

# FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

## PROGRAM UNDER REVIEW

PROGRAM	SENATE APPROVAL DATE	PREPARED BY
Geography	September 13, 2019	Provost and Vice-President

## A. SUMMARY OF REVIEW PROCESS & LISTING OF PROGRAMS UNDER REVIEW

SELF-STUDY REVIEW TIMELINE	DATE
1. Self-Study Presented to AQAPC	Mar. 13, 2019
2. Site Visit Conducted	Apr. 9-10, 2019
3. Reviewer's Report Received	Apr. 17, 2019
4. Internal Reviewers Response Received	Apr. 29, 2019
5. Dean's Response Received	May 27, 2019

### The members of the review committee were:

- Dr. Benjamin Kelly (Internal)
- Dr. Mary-Louise Byrne, Wilfred Laurier University (External)
- Dr. Steven Tufts, York University (External)

### The academic programs offered by the Department which were examined as part of the review included:

- Bachelor of Arts – Environmental Geography
- Bachelor of Arts – Geography
- Bachelor of Science – Environmental and Physical Geography

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on May 17, 2013.

## B. PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**External Reviewers:** *Overall, the reviewers found the Department of Geography programs to be very strong. The program changes since the last review undertaken in 2009 by one of the current reviewers were extensive and the unit has responded positively to most of the 16 recommendations in the last review. Students are pleased with the program and its instructors with a few frustrations over offerings associated with a small program. The emergence of a strong research program in the unit among several colleagues is also noted with the addition of two CRCs to the faculty and significant grant acquisition.*

## C. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

**External Reviewers Recommendation #1: *TAs in the classroom. The reviewers feel that integrating a small number of graduate students into the classroom as teaching assistants will enhance both the undergraduate experience and graduate training. Admittedly, there are collective bargaining issues that need to be resolved, but this will provide a way of funding graduate students beyond very small general assistantships.***

**Unit's Response:** We strongly agree with this recommendation but are also aware that this needs to be addressed within the context of the collective agreement. The current collective agreement assigns laboratory instruction to contract academic staff. However, there are often not enough graduate students and expertise to fill all the required laboratory teaching. As such, it will likely be a mix of contract and graduate students.

**Dean's Response:** I agree with this recommendation. However, the graduate students TA-ships are the purview of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. Discussions are under way.

**Provost's Response:** I whole heartedly agree with this recommendation. This needs to be addressed in the Strategic Plan for Graduate Studies.

**External Reviewers Recommendation #2: *School of Environment and faculty renewal. The formalization of interdisciplinary collaboration already happening in many ways may be enhanced with the creation of a School of Environment. The majority of faculty was open to discussing the potential in a new structure that would facilitate new program development and address enrolment issues. Faculty renewal may be more easily recognized in a larger unit that could accommodate a climatologist more readily and utilize expensive CFI assets that are currently dormant.***

**Unit's Response:** We strongly agree. We have already shown a willingness to such an arrangement through our very successful collaborative MESC/MES program.

**Dean's Response:** I strongly agree that grouping Environmental Studies and Sciences programming under a School of Environment would enhance the Faculty of Arts and Science and potentially significantly increase enrolment in this area. In terms of faculty renewal, discussions are underway to explore possibilities of hiring faculty who could be appointed across several interdisciplinary areas.

**Provost's Response:** I agree.

**External Reviewers Recommendation #3: *CRC transition plan. The University has pursued time limited CRCs for new faculty. As these CRCs end, a transition plan for faculty will be necessary. A transition plan may include bridging resources to maintain research and course release as faculty build toward a full teaching load. Failure to address the transition risks 'burnout' and retention of faculty.***

**Unit's Response:** We agree. Nipissing University currently has limited (no) history of transition planning for outgoing CRC s as the first outgoing CRC to be completing their term after successful renewal will be in 2019/20 (A. James). Currently the research office or the Dean's office has offered no guidance or discussion of a transition plan. Geography is also supportive of any faculty receiving course release to help maintain research. Moreover, we are hopeful that more help will be provided to all faculty who hold externally funded research grants (tri-council or other). The current 3 credit (previously 6 credit) course release for tri-council recipients and the lack of competitive graduate student funding will make it extremely difficult for faculty members to maintain external funding in an increasingly competitive market.

**Dean's Response:** I agree with the reviewers that a proper CRC Transition Plan needs to be put in place to support research at Nipissing. The Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research is currently working on developing a CRC transition plan.

In their response, the Geography department notes the previous 6 credit research/course release allocation and the current three-credit release as insufficient. I agree that researchers with Tri-Council grants should be granted appropriate amount of releases given their contributions to the university. I recommend further discussion of research-related course releases.

