

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome: The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A, B.S. in Geography to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee recognizes that many of the efforts and activities that led to the development of the self-study report were accomplished during the time-period coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee thanks the program for a comprehensive and critical self-study report that included input from multiple stakeholders.

The committee commends faculty efforts to grow the program's enrollment. The committee notes that the program's enrollment (considering primary and secondary majors combined) during the period covering the program review cycle increased (from 60 in 2015 to 76 in 2022). The committee notes the department faculty for efforts to increase the gender and racial/ethnic diversity among its students. The percentage of students identifying as female has increased from 18.6 percent in fall 2015 to 24.7 percent in fall 2022. The percentage of undergraduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline has fluctuated over the period of review, with an overall increase (from 13.8 percent in fall 2015 to 19.2 percent in fall 2022, reaching a high of 30.3 percent in fall 2017). The committee acknowledges the work faculty have completed regarding recruitment efforts and that this work has been successful in enrolling both first-time-in-college and external transfers as first and second majors in the program (e.g., recruiting efforts in 100-level general education courses, sending personalized letters to high school students enrolled in Advanced Placement in Human Geography courses, sending Illinois State students in the Geography Club to serve as advocates at local community colleges). We applaud the development of an articulation agreement with Lincoln Land Community College to form a streamlined pipeline for students transferring into the program. The committee commends the program for the use of several endowed scholarship funds for retaining students and for exploring ways to use scholarships to support recruitment as well.

The committee commends the program faculty for their efforts to support the success of their students. We commend the program faculty's informal discussions to share challenges and strategies to develop approaches to address student performance gaps in 100-level courses. The committee commends the department's work to raise funds to update and upgrade facilities (both space and equipment) that support student learning and faculty scholarship (in particular the new laboratory for Environmental Analysis). We commend the department for housing the Illinois Geographic Alliance, a grassroots organization of geographic educators dedicated to excellence in teaching within the discipline. The committee commends the program for the creative and varied co-curricular and extra-curricular options (e.g., The ISU Geography Club, Gamma Theta Upsilon Honors Society) it provides its students which provide multiple opportunities to participate in activities that allow them to learn from experts in the field both locally and through study abroad programs. The committee commends the advising services provided to students as they enter the program (both FTIC and transfers), while enrolled, and for those rare few who decide to leave the program.

The committee commends the department for creating a standing Diversity and Inclusion committee. Their work, in conjunction with program faculty, is evidenced by the infusion of equity, diversity, and inclusiveness into both the curriculum (e.g., faculty's actions to review, revise, and refine pedagogical practices and course materials through an EDI lens) and co-curricular activities (e.g., the Geography of Chicago course that takes students to Chicago neighborhoods to meet with local experts and experience the locations directly). The committee notes that the program faculty participated in the ALIGNED (sponsored by the American Association of Geographers) and the Unlearning Racism in the Geosciences (URGE) projects with a goal of creating a more inclusive learning environment. We commend the program faculty for submitting a course for consideration to meet the university's IDEAS requirement.

The committee commends the faculty for their substantial work during the period of review to revise the curriculum to ensure that the content reflects changes within the discipline and evolving workforce demands. This work included revisions to capstone options, the creation of a new Career Preparation course, a reduction in overall required credit hours, the addition of GEO 138 as a requirement, the development of seven new 300-level courses, and an update of four concentrations within the major. We commend the program for its strong support of hands-on field experiences that are incorporated into courses and a required off-campus internship capstone experience. The

committee commends the department for the changes made to better facilitate undergraduate student participation in the Honors program on campus. The committee commends the work completed between the department and the subject librarian to infuse learning information fluency skills during the new GEO 375 course. Finally, the committee commends the program faculty for their continued support of Illinois State's General Education program.

The committee commends the program faculty on the development, implementation, and revision of their plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes. During the current review cycle, faculty have used the evidence gathered through the student learning outcomes assessment plan to make program changes, and several examples of these changes were specified (e.g., using an analysis of assessment data to inform optimal sizes of introductory courses like GEO 142 and identifying needed faculty expertise for new faculty hires)

The committee recognizes the faculty members of the program for their scholarly contributions to the Department of Geography, Geology, and the Environment to the B.A., B.S. in Geography program. Faculty members are active researchers who publish peer-reviewed journals articles, and present at national and international professional conferences. We commend the program faculty for their support of student research resulting in 44 student presentations at Illinois State's Research Symposium over the period of review. The program faculty regularly engage in professional development opportunities, including wide participation of the GROWTH Change Team, EDI Leadership Circle, and STEM EDI Taskforce events. Additionally, we recognize that every faculty in the program has been activity involved in advising and supporting professional student organizations demonstrating their commitment to facilitate learning and educational experiences of our students outside the classroom.

