



**WEBER STATE
UNIVERSITY**

The last page of the guide (page 26, Program Review Evaluation Team Report Guidelines) is really the template to follow.

- Brief paragraph of visit overview.
- Articulated strengths, weaknesses/concerns, recommendations for each standard (doesn't mean you have to come up with a strength, weakness/concern, or recommendation for each standard).
- Any other input you might have that isn't covered by the standards - especially if there is a recommendation you would like to share that isn't easily included in the standards.

That's it.

-thanks, Eric

Program Review Evaluation Team Report Guidelines

The Program Review Evaluation Team generally appoints one member of the team to prepare a 3-5 page narrative report, consistent with the self-study standards, addressing all self-study standards (A-H, see below), which identifies the following:

- program strengths - reference standard where appropriate
- program challenges – reference standard where appropriate
- program weaknesses - areas where the program did not meet the standards and why - reference standards
- recommendations for change - suggested changes for meeting the standards
- additional recommendations from the review team

Please be explicit about strengths, challenges, and weaknesses.

Standards:

- A. Mission Statement
- B. Curriculum
- C. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment
- D. Academic Advising
- E. Faculty
- F. Support (Staff, Administration, Facilities, Equipment, and Library)
- G. Relationships with the External Communities
- H. Results of Previous Program Reviews

Weber State University Program Review Evaluation Team Report:
Department of Geography

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of an external review of the Weber State University Department of Geography, Environment & Sustainability (GES). The review team consisted of Dr. Carie Frantz (Associate Professor of Earth and Environmental Science, Weber State University) and Dr. Daniel Horns (Dean of the College of Science and Professor of Earth Science, Utah Valley University). Over the first few weeks of September 2024, Drs. Frantz and Horns reviewed several documents relevant to the Department, including the [Department web page](#) the [Department Self-Study Document](#), and the [CV's of Department faculty members](#).

Links:

- Department web page - <https://www.weber.edu/geography/>,
- Department Self-Study Document - <https://www.weber.edu/ie/Results/geography-pr-2023-24.html>
- Department faculty CV's - <https://www.weber.edu/ie/Results/geography-faculty-cvs-23-24.html>

On September 19, 2024, Drs. Frantz and Horns visited the Department and met with faculty, staff, and students following the schedule below.

9:30:00 AM Welcome
9:45:00 AM Eric Ewert, Department Chair
10:00:00 AM Sarah Rivkind, Geography Office Administrator
10:15:00 AM Ryan Frazier, Faculty
10:30:00 AM Christy, Nick, and Genesis, College Advisors
11:00:00 AM Julie Rich & Brent Horn, College Dean and Associate Dean
11:30:00 AM Maria Groves, Faculty
11:45:00 AM Mike Hernandez, Faculty Earth and Environmental Science
12:00:00 PM Dan Bedford, Faculty
12:15:00 PM Alice Mulder, Faculty
12:30:00 PM Chuck Holland, CSBS Development Director
12:45:00 PM Jeremy Bryson, Faculty
1:00:00 PM Lunch
2:00:00 PM Kate, Paula, Jacob, etc., Geography Majors
2:30:00 PM Shauna Wolfgram & Jace Colby, Adjunct Instructors
3:00:00 PM Brandon Rypien & Joseph Simpson (Ogden City Planners) & Bryan Dorsey, Faculty
3:30:00 PM Reviewer Wrap-up with Eric

Links:

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Program Evaluation

Standard A. Mission Statement

Strengths

- The department mission statement, with five specific objectives (that are linked to curricular learning outcomes), is clearly articulated on the department website: <https://www.weber.edu/geography/mission.html>.
- Upon first reading the mission statement, one reviewer (Horns) felt that the sole focus on sustainability within the one-sentence mission statement did not sufficiently reflect the breadth of the discipline of geography. Upon reading through the objectives and learning about well the Department has earned a reputation as a hub for sustainability efforts, however, Horns concluded that it is an effective and representative mission statement.
- The mission statement & objectives cover some of the breadth of geography as a discipline, with the department's key foci (sustainability and environment, geospatial, planning, human and global geography) highlighted.
- The mission statement and objectives are consistent with the [mission and values statement of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences](#), as well as that of the [university](#).