**Provost's Response:** The common practice in Canadian Universities is that teaching releases related to Tri-Council research are extremely limited, and not supported by Tri-Council itself. Many universities do not give any releases for CRC as it is viewed as very important for the best researchers to continue also teaching. The Dean of Research and Graduate Studies has a transition plan for CRCs.

**External Reviewers Recommendation #4: *Reintroduction of labs. Introducing lab components to courses in second year is supported by both faculty and students. However, this must be done with adequate resources (lab instructors and/or teaching assistants).***

**Unit's Response:** We agree with the reviewers and hope that the administration will provide the necessary resources for these new labs associated with three second year physical geography courses (already approved through senate).

**Dean's Response:** While I agree with the reviewers that introducing labs at the 2000-level would enhance students' experience, given the current budgetary situation, I do not think such a recommendation is fiscally possible at the moment. Having said that, the Dean's Office will investigate and survey other universities' 2000-level laboratory components in Geography to make an informed assessment.

**Provost's Response:** Agree with Dean. It is also vital that we develop policy that distinguishes between teaching labs and research labs. This policy must include an end date to non-funded labs.

**External Reviewers Recommendation #5: *New program development in Environmental Science/Studies. The development of new major programs (BSc in Environmental Science) is warranted. Clearly, Nipissing has the capacity to deliver such a program and could explore the idea of developing a complementary program, BA in Environmental Studies.***

**Unit's Response:** We agree and have initiated the first stage towards the development of the BESC. Moreover, we have already begun serious discussions in regards to a complementary BES.

**Dean's Response:** I support this recommendation. The department has put forward a Letter of Intent to begin the process.

**Provost's Response:** A great idea, and I look forward to seeing the letter of intent .

**External Reviewers Recommendation #6: *Opening Geomatics. There is potential to open Geomatics certification and instruction to non-geography students at Nipissing and the broader community as professionals seek training opportunities. Similarly, we hope to see Geomatics faculty continue to develop the already significant networks with the local community.***

**Unit's Response:** We agree and last year we managed to open up our second year introductory geomatics course to all students. Unfortunately, we have not seen any new enrolments this year but have hopes that our Dean will assist us in properly advertising this option for all students. Finally, although we maintain the most up to date version of the most commonly used geomatics software the computers have not been replaced in quite some time which seriously limits proper training of our students.

**Dean's Response:** the reviewers recommend opening the Geomatics certification and instruction to non-geography students at Nipissing and the community at large.

I agree. As noted in the department's response, first steps toward opening up the Geomatics area to non-geography students have been undertaken through curriculum updates and removal of prerequisites.

In addition, discussions with community partners have begun. Furthermore, the Dean's Office will support another iteration of the Geomatics Day and has put forward a request for a full-time GIS lab instructor (currently pending budgetary approval). Further integration of GIS into other programs like Digital Humanities, not to mention Humanities and Social Sciences programs at large should be considered as well.

**Provost's Response:** The Dean has adequately responded.

**External Reviewers Recommendation #7: *Increased support staff and Lab Instructors. To maintain research and teaching capacities, a physical geography technician would service multiple research programs in the unit. The loss of a lab instructor has also been a burden on the remaining instructor. Administrative support at the unit level to assist faculty and advise students would also be of benefit. The reviewers recognize that this would likely only be feasible for a larger unit (e.g. School of Environment).***

**Unit's Response:** We strongly agree with the reviewers and have tried every year to secure funding for such a lab instructor position.

**Dean's Response:** Currently, the department has a technician and 1 full-time lab instructor. An additional half-a-position of a lab instructor in Geomatics has been discussed and recommended to the Provost. Further efficiencies and reallocations in terms of support staff and lab instructors will be further explored.

**Provost's Response:** Under consideration

**External Reviewers Recommendation #8: *Honours thesis guidelines. The Department can establish some strong guidelines and supports for honours thesis students and supervisors. Clearly defined expectations for students and supervisors, common dates for progression (e.g., proposal, first draft, submission), and formal presentations of findings to the Department would streamline the thesis program.***

**Unit's Response:** We agree with the reviewers and several years ago had developed guidelines. These were posted online for students but somehow were misplaced with the many recent modifications to the Nipissing website. The Department will re-examine these guidelines and make sure they are once again visible to the students through our website.

**Dean's Response:** The reviewers recommend strengthening the current Honours Thesis Guidelines.

I agree that the department needs to revisit their Honours Thesis Guidelines package. The current guidelines are rather general and do not provide sufficient guidance for students undertaking an honours thesis. While the general honours thesis guidelines have been standardized, each program should tailor the structure and organization of the thesis proposal, the format, and the referencing style according to their discipline. The Dean's Office will support the department in updating their guidelines package.

