

Geography, Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies and the Faculty of Science

**Cyclical Program Review Period: Undergraduate Program: 2010- 2015;
Graduate Program: 2007 - 2015**

Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

**Reported to Joint Sub-Committee on Quality Assurance: December 12,
2016**

Program Description

The Geography Department was founded in 1962 and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2012. The Department of Geography offers the following degree options to students registered in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies or the Faculty of Science:

Bachelor of Arts Geography:

Bachelor of Arts Honours – Geography; BA Specialized Honours – Geography

BA Specialized Honours – Geography and Urban Studies

iBA (International Bachelor of Arts) Honours – Geography Major

BA Honours – Double Major – Geography

BA Honours Major/Minor (Geography Major) (Geography Minor)

Bachelor of Science Geography:

BSc Geography; BSc Honours, Specialized Honours

Bachelor of Science - Environmental Science:

BSc Specialized Honours, (Physical Sciences or Life Sciences Stream)

The Department also offers three undergraduate certificate programs: GIS and Remote Sensing; Urban Studies; and Refugee and Migration Studies.

The Graduate Program in Geography at York University offers three programs leading to the following degrees:

M.A. in Geography

M.Sc. in Geography

Ph.D. in Geography

Program	Accepts 2014	Enrolments FFTES	Degrees Awarded 2014
Geography (LAPS)	34	190	40 Hons; 29 90-credit; 5 certificates
Geography and Urban Studies (LAPS)	9	17	6 Hons
Geography (Science)	9	32	3 Hons; 3 90-credit
Environmental Science (Science)	16	40	8 Hons
Geography (Masters)	13	33	12
Geography (PhD)	10	36	6

Reviewers:

Dr. Tim Moore, Professor, Department of Geography, Director, Trotter Institute for Science and Public Policy, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

Dr. Geraldine Pratt, Canada Research Chair in Transnationalism and Precarious Labour, Professor of Geography, University of British Columbia

Dr. Ravi De Costa, Associate Professor and Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University

Documentation Provided to the External Reviewers

Prior to the site visit, the external reviewers are provided with the following:

- Dean's /Principal's Agenda of Concerns
- Department/Program Omnibus Statement (where applicable)
- Program Self-Study Brief, which includes program structure, curriculum and learning outcomes, program reflection, enrolment and retention data, resources, student input and quality enhancement opportunities
- Faculty CVs
- University, Faculty and Program planning documents

Site Visit: February 3 & 4, 2016

The site visit consisted of meetings with senior academic leadership at York University, including Alice Pitt, Vice Provost Academic, Steven Tufts, Geography Chair, Tarmo Remmel, Undergraduate Program Director, Philip Kelly, YCAR Director, Alison Bain, City Institute Director, Catherine Davidson, Associate University Librarian, Rosa Orlandini, Map Librarian. The reviewers also met with Members of Undergraduate Program Committee, faculty, students and staff from the Department.

Outcome: The Joint Sub-Committee on Quality Assurance concluded that the Decanal response adequately addressed the review recommendations. Progress on the recommendations will be included in the Follow-up Report due June 2018. The next Cyclical Program Review will begin in the Fall of 2022.

Program Strengths

The External Reviewers report made particular note of a number of strengths in the program. The report lauded the fact that the program has clear and appropriate learning outcomes for its human and physical geography graduate programs. The Reviewers stated, "Geography is almost uniquely qualified to educate students with an integrated grasp of physical and socio-economic and political processes". As this LAPS Department houses the only science faculty members, students and programs in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies (LA&PS), "it quite literally embodies the kind of interdisciplinarity that the University champions and it is a showpiece and demonstration of how interdisciplinary - indeed different epistemological - worlds might co-exist and intermingle".

The Report also noted the strength of the physical geography program in extreme environments, especially Arctic geography, and GIS; the human geography in urbanism, transnational processes, and social, spatial and environmental justice. The Reviewers affirmed that it is appropriate for particular departments to develop specific lines of concentration and expertise and unrealistic to expect comprehensive coverage.

Two initiatives in Geography stood out as examples of collective efforts resulting in outstanding practices in teaching which should be publicized and built upon. The first is the Colloquium at the graduate level which is a substantive and rich experience for students and is the most important forum in the Department for building community and disciplinary identity. The other is the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees project, which is a ground-breaking initiative involving faculty in Geography and other units.

Opportunities for Enhancements and Recommendations

The External Reviewer's Report and the Dean's Implementation Plan have identified a number of opportunities for enhancement and indicated explicit ways to advance those options. The majority of the suggestions focused on the undergraduate program, with some specific action items for the graduate program. Ideas and suggestions from students and faculty formed the basis for many of these.

- The University should establish a coordinated approach to 'branding' the accomplishments of the Department and all that they offer to undergraduate

and graduate students and ensure there are opportunities to participate in centralized marketing strategies.