Areas for Improvement

Needs

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

Standard B. Curriculum

Strengths

- Breadth of curriculum:
 - Geography is a broad field. Program course offerings, especially in upper-division courses, provide students with the opportunity to sample from much of the breadth of the field.
 - Flexibility in electives both allows students to pursue their individual interests and likely helps students graduate in a timely manner.
- Program tracks: Students pursuing the B.S. in Geography choose from among seven program "Tracks." These tracks were defined via a recent overhaul of the curriculum that involved all Department faculty. Given the breadth subdisciplines within the field of geography, these tracks guide each student toward classes in which they will develop skills applicable to specific career paths and/or graduate programs.
- Curriculum foci: Despite the wide breadth of courses across the seven tracks of the B.S. in Geography, all graduates from the program will have courses covering GIS and aspects of sustainability. Some background in these areas will help the students to gain employment and/or admission to graduate programs.
- Student satisfaction:
 - Soon-to-graduate students indicate high satisfaction with their education in GES.

- Anecdotal job/graduate school placement, as well as reports from those alumni who remain engaged suggests that the program prepares students well for their future careers.

Areas for Improvement

- **Redundancy of courses:** Students and some faculty indicated that there is some redundancy in course offerings. One example noted by the students interviewed was the high degree of content overlap in GEOG 1500, GEOG 1130, and GEOG 3050, all of which are required for Track C.
- **High number of tracks within the B.S. in Geography:** While we find that the availability of tracks within the B.S. in Geography to be a net strength, having seven different tracks appears to have resulted in some redundancy between some tracks. For example, faculty noted redundancy between the *Earth Systems and Features* and *Climate Science* tracks, and they suggested that these two tracks could be merged. Also, it may be challenging to offer enough courses to support the seven different tracks, and this challenge may contribute to issues of course sequencing and availability (see below).
- **High flexibility within tracks:** The high degree of elective choices given to students within tracks could theoretically result in students not mastering important learning outcomes. This is hard to gauge given the way the curriculum is structured.
- **Course sequencing and availability:**
 - **Course availability:** Students and college advisors noted some challenges with course sequencing and availability. This may be influencing the relatively low rates of timely degree completion, i.e., the ~50% of students who complete their degrees within two years of accumulating 90 credits (it should, however, be noted that these rates, while well below the university goal of 70%, is still in line with university averages). It may be possible to at least partially address this issue by reducing redundancy among courses by paring down course offerings and/or by reducing the number of tracks within the B.S. in Geography (see above).
 - **Completion of GEOG 2790:** Many students are not taking GEOG 2790 until late in their studies, defeating the advising purpose it was designed to serve.
- **Geography and Teaching track:** The title and description of the Geography and Teaching track of the B.S. in Geography suggest that completion of the courses listed for the track will qualify a graduate to pursue a career in teaching. To teach geography in the public school system, however, a student would need to also complete several education courses.

Needs

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

- **Create an advisory board:** An advisory board consisting of regional employers could provide additional feedback about the preparedness of employees and applicants from the program.
- **Reduce number of tracks within Geography B.S.:** Consider streamlining tracks by merging those with high overlap. For example, Merge Tracks B (Earth Systems) & C (Climate Science) into an Earth Systems & Climate track, eliminate redundant courses

- Could merge Tracks A (General Geography) & D (Global Studies) (and drop the Teaching bit)
- Address redundancy in courses: Students indicated that there is repeated information among some courses. We suggest re-assessing required courses to ensure they are stacking, not repeating, concepts. Merging highly similar courses could free up faculty to offer new and more topically unique courses to fill in any identified curriculum gaps (e.g., at the 2000-level, or 4000-level courses to ensure mastery of key learning outcomes).
- Address lack of 2000-level courses: To fill in the “Sophomore Year” gap
 - Encourage students into certificates
 - Encourage or require student internships or other HIEE, e.g., study abroad, earlier undergraduate research
 - Field trips
- Facilitate degree completion:
 - Increase funding for faculty to teach summer so more sections can be offered each year. This would enable summer course offerings and give students more flexibility, hopefully aiding timely completion rates.
 - Track who is enrolled in the different tracks, and communicate this information to class schedulers to ensure courses are available to serve students in the various tracks.
- Address the likely drop in enrollments due to reduced general education requirements:
 - Promote GIS across campus: We suggest promoting the value of GIS among departments/programs across campus to increase enrollments in GIS courses, develop as a service arm of the department since it’s a key technology for *many* disciplines
 - Develop new courses: Faculty mentioned some great program/course proposals, which could draw new students--encourage further exploring/piloting these
 - ONL general geography track--develop as fully-online option
 - ONL GIS BS (GES) + MS (EES/COS)
 - Interdisciplinary Sustainability Solutions/Planning Certificate
 - Introduction to Sustainability Course (this was an adjunct idea) -- could be a [WSU course](#) satisfying both PS & SS GenEd requirements
 - Drone Fundamentals Course -- taught by Hernandez in EES/COS as experimental course before, could lead into Drone Data Processing course and ultimately develop drone tech certificate program

