**2018-2019 Annual Program Assessment Report Guide**

Please submit report to your department chair or program coordinator, the Associate Dean of your College, and to [james.solomon@csun.edu](mailto:james.solomon@csun.edu), Director of the Office of Academic Assessment and Program Review, by **September 30, 2019**. You may, but are not required to, submit a separate report for each program, including graduate degree programs, which conducted assessment activities, or you may combine programs in a single report. **Please include this form with your report in the same file and identify your department/program in the file name.**

**College: Social and Behavioral Sciences**

**Department: Geography and Environmental Studies**

**Program:**

**Assessment liaison: Ron Davidson**

1. **Please check off whichever is applicable:**

**A. \_\_\_\_\_x\_\_\_ Measured student work within program major/options.**

**B. \_\_\_\_x\_\_\_\_ Analyzed results of measurement within program major/options.**

**C. \_\_\_x\_\_\_\_\_ Applied results of analysis to program review/curriculum/review/revision major/options.**

**D. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Focused exclusively on the direct assessment measurement of General Education Arts and Humanities student learning outcomes**

# Assessment Report – Department of Geography and Environmental Studies

## 1. SLO 1.1 and 1.2 - Knowledge Baseline Assessment

We gave continued our assessment of students’ incoming geographical knowledge using SLOs 1.1 and 1.2 using multiple-choice tests in Geography 150 (World Geography). This has been done for multiple years to assess the baseline geographical knowledge and therefore relative preparedness of incoming students. We also compared transfer versus non-transfer students.

1.1 Students recognize, recall and identify facts and ideas constituent of the core content knowledge of physical geography.

1.2: Students recognize, recall and identify facts and ideas constituent of the core content knowledge of human geography.

### Results:

Forty-six students took the pre-test in Geography 150 (World Geography), receiving an average score of 46%. This is in line with the scores in past years (which have ranged from 44% to 53% in the past five years). What is significant is the higher overall scores of non-transfer students:

Transfer students on average received a score of 41%, and non-transfer students 47%.

In the 2016-17 assessment report (the last “normal” assessment done because we assessed GE Science SLOs the year after), we noted that transfer students outperformed non-transfer students on these SLOs at the upper-division level. Our finding in this report is that that non-transfer students outperformed transfer students at the lower-division level. The assessment committee will collect data to verify this finding in its next “normal” assessment. (We will be assessing GE Social Sciences SLOs this year.)

Nonetheless, even the higher scores of non-transfer students are below 50% and reflect the lack of geographic instruction at the K-12 level, however. In the past we have taken many steps to assist students to improve their foundational knowledge, such as implementing online lesson modules to supplement in-class teaching and encouraging students to play online games that teach world geography. This year lower-division instructors are focusing on enhancing students’ enthusiasm for increasing their fundamental geographical awareness by emphasizing its importance to human survival in an age that dangerously combines global warming with the science-denial of American political leaders and the geographic ignorance of young Americans as captured in National Geographic assessments, and relating course material to scaffoldings of student knowledge and local and world news issues.

In addition, the department is seeking to compensate for initial deficiencies in students’ knowledge of physical geography by using a new textbook in Geography 101 (Introduction to Physical Geography). The switch reduces the overall costs for students (($210 new vs. $75 new), but more importantly, features less text and more robust exercises and labs that are graphics- and video-intensive. The CSUN dashboard shows that the DFW rate for this course hovers between 30-35%, and was 32% in Fall 2018, prior to the book switch. In Dr. Graves’ 101 course in Fall 2019 (with the new book) the DFW rate was 19%, a statistically significant improvement. We will check to see any effect the switch has on student performance with respect to SLO 1.1 as a result of the increased attendance and the pedagogically different text.

## SLO 4.2: Student writes an effective research paper.

This year assessed SLO 2.4 using student performance in the capstone (Geography 490) class. This year, in contrast to the last time we did this assessment, we chose to assess the final drafts of capstone papers rather than the proposals. We assessed proposals in order to avoid assessing the editing and writing of the class instructor, who had a very “hands on” approach with student work. In this assessment cycle, we assessed the final projects because the 490 instructor last year directed but did not intensively re-write student work.

We broke the SLO into several sub-components. The average scores for each sub-component are listed below. (n=9)

The average score for Knowledge and Accuracy was 75%.

The average score for Effective use of Prior Research (Literature Review) was 65%.

The average score for Argument was 60%.

The average score for Geographic content was 74%.

The average score for Graphic Skills was 60%.

The average score for Text Organization, Tone and Readability was 60%.