The committee appreciates the in-depth analysis of comparator and aspirational programs. As part of this analysis, the program faculty identified multiple institutions with similar programs that excel in ways that our program may aspire to. The committee also recognizes that faculty developed specific action plans to implement similar initiatives to improve the program at Illinois State.

The committee commends the program faculty for being accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) for the Geography Teacher Education Program. Furthermore, we also commend the program faculty for maintaining program standards that meet the Illinois teacher licensure requirements set by the Illinois State Board of Education which makes graduates qualified to teach in all areas of geography in grades 5-12.

Recommendations.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty members of the Department of Geography, Geology, and the Environment for the opportunity to provide input regarding the B.S. in Geography program at Illinois State University through consideration of the self-study report submitted by faculty. The following committee recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle are provided in a spirit of collaboration with Geography program faculty members. In the next program review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2030, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Develop a plan for enrollment management. The committee notes that demand for the program remains strong as reflected by the relatively stable enrollments even during the height of the COVID pandemic. The committee recommends that the program continue to work with Enrollment Management and Academic Services and the Office of the Provost to continue refining and implementing their plan for student recruitment, including determining ideal target levels. We recommend that the program faculty monitor the impact of factors like the new ESSS program, the continued decreased enrollments in the GEO Teacher Education program, and the impact of both the ALIGNED and URGE initiatives.

Continue to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity. The committee recognizes the efforts that have resulted in the diversity of faculty and students within the program and encourages the program to continue to pursue its goals related to further developing an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment that effectively supports students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. We encourage the program to continue refining and implementing strategies for recruiting students from groups who are traditionally underrepresented in the program and discipline to meet their stated targets. Furthermore, we encourage the program faculty to continue to examine ways to infuse diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum.

Continue to focus on student success and retention. The committee recommends that the program faculty develop a plan for student success. The plan should be used to increase transparency and communication around “student success” by defining the program’s goals for, assessment of, and actions towards supporting students enrolled in the program. The plan may provide an overarching structure for other plans (e.g., retention, curriculum, alumni engagement). The committee recognizes substantial work by former and current faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure and content to remain current with changes in the field and to maintain program retention and graduation rates. The committee recommends that the program continue monitoring trends within student retention and time to degree metrics, particularly and address potential inequities that may exist.

Continue to review and revise the curriculum. The committee recognizes substantial work by faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure and content to remain current with changes in the field including assessing the impact of recent revisions. The committee recommends that the faculty continue to explore ways to infuse issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion into the program. We recommend that the program develop a plan to identify quality indicators and metrics to monitor and assess student learning in the associated minors program.

Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee encourages faculty to continue its implementation of the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program during the next program review cycle, to continue to utilize information gathered through plan implementation to make program revisions as necessary, and to document how that has been done. The committee noted that the assessment plan has a heavy reliance on course grades and recommends that the program continue to add more indirect measures to their assessment activities. The committee encourages faculty to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in assessing student learning to identify any modifications to the plan faculty may deem necessary.

Continue the collaborative work with Milner Library. The committee recommends that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to examine and evaluate the library's journals and monograph collection to aid in both the selection and deselection process of these sources. Given recent journal cancellations and expected increases in distance and hybrid courses, we encourage the department and library to further collaborate to increase awareness of alternative access to resources, such as Interlibrary Loan and I-Share lending, among faculty and students. We also recommend that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to develop a tiered approach for information fluency learning outcomes for the department, align those outcomes to the curricula, and integrate those outcomes into the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program.

Develop a plan for alumni tracking and engagement. The committee encourages the faculty to continue to refine their plan for tracking program alumni and use this system to enhance alumni networking and engagement. These activities may become even more important in the years ahead as the program’s alumni become more diverse. The program could benefit from increased involvement of its alumni, employers, and other external stakeholders in providing input regarding the program and in mentoring students and providing employment opportunities for program graduates.

Continue to look externally for aspirational initiatives. The committee has included analyses of comparator and aspirational programs in the self-study report guidelines to provide faculty with opportunities to consider the niche their program has among its peers and to gather information for program planning. The committee recommends that the program continue this approach to develop strategies for addressing priority initiatives for the program including student recruitment, student diversity, and participation in co-curricular activities, as well as curricular development. Furthermore, consider how these initiatives could be operationalized including identifying resources needed for success.