

Academic Program Assessment Plan Geography BA

May 2017

The principal method of evaluating individual students is through the course work that is completed as part of the core and elective requirements for the degree program. The Geography BA has 41 hours of required classes and 15 hours of geography electives. Students can also elect the GIS/Cartography specialization which requires an additional 3 required hours and mandates that 9 of the 15 elective hours must come from an approved list of technical/quantitative classes. The core requirements for Geography include 50 hours in Geosciences (geography and geology) and 6 hours of world language. Goals/objectives and specified learning outcomes are included in the syllabus for each course and students are evaluated on the basis of their understanding of those goals. Student learning is assessed by examination, written papers, and oral presentation of assigned projects. Student learning takes place in both individual and group project settings and team-projects are particularly important in upper level classes.

Student progress and learning is assessed annually by the geography faculty, through review of the required curriculum for the degree program.

Program Goals

The goal of the geography BA program is to produce graduates who are competent in a wide range of geographic techniques and are familiar with the concepts of geographic theory and spatial analysis. The required classes in the program provide students with a comprehensive introduction to geography, and familiarize them with the wide variety of sub disciplines in the field while encouraging them to pursue a degree track that fulfills contemporary disciplinary standards for theoretical and technical knowledge in the field. Electives are designed to further develop skills in theoretical knowledge and quantitative competence within the sub-disciplines represented by faculty expertise.

Students graduating from the Geography BA program should be prepared to enter an MA or an MS program in geography (at Arkansas or any peer institution) with no deficiencies. For students intending to enter the job market, the degree should provide a sufficiently solid foundation in basic geographic skills and techniques for employment in (among others) environmental, logistics, urban planning and spatial analysis fields.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students earning the BA in Geography will:

- Understand the concept of globalization as it relates to human activity and environmental change.
- Have an appreciation for human-environment interactions and understand human impacts on earth systems as well as the potential changes and risks associated with human activities.
- Understand the spatial components of the contemporary demographic, socio-economic and political structures of the world in the 21st century.
- Understand the fundamentals of landscape change, both natural and human-induced.
- Develop competence in the use of geographic tools including Geographic Information Systems, Spatial Statistics and Remote Sensing.
- Be able to communicate spatial information in a clear fashion through the development of sophisticated cartographic design skills.
- Understand the concepts of place (spatial attributes); pattern (spatial distribution), diffusion (spatial dispersion), movement (spatial interaction) and scale.
- Have the ability to communicate results of their efforts in written reports and orally to diverse audiences.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment Methods of Assessing Student Learning

Direct Methods

- GEOS 4xx3 is a new class that has been proposed to act as a capstone class for graduating geography majors. The introduction of a capstone class was recommended in the report for the External Review in 2014 and the class will be submitted to Courseleaf this summer in preparation for Spring 2018. The class has been delayed by one year in order to integrate new faculty into the class structure. The class will include a history of the discipline as well as a survey of geographic research methods and will be structured around two field weekends where students can engage in a variety of field-based projects. Assessment will include traditional paper and project-based grades as well as an individual semester long research project. Designed to be taken the semester a student graduates exit interviews will also be administered at the end of this class. The exit interview for geography will be created this summer and tested on a few graduating seniors in the Fall so that it can be refined for Spring 2018.
- Score gains from pre and post tests are used as a primary assessment mechanism for students in GEOS 1123 – Human Geography and for GEOS 2013 – World Regional Geography.

Indirect Methods

- Course grades – average and individual grades from each course in the program are submitted and tabulated each semester.
- Admission rates into graduate programs and quality of the graduate program accepting our students.

- Placement rates of graduates into appropriate career positions and starting salaries. Assessed through exit interviews and post-graduate tracking.
- Student/alumni satisfaction with learning, collected through social media surveys, exit interviews, and post-graduate focus groups. Geosciences also has an external advisory board that provides feedback annually on our curriculum and the quality of the students graduating from our programs.
- Student participation rates in faculty research, publications and conference presentations.
- Honors, awards, and scholarships earned by students and alumni.

Timelines for Data Collection and Analysis

Assessment data for our introductory courses are collected each academic semester. These data are compiled annually and reviewed by a faculty committee.

Assessment of the capstone course in geography (GEOS 4xx3) will occur annually at the end of the Spring semester. Multiple faculty will be involved in teaching the class, through guest lectures and participation in the field sections of the course. These faculty will collectively review the outcomes of the course each year and modifications will be implemented to resolve issues and improve course outcomes in order to enhance overall student learning.

The Geosciences external advisory committee, which is composed of representatives from industry and local, state and federal government representatives, meets annually and provides feedback on our curriculum relative to their needs, as well as the quality of the students graduating from our program.

Use of Results

Results of data analysis are reviewed and discussed by faculty annually. Modifications to curriculum do occur as a result of these analyses, and as a result of feedback provided by our external partners. For example, a board discussion of insufficient quantitative preparation of geography graduates resulted in the addition of GEOS 3243 to the core requirements for the degree in 2015. In addition, the board conformed that the addition of the capstone course, first suggested in the 2014 external review, would be of benefit to students entering the job market.

Clearly, ongoing assessment, analysis and review by both the external advisory board and faculty committees are providing critical feedback that encourage the implementation of course and program modifications that help us to meet our student learning goals/objectives and outcomes.

Annual Academic Assessment Report

BS Geography

(May 2017)

Report annually to the Dean of the college/school the following:

- Results of analysis of assessment of Student Learning Outcome**
 - Assessment and analysis of pre- and post-test results will be reported in a separate report related to Geosciences Core Course Assessments. There has been little change in the results of these tests over the past few years. Typically in GEOS 1123 students score around 45-50% on the pre-test and improve to about 65% or 70% on the post-test. In GEOS 2013 students typically score about 40% on the pre-test and improve to around 70% on the post-test. These classes are not in sequence and most students in the classes are not majors and only take one of the two classes, thus there is no cumulative improvement between the two classes.
 - Graduate placement is tracked to the extent possible, and reported annually to our external advisory board. These data are tabulated in written reports to the advisory board since 2007.
 - Our external advisory board met and provided feedback on our programs in October 2016 and May 2017.
- Any changes to degree/certificate planned or made on the basis of the assessment and analysis**
 - None planned based on the 2016-2017 assessment period
- Any changes to the assessment process made or planned.**
 - None planned based on the 2016-2017 assessment period