- The Department should examine teaching resource allocation and a rationalization of course offerings, particularly in light of small enrolments at the third and fourth year level.
 - More summer courses should be offered, in which students clearly indicated an interest.
 - A mentorship program between graduate and undergraduate students should be established.
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- Members of the department should work together to more fully clarify the objectives of a graduate course bringing human and physical geographers together, including the options of a methodology course or a problems-based introductory seminar.
 - Reasons for tardy time to completion rates at both the master's level and the PhD level need to be examined carefully. Among other things, strategies put in place to ensure students are realistic in their proposals (master's level) and ensure that course scheduling does not have a negative impact. Other factors identified by students should also be carefully examined, as there is a potential impact on withdrawal rates as well.
 - A system of long-term planning for the funding of equipment recalibration and repair should be put in place.

Implementation Plans

The Implementation Plan submitted by the Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies addresses many of the specific recommendations made by the external reviewers and notes that the program largely agrees with the reviewers' report. The Dean is in agreement with the Department's Plans. The Dean's Implementation Plan provides clear direction on priorities in three areas: recruitment and retention, curriculum clarity, and resources and workload. The Dean of the Faculty of Science also submitted a statement expressing support for the LAPS implementation plan and an expectation that they will be included in discussions for program enhancements. The implementation plan incorporates the Science recommendations.

Recruitment and Retention

The reviewers and the LAPS Dean's implementation plan noted that there has been a dramatic decline in student enrolment over the past seven years. The LAPS Dean's Plan states, "The Dean's office is more than willing to work with all parties to ensure that these discussions are fruitful (including supporting a "retreat"), and the impacts on student recruitment and retention could be

significant if students are presented clear pathways of study and mutually supporting programs which are transparent and permeable.” The Dean of the Faculty of Science has indicated agreement with this focus and a desire to participate. This is reflected in the table on the following page.

Action	First Responsibility	Final Responsibility	Timeline
Retreat with FES, Urban Studies and Area Studies	Geography and other departments	LAPS Dean's office (facilitating a retreat and administrative support); Science Dean and the FES Dean will be consulted.	Departments meet Spring/Summer 2016 Proposal to the LAPS and Science Dean's Offices by spring 2017.
Map of "competitor" programs in GTA	Department	Department	Formal report by Spring 2017: to be submitted to the LAPS and Science Dean's Offices.
Student Lounge	Department	LAPS Dean's Office	Fall 2017

Curriculum Clarity

The Dean's Implementation Plan submitted by Liberal Arts and Professional Studies notes the following, "The Geography Department is the only department in LA&PS which has a significant science component to it – which is both a strength in terms of interdisciplinarity and a potential weakness in that it is at least questionable that there are sufficient students or resources to mount rigorous curriculum and quality student experience in this field – both at the undergraduate and graduate levels."

The Dean of the Faculty of Science supports the review of the "Science" component of Geography and the rationalization of course offerings (see chart below).

The Reviewer's Report had the following specific recommendations for the Graduate Program. "The Department has suggested three curricular innovations: a) replacing the core course with a research design or methods course required of non-science students only; b) requiring students who do not hold a degree in Geography to take a course in geographical thought; c) requiring students to attend the professional development series." The LAPS Dean's Implementation

Plan includes attending to these specific items (see row 3 of this section of the chart below).

Action	First	Final	Timeline
Review of the "Science" Component of Geography	Department (includes faculty from LAPS and Science)	Department (including faculty from LAPS and Science) will report to the LAPS and Science Deans	September 2017
Systematic review of and rationalization of course offerings	Department	Dean's Office (LAPS and Science)	September 2017
Enact the three "innovations" for the Graduate Program made by the Reviewers	Department	Department	September 2017

Resources and Workload

The LAPS Dean's Implementation Plan notes that both the Reviewer's Report and the program's response to that report include a series of resource requests and recommendations that are related to faculty complement as well as physical space. The two action items identified in the chart below would contribute to a report that, in the Dean's words, "highlights the ways in which it is reorganizing itself to create curricular and resource efficiency and increased enrollments and retention, to facilitate increased resources".

Action	First Responsibility	Final Responsibility	Timeline
Review of workload documents	Department	LAPS Dean's Office	September 2017
Resource report on needs in the context of review	Department	Department	September 2017

As per normal YUQAP procedures, a follow-up report will be due in June of 2018. This report should be prepared by the Dean of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies in consultation with the Dean of Science and should provide an update on the advancement of the above recommendations and the impact on the students pursuing programs in both Faculties, as well as graduate students. The outcome of discussions with the Faculty of Environmental Studies and Urban Studies may affect the approach to the curriculum review, and the follow-up report should reflect the impact of decisions on other aspects of the implementation plan. The Report should also provide an update on enrolment in undergraduate programs and graduate program times to completions.

Alice J Pitt,
Vice-Provost Academic
York University