Standard C. Student Learning Outcomes & Assessments

Strengths

- Exit survey: The department uses an exit survey for graduating students that provides a picture of student satisfaction with their learning. It also collects email addresses that could be used to follow up with graduates to assess placement and career outcomes.
- Existing data indicate successful programs: Where assessment data exist, they indicate that students are meeting or exceeding expectations for assessment benchmarks.

Areas for Improvement

- Assessment of lower-division courses: Assessment of lower-division courses (both majors' courses and general education courses) became spotty following the loss of ChiTester in 2022, which was previously used to compile and assess performance in those courses. All assessment data provided for these courses was from before 2022.
- Assessment of capstone courses: Assessment of capstone courses (GEOG 3790 & 4990) is subjective and vague.
- Graduating student survey: The graduating student exit survey gives a self-report of learning from students, but these are unreliable for evaluating actual learning and career preparedness (need reference).
- Assessment of certificate program: There is no comprehensive assessment data yet for the certificate programs.

Needs

- Support from Weber Online: Departments across the university, including GES, need support from Weber Online to reinstate tracking and compilation of core questions/learning outcomes in the new Canvas testing format. Weber Online should work with faculty to determine what sort of assessment reporting would be most useful, and at a minimum recreate the functionality that ChiTester once provided.
- Increased sense of community among students: We received comments from students and faculty indicating that students in GES do not feel a sense of community.

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

- Improve assessment of lower-division courses: Work with Weber Online to re-implement learning outcome assessment in general education and lower-division core courses.
- Improve assessment of capstone courses: Create an instrument for assessing mastery of key learning outcomes in the capstone courses (GEOG 3790 & 4990) to ensure students are aware of and meeting rigorous expectations and demonstrating mastery of key learning outcomes for the program. Assessment data from these capstone courses could provide meaningful information about how well (and consistently) students are achieving program-level learning outcomes.
- Utilize student portfolios in assessment: An alternative means of assessing student achievement of departmental learning objectives could be implementing [portfolios](#) where students are required to document assignments where they demonstrate an adequate level of mastery of each of the department-level outcomes as a requirement for graduation. The format and examples could be introduced in GEOG 2790. Portfolios would need to be assessed by someone (e.g., as part of a 1-credit course), but with relatively small graduating class sizes this may be manageable.
- Encourage course-level assessment: The chair should create an environment where faculty are encouraged to reflect on their assessments of the key learning outcomes for their classes as they relate to the department's overall curriculum goals. Where a need for improvement is indicated, support faculty in efforts to make said improvements.
- Revisit the curriculum grid: Break out the curriculum grid by track to ensure that students receive appropriate emphasis (or mastery) of the departmental learning outcomes in all tracks/degrees. Faculty teaching courses should identify how they can assess emphasis/mastery in courses where those levels of instruction are identified in the

curriculum grid. It could be helpful for that information to be compiled and summarized annually, and shared back with the faculty, to identify and troubleshoot areas of weakness in the curriculum.

- Increase variety of assessment tools: An objective, data-supported assessment of how well the curriculum is assuring that students meet the department's learning outcomes, and preparing them for post-graduation careers, is lacking. Now that the curriculum has been overhauled, this is an obvious next step for determining how well the newly implemented curriculum is performing. The department has mapped learning outcomes to courses in the program in a curriculum grid (Table 1 in Department Self Study Document), which is a good start for assessing how well the curriculum addresses departmental learning objectives. However:
 - Core courses provide introductions to all of the program learning outcomes, but coverage of the outcomes is uneven. For example, the technical skills and planning outcomes are only *introduced* (never emphasized or mastered) within the core. Mastery may be possible depending on what students do for their capstone projects but is not ensured according to the curriculum grid.
 - The curriculum grid is not broken out by track. Some tracks are notably weak in some of the learning objectives. This indicates that some students may graduate without having been more than introduced to the central departmental learning outcomes.
 - The course assessments for capstone courses (GEOG 3790 & 4990) that were provided in the Self-Assessment Report (p. 9-10) imply that some students are graduating without passing clear benchmarks for mastering key learning outcomes. There is a need for clear rubrics or benchmarks to assess student achievement and demonstration of learning outcomes as students are approaching graduation.
- Increase activities to cultivate a sense of community among students: Increase activities such as field trips and socials to build a sense of community among students.

