

Geography Graduate Program Assessment Methods

Student Progress and Mentoring

In order to strengthen graduate student mentoring beyond that provided by individual faculty advisors and the chair of the Department's Graduate Program, in 2003-2004 the position of Graduate Assistant and Activity Coordinator (GAAC) was created. The GAAC assists the Graduate Program Chair with oversight of student progress and mentoring. The GAAC also assists the Department Chair in coordinating teaching assistant (TA) assignments based on student experience and fit. To date, the most substantial development related to the creation of this position is initiation of the Department's Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program.

As part of the Department's PFF program, an enhanced departmental orientation program has been designed and implemented in order to make new graduate students more familiar with faculty and other graduate students, the department, the campus, and the community. During this orientation, new graduate students are asked to present material in front of faculty and other graduate students so that they might become more comfortable speaking in front of others. New TAs are paired with experienced TAs during the orientation. The experienced TA is then required to sit in on the new TA's classes during the first week in order to give the new TA (positive) feedback. The graduate student mentor is also charged with the responsibility of being a contact person for the mentee, such that the new teaching assistant can therefore ask any questions he or she may have.

As another part of the PFF Project, a series of colloquia has been designed in order to give graduate students more training in areas such as pedagogy, research, and departmental and campus service. Each year, departmental faculty members are asked to come and speak during these sessions about their experiences as teachers and researchers. Graduate students are required to attend these meetings and are encouraged to ask questions and contribute to the discussion. Also, a series of web pages for the PFF Project have been attached to the departmental website in order to give graduate students in the department an additional resource. These pages are meant to summarize the commitment that the department makes to the development and success of graduate students as future faculty.

Currently, the Department has two graduate student representatives that alternately attend faculty meetings in order to keep the graduate student body informed of departmental concerns. The graduate student representatives are also charged with taking concerns and questions posed by other graduate students to the faculty. Enhanced graduate student participation in various departmental committees is currently being sought.

Specific Strategies for Student Assessment

1. Administration of a confidential graduate survey during the spring semester of each academic year (started in Spring 2003)

This survey is designed to help the department determine what instruction graduate students feel they need from the department in regard to pedagogy, service, and research related issues. The survey will be changed if necessary to reflect the concerns of graduate students- primarily those who hold assistantship appointments.

2. Annual Evaluation

Each year every student undergoes an evaluation by the members of the faculty in order to determine the student's progress and readiness to continue in the program. This evaluation can include inspection of all written work produced in courses, commentary by relevant instructors, and any other materials the student chooses to submit. The possible outcomes of this review are: (a) PASS (student continues with their normal program); (b) FAIL (student is recommended for academic dismissal); or (c) PROBATION (student is counseled to take specific courses or other actions to achieve the necessary readiness to continue in the program). In the case of a recommendation of Probation, the student will be re-evaluated after an additional semester. If this second review does not result in a decision to PASS, the student will be recommended for academic dismissal.

3. Final Oral Exam

Each year the faculty will discuss the collective level of student achievement, based on the results of final oral examinations.

Consideration of Modifications to the Program

Based on issues raised by the assessment strategies, the faculty will consider modifications to the program annually.