### Discussion:

The student papers were overall of acceptable quality, but relative weaknesses were apparent in Argument; Graphic Content; and Organization, Tone and Readability. We are somewhat pleased that the scores for the literature review were slightly higher, as instructors have emphasized literature review skills in response to previous findings in assessment reports. There is still a need for improvement, however. In Geography 300, the program’s required methods course, Dr. Drake is emphasizing techniques for reading and synthesizing peer-reviewed research. In addition, various instructors are working to improve students’ writing abilities. Also in Geography 300, students are taught how to organize academic, scientific writing. In other courses instructors are emphasizing writing skills increasing the number of writing assignments in online formats, including by interacting with other students’ posts on topics presented on discussion boards. Dr. Davidson takes his students to the Learning Resource Center for lessons on research paper organization by Melissa Filbert. Dr. Craine has revised his writing requirement to emphasize paper organization in his regional courses.

## SLO 5.2: Students will demonstrate awareness of their individual role as global citizens.

We assessed this SLO using 490 final papers.

The average score for this SLO was 83%.

The 490 projects scored well with respect to this SLO. Numerous projects reflected an awareness of global citizenship, and all papers that had ethical content bore on this theme in a way that was acceptable or exemplary. No students pursued research that contradicted the values of global citizenship identified in this SLO.

## Oral Presentation Skills

Department Learning Goal 4 states: “Students are effective communicators – demonstrate ability to communicate effectively using textual, oral, graphic or numeric media.” While this goal includes improving “oral” presentation skills, we do not have any SLOs written specifically about oral presentations. The assessment committee believes we ought to and will address this shortcoming as part of its duties either this or (due to our focus now on GE social science SLOs) next year. Nonetheless, oral presentation skills were assessed last year.

As the culminating event in Geography 490, students present their research to fellow classmates as well as to any interested undergraduate and graduate students and department faculty in a forum that resembles a professional conference session. Five components of the presentations were assessed, with their average scores shown below: (n=11)

The average score for Research Question was 69%.

The average score for Methodology was 63%.

The average score for Analysis was 66%.

The average score for Media was 63%.

The average score for Presentation was 60%.

This assessment shows that Geography 490 students scored lower on their oral presentations than on their written reports. This suggests that additional work needs to be done on honing oral presentation skills – especially basic presentation skills (making eye contact, not speaking too quickly, speaking clearly), use of media, and articulating methodology. In weeks 10-12, when the 490 students are converting their written papers into oral presentations, these aspects of the presentations will be emphasized by the 490 instructors.

## Graduate Program Assessment

### Graduation rates and thesis quality

Although the majority of our graduate students successfully finish the coursework of their programs in three semesters, it can be observed that their main struggle starts right before (and continues after) they enroll in GEOG 698, the Thesis course. Traditionally, students prepared their thesis proposals in GEOG 696 without having formed an advising committee. This, later on, introduced a series of problems, including difficulties in forming an advisory committee and those committees often requiring students to revise and re-write their thesis proposals. To improve the situation and based on the faculty recommendations in 2015, we asked our students to discuss their dissertation ideas with prospective advisors before taking GEOG 696 and required them to form their thesis committee within the first four weeks of GEOG 696. This would help students and faculty to work together during the development of their thesis proposals and later on in the implementation of the methodologies and analysis. We anticipated that our low two-year graduation rate would improve by asking our students to work directly with an advisor earlier in their second year. However, although the students during the past three years established their advisory committees early in the second year, it seems that the plan did not increase graduation rates in a tangible way. The two-year graduation rate in 21.4% in 2015, 25% in 2016, and 23% in 2017.

Hence only a small portion of our students who enroll in GEOG 698 Thesis or GEOG 698D Thesis Project will finish and submit their theses within two years. This can be attributed to several factors, most importantly the lack of initial preparation of the thesis with the advisory committee and, in the case of GIS-based theses, data access/availability and development and also a lack of students’ knowledge and skills in GIS specific methods. Our Graduate Committee is currently evaluating the option of having GEOG 696 be offered in the second semester of first year to engage the students with their thesis and advisory committees even earlier in order to improve the two-year graduation rate. If approved by the faculty, the results of the approach can be evaluated two years after its implementation.

In addition, we are adding a new requirement that all students taking GEOG 696 do a proposal defense in the form of a day-long conference that will take place in one of the final weeks of the semester. Each students’ full committee will be present for their students’ presentations, as will any interested undergraduate and graduate students and other faculty. We are reserving a conference room for a block of time on a Friday in November for this purpose.

### SLO 4.2: Student writes an effective research paper.

We also assessed two batches of graduate student term papers (n=17). The issues that emerged from this assessment were that a small but significant number of graduate student papers (3 of the sample of 17) included significant amounts of subjective language and opinion. Two of the papers failed in terms of organization, as they did not work logically to solve a central research question. The committee theorizes that the underlying reason for this was a lack of research, which informal interviews with students seemed to confirm. (Some graduate students are attempting to write their papers in very limited time frames, and, having done insufficient research, are “forced” to promote ideas/opinions of their own simply to fulfill length requirements.) Instructors in graduate seminars are warning of this danger and Dr. Davidson is requiring research proposals and tentative bibliographies early in the semester to address this problem.

## 2019-20 Assessment:

This year we will assess our GE Social Science SLOs as required by the university. The committee will meet to formulate its approach in coming weeks.