**Provost's Response:** I agree with Dean

**External Reviewers Recommendation #9: *Development of online courses. We encourage the department to develop online courses in response to demand from majors and non-majors and professional programs in a planned and measured fashion. Support needs to be provided to develop the capacity and careful analysis of***

*what courses should be offered online undertaken. Given the size of the department online offerings should be developed incrementally.*

**Unit's Response:** We agree and have encouraged several faculty members to develop online courses where we believe the demands may be best served. The Department will further discuss the preferable methods of delivery (blended versus all online).

**Dean's Response:** The reviewers note a significant lack of online courses in Geography. In consultation with the department, the Dean's Office has already begun addressing this deficit. At the moment, two faculty members agreed to put forward online courses to accommodate flexible learning formats. Further opportunities will be considered and supported.

In addition, the reviewers also noted the importance of bolstering the suite of GIS courses, specifically their practical/lab component. In consultation with the Department, the Dean's Office will encourage further initiatives and potential community outreach opportunities in this area.

**Provost's Response:** I agree with above.

**External Reviewers Recommendation #10:** *Outdoor storage capacity. The reviewers felt the case was made for an outdoor storage unit that includes space to maintain and clean the equipment after a field season. Again, such a facility could include an outdoor lab component and is best proposed in conjunction with multiple faculty who require such space.*

**Unit's Response:** We agree with the reviewers and the Department has officially submitted a proposal to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research. Note that the proposed facility would support faculty and students beyond a single department.

**Dean's Response:** I agree with the recommendation. Such a facility would further enhance land-based teaching and field camps organized by the department. As noted in the department's response, the department has submitted an outdoor storage facility proposal to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research.

**Provost's Response:** The University is currently developing an outdoor classroom.

**External Reviewers Recommendation #11:** *Greater collaboration with the Registrar's Office. We encourage the Department to work closely with recruitment and admissions in the Registrar's office to support efforts to increase interest from High School and other applicants. Further, the Department should engage with the office to ensure that students are receiving the most current and accurate program information.*

**Unit's Response:** The Department has always tried hard to work with the Registrar's Office whether through participation in the open houses, educating the recruitment officers or contributing to the OUF. Moreover, we are likely the only program that still volunteers with on campus education of visiting IB students. Some of us have also lectured in science classes within the local high schools.

**Dean's Response:** The reviewers recommend that the department engage with the Registrar's office to increase student enrollment. I agree with this recommendation. Further collaboration will enhance the Recruitment team's understanding of the Geography programs and will thus help facilitate further engagement with prospective students.

**Provost's Response:** The Department should seek to contribute to the ongoing SEM planning led by the Registrar

**External Reviewers Recommendation #12:** *Re-assess 4000 level program requirements. The program should re-examine program requirements at the 4000 level requirements as 18 credits seems excessive. Further, an up-*

**to-date 'checklist' with program requirements should be created for students as they plan their progress through programs.**

**Unit's Response:** We believe that the current students have concerns regarding the very limited number of fourth year courses available this year which has been compounded with scheduling issues and strict requirements for the two certificates. With three faculty members on sabbatical this year and no replacements for them this has been an exceptional situation. However, we are willing to re-examine the 4000 level requirements as well as the suggested up-to-date 'checklist' for program requirements.

**Dean's Response:** The reviewers noted that the 18 credits of required courses at the 4000-level might be excessive when compared to other institutions. Given that the Honours Specialization in Environmental Geography requires only 9 credits at the 4000 level, reducing some of the requirements at the 4000 level in the Geography and Geography, Environmental and Physical, programs would be worth considering.

**Provost's Response:** Agree with above, please reduce requirements at this level.

#### D. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Below are the recommendations that require specific action as a result of the Review, along with the identification of the position or unit responsible for the action in question. Notwithstanding the position or unit identified as the being responsible for specific recommendations, the Dean of the Faculty has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the recommended actions are undertaken

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBLE MEMBER/UNIT	PROJECTED COMPLETION
#1 - Role of grad TAs in undergraduate teaching	Dean of Research and Graduate Studies	With Strategic Plan for Graduate Studies (IIIB3 in Annual Academic Plan)
#2 - Articulate a position on the School of Environmental Studies	Dean with stakeholder Departments	May 2020
#4 - Policy on labs	Dean of Research with Faculty Deans	February 2020
#5 - New programme proposal must follow NU-IQAP	Dean	As needed
#8 - Review of Honours thesis guidelines	Department	January 2020
#9 - Review of programme delivery	Department	December 2020
#11 - Contribute to SEM plan	Department with Dean in consultation with Registrar	May 2020
#12 - Review 4000-level programme requirements	Department	March 2020