Standard D. Academic Advising

Strengths

- Student satisfaction:
 - Conversations with students indicate that advising is effective and adequate.
 - Students and alumni consistently praise faculty for the individualized care and attention that help them make connections for their future careers.
 -
- Multifaceted advising resources: Students gain assistance in choosing and navigating their degree programs via dedicated college advisors, departmental faculty advisors, and online resources.
 - College advisors are very familiar with the GES programs and have a good working relationship with the faculty and department chair.
 - Students can get help deciding on a track through information on the department website, conversations with faculty, formal advising, and through an introduction to the tracks and their associated careers in the required GEOG 2790 course.

- The department website is easy to navigate and information-rich, providing clear information to students and others, including about degrees, tracks, minors, and certificates ([degree programs page](#)).

Areas for Improvement

Needs

- Maintain current level of college advising support.

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

- Streamlining tracks by merging those with obvious overlap would simplify advising. Map tracks to careers and advertise career placements (where graduates go, with real examples of alumni – see notes under Standard B for details).
- Course sequencing: Consider having the GEOG 2790 be a prerequisite to other course(s) to encourage sequencing and get students advising early. This could backfire in terms of student ability to take the course when they need it. Possible to develop it as an ONL asynchronous course offered every semester?

Standard E. Faculty

Strengths

- Exceptional faculty
 - Comments from students indicate high satisfaction with faculty:
 - “Faculty are so engaged” and willing to work with students, bend over backwards to help students, heard this consistently from students, advisors, and alumni.
 - EVERYONE says that the faculty really care about students and are accommodating, available, personable, welcoming, encouraging, inspiring, collaborative, top-notch, etc.
 - Faculty expertise: Faculty members are productive and engaged in their respective areas of expertise, respected in their disciplines and in the community
 - Faculty influence across campus: GES faculty are campus-wide leaders in some of Weber’s core strengths: sustainability, high-impact teaching, community engagement and service.
 - Strong adjunct instructors: Department engages numerous adjunct instructors who feel well-supported by the department
- Department culture: Excellent collegiality among faculty, tight-knit department who also have great relationships across campus due to the open, collaborative, “let’s try it” attitudes of the department
- Support for students: There is a good faculty to student ratio which facilitates an atmosphere where students feel seen, supported, and cared about as individuals. Students commented that some of them joined the department after taking one or two geography classes and feeling great support from the faculty.

Areas for Improvement

- It’s hard to improve on the exceptional.

Needs

- Support for more geospatial courses: Expanding the availability of geospatial courses (number of sections / class sizes / ONL & Summer offerings, drone courses) would require the addition of a new faculty member.

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

Standard F. Program Support

Strengths

- Generally good financial situation: The department seems to have sufficient funds to cover the basic requirements as well as some high impact educational experiences (e.g., student research, field trips).
- Physical facilities:
 - New Building: GES is housed in a beautiful newly-renovated building with adequate classrooms and office space. The department is located in a labeled and engagingly decorated office suite that houses the faculty, staff, and adjunct instructors together, and also provides communal eating and conversation spaces that provide opportunities for student use, facilitating a sense of community.
 - GIS lab: New Geospatial Lab with modern computers and software access for up-to-date teaching of GIS and related technologies

