit organizations. In terms of guest speakers, students opinions are divided, however, most of them agree that guest speakers coming to regular class meetings would improve internship options and enhance the student's professional knowledge of geography.

Faculty members have discussed these concerns and will follow up in due course.

6. How can the Geography major be improved?

- More interaction and availability to a personal advisor. Several students wished that each professor could specialize as an advisor or designate certain professors for certain tracks. This is similar to the Political Science Department where several professors act as advisors, and students can choose.
- More concentration on GIS. Every student wanted a more "GIS focused track" or an undergraduate certificate, setup like a minor.
- Integration of Geography into the working world, having more outside glimpses of geography after graduation incorporating it more professionally, and not focusing on graduate school as much. More exposure to real-life working world ideas.
- More field courses should be offered during the semester;

- More flexibility of classes and field requirement/internships. Several students wished the department offered more flexibility of major classes. Also, more flexibility was desired of field requirements, some prefer doing it in an urban environment, which is more connected to geography and work after graduation.

As mentioned, we are dealing with the advising issue and more GIS courses will be offered. The internship program and the colloquium program will also be examined to see how they can be improved to give students more exposure to professional geographers.

7. What is your general assessment of your experience within the UWM major program?

- The overall assessment of the Geography program was "good", with one "very favorable" and one "mildly frustrating" response.
- Reasons for the "good" rating (versus excellent or poor) in large part reflect positive responses to the faculty, but negative opinions toward the current advising program.
- Most responses were positive about course offerings, and the strong and broad foundation they offer within the field of Geography.
- Other recommendations include more:
 - GIS and Urban focuses
 - Internship and outside speakers
 - Upper-level course offerings
 - Distance education opportunity

As mentioned, all Geography major tracks have been refined and changes were implemented starting fall 2004. The Department is also in the process of identifying internship opportunities. The Department will consider these recommendations in more detail during fall 2004.