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Geography

Cyclical Program Review

Executive Summary

Program description

The Program addresses some of the most pressing concerns facing humankind today like climate change, resource depletion, human migration, globalization, geopolitics, poverty, inequality and vulnerability – their causes, consequences, and implications on urban and regional development.

Hands-on learning, using technologies and field work to collect the facts on the ground, whether they are on the streets of Toronto or in the streams of the Arctic, the program offers the following degree types: a Bachelor of Arts (BA), a Bachelor of Science (BSc), and an International Bachelor of Arts (iBA). It can also be paired with a certificate in Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing, Urban Studies, or Refugee and Migration Studies

Reviewers:

Dr. Michael Baklacich , Carleton University (External)
Dr. Jessie Poon, University at Buffalo-SUNY (External)
Dr. Wenona Giles, York University (Internal)

Site Visit: January 25-26, 2011

Reported to Joint-Committee: [date]

Outcome: Following receipt of unit response to the consultants' report and Decanal Implementation Plan, members of the Senate Joint Sub-Committee on Quality Assurance reviewed the documentation and concluded that a meeting with the Dean and the Proponents was not required. **Follow-up interim report is not required due to the fact that process was extended in time and the next review is scheduled in 2015.**

Program Strengths

- The department hosts one of the largest undergraduate programs in geography in Canada (2008/9 627 majors and 478 honours students) with a majority in full-time study

- Unique is the fact that the department offers BA (2/3 of enrolments) and BSc (1/3 of enrolments) degrees
- Human geographers are nationally and internationally recognized as leaders in immigration and urban diversity and political economy and political ecology
- The identity of the program is clearly identified with curriculum in applied fields (statistics, geographical information system/remote sensing, physical environmental processes, laboratory oriented tutorials) with strong attention to field studies
- High rates of student satisfaction and acknowledgement of faculty engagement in supporting learning and experience

Opportunities for Program improvement

The reviewers made following recommendations:

- Renewal in attraction of majors (442 in 2011 with 88 minors)
- Enhancement of balance between undergraduate and graduate enrolments in order to satisfy need for qualified teaching assistants in lower level courses
- Renewal in the physical geography complement to sustain all aspects of the sub-discipline and to rebalance enrolment distribution given trends in the discipline, with a particular focus on the integration of the physical and social sciences in the analysis of place-based environmental and societal problems
- Enhancement of experiential learning linked to career opportunities
- Enhancement of outdoor laboratory space and resources and attention to equipment renewal and replacement
- Increased flexibility in terms of course offerings to meet needs of York students, many of whom are employed and commuting to York
- Enhanced marketing communications to ensure that prospective students have sound information about the full range of offerings

Decanal Implementation Plan

The Decanal plan emphasizes the need, addressed by the unit and the consultants, for the department to attend to the dilemmas created by a decreased emphasis on geography as a distinct secondary subject and an increased set of opportunities at the post-secondary level in general and at York for students invested in concerns addressed by Geography. The plan endorses efforts made by the unit to ensure that professorial faculty members meet students in large elective courses in order to enhance opportunities to attract

majors and minors. The plan encourages the unit to continue its efforts to specify career opportunities for prospective students and to engage alumni in these efforts. The plan ensures support for the department to collaborate with the Faculty of Science and the School of Engineering to ensure that Physical Geography be renewed and supported as an aspect of the university's academic plan towards comprehensiveness with attention to interdisciplinarity.

Executive Summary

The strengths of the Geography Department and the programs it provides are well documented and persuasive. There is concurrence among the unit, the reviewers and the dean's report on issues to be addressed. The department is well poised to undertake improvements, with support from the Faculty and in alliance with the York University priorities, to strengthen its goals to balance the human geography and the physical geography aspects of its programs, to renew its human and material resources, and to situate itself as a leading participant in a discipline with permeable borders and a keen interest in working the borders both within the university and beyond.

Alice J Pitt, Vice-Provost Academic
June 11, 2013

