Undergraduate Program Assessment Annual Report
School Year 2007-2008
Department of Geography
December 2008

I. Program's Student Learning Outcomes:

A. Program Goals: The Geography Department Assessment Plan is conceived to evaluate teaching and learning according to areas of fundamental knowledge and abilities/skills which Geography majors need to demonstrate before graduation. The Department offers courses that present timely understanding and interpretation of geographical events and development and strives to train students to think clearly, logically, and critically.

The goals of the Geography Department are as follows:

1. to create an environment for students to learn about the breadth, depth, and complexity of the human experience through the study of geography;
2. to produce graduates who have an informed appreciation and understanding of geographical processes;
3. to produce graduates who are prepared for and can compete successfully in geography related careers;
4. to prepare students for graduate and other professional programs.

B. Learning Outcomes/Data Collection

1. Students communicate effectively

It is particularly important for geography majors to communicate effectively because they obtain employment in a wide range of job fields. As planners, government employees, GIS specialists, business analysts, etc., their communication skills are critical to job performance and career success.

To achieve this outcome, geography instructors incorporate writing and speaking assignments in courses above the 100-level to help build on the skills students acquire in requisite university communication courses. In order to impose consistency in grading and uniformity in assignment expectations, a standard writing rubric and speech rubric have been adopted for use by the department.

2. Students completely interpret and construct maps

Map interpretation and construction constitute technical skills expected of all geography graduates. Students are regularly exposed to different types of maps in

geography classrooms where they are guided in the interpretation and comprehension of map information. Today map-making is much different from production of pen and ink maps a short decade ago. Computer-based map skills include knowledge of digital map sources, software programs, and cartographic principles. Map skills are directly taught in a required class (GEO 426) in which students learn how to apply the premier Geographic Information Systems software program, ArcGIS by ESRI.

Satisfactory grades on assignments – as evaluated by a department rubric created for this purpose – constitutes one measure of competency. In addition, map-making skills are assessed in a required component of the capstone research paper (GEO 420). Finally, students will be asked to interpret a thematic map on a survey instrument administered on Assessment Day.

3. Students possess foundational knowledge of physical and human geography

Geographers occupy diverse job fields and often demonstrate considerable versatility, but specific to the major, graduates must offer greater than average knowledge of physical and human geography. Knowledge of geography provides the basis for critical thinking to come later in high-level courses and for applications outside academia where globalization renders such knowledge invaluable.

Student retention of foundational information covered in core required courses will be tested via a survey instrument on Assessment DAY. The survey will contain multiple short answer questions representing core information taught in required lower-level courses.

4. Students critically evaluate global issues

Related to the foundational knowledge in #3 above, geography graduates should apply their geographical knowledge to effectively evaluate multiple dimensions of important global issues. Essentially, the latter is one of the primary goals of upper-level courses in the department. While critical thinking skills are important to graduates in the job market, they are especially important to develop in students seeking to continue their education.

Student ability to achieve this outcome will be tested via the survey instrument on Assessment Day. They will choose two topics – which they will have been exposed to in upper-level courses – to discuss in depth and reveal the quality of their comprehension and reasoning.

5. Students demonstrate the ability to produce geographical research

The production of a geographical research paper represents the culmination and integration of the student outcomes listed above – geographical knowledge, effective

communication, map-making, and critical thinking. In addition, students learn the proper framework in which to engage in research, they develop the elements of a research proposal (research problem, literature review, research design), then collect and analyze primary data, and interpret the results. For students continuing their education, learning the fundamentals of the research process provides them with a sound foundation to produce quality theses at the graduate level.

Achievement of a grade of C or better on the research paper and research presentation – as evaluated by a course specific rubric – denotes a satisfactory student outcome.

C. Results:

This is the first year that the department has collected assessment results which means our data is limited. Assessment Day survey instruments were prepared but in every instance, there was not enough student participation to obtain valid results. However, where valid results were obtainable via stated component assessment rubrics etc., the results were excellent. See attached Student Outcomes Chart.

II. Assessment activities:

Marshall University
Assessment of Program's Student Learning Outcomes for the [Insert Name of Program]
[2007-2008]
Department of Geography

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Assessment Measures (Tools)	Benchmarks	Results	Analysis/ Planned Actions
3. Students possess foundational knowledge of physical and human geography	Teaching and testing by means of written and oral projects as defined by course instructor. A survey instrument on Assessment Day containing multiple short answer questions representing core information taught in lower-level classes.	Written grading criteria for written and oral projects that demonstrate desired level of foundational knowledge in physical and human geography.	In the GEO 100 courses, (10 students), 80% performed in the excellent (A-grade) category, 10% in the good (B-grade) category and 10% in the competent category (C-grade). A survey was prepared for Assessment Day but not enough majors completed the survey to make it valid.	The GEO faculty will extend the courses number courses for this outcome: GEO 317 and GEO 101 for the academic year 2008-9. We will also place added emphasis on the Assessment Day survey in order to get a valid sampling of students.

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Assessment Measures (Tools)	Benchmarks	Results	Analysis/ Planned Actions
2. Students completely interpret and construct maps	Teaching and testing by means of written assignments and projects	Written grading criteria for written projects that demonstrate desired level of interpreting and construction of maps.	In GEO 100, 101, 317, 429 are courses where map interpretation and construction are featured. In these courses, (15 students) 79% performed in the excellent category (A-grade), 10% in the good category (B-grade) and 11% in the competent category (C-grade).	Student outcomes for this objective were gratifying. This objective is basic to the discipline and the faculty will strive to maintain the present level of excellence.
4. Students critically evaluate global issues	Teaching and testing by means of written and oral projects. A survey instrument to be tested on Assessment Day. They will choose tow topics-which they will have been exposed to in upper-level courses-to discuss in depth and reveal the quality of their comprehension and reasoning.	Written grading criteria for written and oral projects.	In GEO 305, 407, 480, (9 students), 100% performed in the excellent category. Written as well as oral presentations were of an unusual quality. A survey instrument was prepared for Assessment Day but not enough students completed the survey to obtain a valid result.	The faculty realizes 2007-8 outcomes were unusual and resolves to maintain the level of excellence as in 2007-8. This is an essential objective of the program because geography students should apply geographical knowledge to effectively evaluate multiple dimensions of important global issues.