Areas for Improvement

Needs

- Full-time administrative specialist: While the current administrative specialist is excellent, admin support is currently inadequate. There is a need to increase the admin position to 100%, 11 months. Addressing this need could help the department address several of the weaknesses identified in this report.
 - Sarah Rivkind (current administrative specialist) is already at her limit for what she's able to do.
 - Faculty mentioned that they do a lot of work that would normally be done by an administrative specialist because they know Sarah is at her max.
 - Need for someone to staff the front office in the afternoons.
 - Creates a more welcoming environment for students.
 - Students frequently need support when Sarah isn't there
 - With additional time, Sarah could assist with assessment & alumni tracking, which are suggestions we have for the department
- Wet lab, instruments, and instrument lab space:
 - Wet lab: The department needs a wet lab with a sink, refrigerator for storing samples, bench space for paleoclimate work.
 - Instrument lab: The department needs lab bench space; additional analytical equipment (e.g., x-ray fluorescence spectrometer (XRF)); storage areas for keeping, calibrating, and programming instruments.
- Support and advocacy from upper administration:
 - The department is concerned about the reduction in enrollment that is likely to occur as a result of the reduced general education requirements. The impact to any

one department of the reduced general education requirements could be minimized by coordination across colleges to spread the enrollment in general education classes across departments. Without such coordination, some departments may be more aggressive about recruiting gen ed students to boost their own enrollments at the expense of other departments.

- Assessment support: Support from Weber Online to reinstate assessment (and analytics) of core questions/learning outcomes that used to be housed in ChiTester for better GenEd and lower-division assessment
- Definition and articulation of development needs: There appeared to be a disconnect between department needs and the focus of Development (Chuck Holland). The department may need to better articulate their needs. Development office may need encouragement to focus less on big donations for appealing but less practical purchases, and more on what actually makes a difference for programs and students.

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

- Address instrument needs via sharing with other departments: Some instrumentation needs described above may be met via collaboration with other entities on campus. For example, Dr. Groves could make use of the usually underutilized XRF housed in Earth and Environmental Sciences. This sharing of resources would further strengthen the interdisciplinary ties between departments and colleges.

Standard G. Relationships with External Communities

Strengths

- On-campus relationships: GES has developed strong and productive collaborations with other colleges, programs, and departments across the WSU campus.
 - College of Science
 - Especially [Earth & Environmental Sciences](#) via GIS programs / [NUGeoTec](#) (Frazier & Ewert)
 - [Environmental Science Degree Program](#) (Frazier, Mulder, & Bedford are [affiliated faculty](#) with the program)
 - Great coordination to avoid redundancy in courses between the two departments.
 - Sustainability program
 - [SPARC](#) (Mulder directs)
 - [ESO](#) (Run and staffed by several GES grads)
 - [EIC](#) (Mulder is Co-Chair)
- Off-campus relationships:
 - CEL courses: GES faculty and students interact with the WSU community through many Community Engaged Learning (CEL) geography courses
 - Partnership with Ogden City: GES has built a strong relationship with Ogden City Planning by working on many collaborative projects. Employees of Ogden City appreciate the quality of work done by GES faculty and students on collaborative projects. These projects are a model for university-community collaboration.

Areas for Improvement

Needs

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

- Create a GES Advisory Board: The Advisory Board should provide information about skills that are needed in the job market, help to develop connections in the community that will lead to opportunities for collaborative projects, internships, post-graduation employment, etc.
- Hold a career seminar series:
 - Invite alumni & employers in order to strengthen connections, keep in touch, talk about ideas for new collaborations (e.g., CEL, INT opportunities), and hopefully promote internship, employment, and mentoring opportunities for students
 - Could be promoted at campus career events and via university and social media to advertise connections between the degree and careers, could help with recruitment
- Survey graduates: Recommend comprehensive tracking of graduates by following up, e.g., 1 year and 5 years after graduation. Ensure that contact information provided in the exit survey are *not* @weber.edu addresses, consider collecting additional means to contact students (phone numbers, mailing addresses). Were the admin position changed to full-time 11 months, this could be a summer task for the admin.

Standard H. Program Summary

Strengths

- Outstanding faculty dedicated to student success.
- Collegial culture among faculty.
- Breath of curriculum serves many interests and career tracks.
- Focus on sustainability has established WSU GES as a leader in sustainability education.
- High impact educational experiences.
- Collaborations with Earth and Environmental Sciences, Ogden City, and other community partners.

Areas for Improvement

Needs

Suggestions, Opportunities, & Ideas

- Review course curricula to decrease redundancy among some courses.
- Merge some of the tracks within the B.S. in Geography
- Create an advisory board
- Improve assessment via better assessment of lower-division and capstone courses and adopting a wider variety of assessment tools.
- Mitigate decreased enrollment due to changes in general education via development of new G.E. courses, recruitment of students into GES majors, recruitment of students from across campus into GIS courses, and more