Central Washington University  
Assessment of Student Learning  
Department and Program Report

Please enter the appropriate information concerning your student learning assessment activities for this year.

Academic Year of Report: **2009-2010**  
College or Support Area: **College of the Sciences**  
Department or Program: **Geography**

Check here if your assessment report covers all undergraduate degree programs: [ X ]  
Check here if your assessment report covers all graduate degree programs: [   ]

1. What student learning outcomes were assessed this year, and why?  
   ![In answering this question, please identify the specific student learning outcomes you assessed this year, reasons for assessing these outcomes, with the outcomes written in clear, measurable terms, and note how the outcomes are linked to department, college and university mission and goals.]

Our department assessed two programmatic outcomes this academic year.

1. Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. This outcome was chosen because our department assessed it last year, and wanted to follow up on our ability to assess our students’ learning in this critical area; it is critical that students be able to not only understand the keys to our enterprise but also be able to craft an argument to present their analyses, findings, perspectives and passion to the world at large; this is our future. This outcome relates to: Program Goals of “promotes the integrative, synthesizing view of geography,” “creating a diverse community caring deeply about the Earth, sharing ideas and responsibility” and “fostering faculty and student research and civic engagement;” COTS Goals of “providing for an outstanding academic life in the College of the Sciences,” “building partnerships” and “providing a productive, civil and pleasant learning environment;” and University Goals of “providing an outstanding academic life at the Ellensburg campus,” “building beneficial community partnerships,” “achieving regional and national prominence” and “creating inclusive and diverse campus communities.” We are strongly committed to doing all within our power to ensure that our geographers have the communication skills necessary to help change the world.

2. Outcome—Critical Thinking and Application: Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and describe physical, human and cultural systems and/or issues, using sound geographic principles. This outcome was chosen because we have been putting emphasis on critical thinking in several of our upper division courses and would like to begin assessing our students’ grasp of these concepts so important to an educated geographer. This outcome relates to: Program Goals of promoting “the integrative, synthesizing view of geography,” observing “the world in terms of its landscapes and understand[ing] the concept of place at scales local to global,” and supporting “faculty and student research/civic engagement;” the COTS Goals of providing “for outstanding academic life in the College of the Sciences,” developing “a diversified funding base for student and faculty research and applied research in COTS disciplines,” and “build[ing] partnerships;” and University Goals of providing “outstanding academic life at Ellensburg campus,” “build[ing] beneficial community partnerships,” “achiev[ing] prominence” and developing “inclusive and diverse campus communities.” We are determined that our graduates have needed critical thinking tools and the ability to apply them.
2. How were they assessed?

[In answering these questions, please concisely describe the specific methods used in assessing student learning. Please also specify the population assessed, when the assessment took place, and the standard of mastery (criterion) against which you will compare your assessment results. If appropriate, please list survey or questionnaire response rate from total population.]

A) What methods were used?

1. Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. A) To apply for the major, students are required to write a diagnostic essay of 500 words and meet with the chair to discuss the essay and the student’s future in geography. Both written and oral skills are assessed by the chair and results discussed with the student during the oral interview. B) In the senior seminar (GEOG 489-Geography Capstone), students are required to write a five-page self-assessment essay, a one-page critical analysis of a published geographic article, create a map with a two-page narrative, short oral presentations and one fifteen-minute oral presentation, and a final oral exam including a current resume which is graded. (In the majority of our upper division geography classes, students are required to give oral presentations. In each of our upper division classes, a written analysis, research paper, poster and/or statistical analysis and representation is required.) Here, we are discussing assessment in A) above, but are assessing the outcomes discussed in B) above.

2. Outcome—Critical Thinking and Application: Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and describe physical, human and cultural systems and/or issues, using sound geographic principles. This outcome was chosen because we have been putting emphasis on critical thinking in several of our upper division courses and would like to begin assessing our students’ grasp of these concepts we consider so important to an educated geographer. This outcome relates to: Program Goals of promoting “the integrative, synthesizing view of geography,” observing “the world in terms of its landscapes and understand[ing] the concept of place at scales local to global,” and supporting “faculty and student research/civic engagement;” the COTS Goals of providing “for outstanding academic life in the College of the Sciences,” developing “a diversified funding base for student and faculty research and applied research in COTS disciplines,” and “build[ing] partnerships;” and University Goals of providing “outstanding academic life at Ellensburg campus,” “build[ing] beneficial community partnerships,” “achiev[ing] prominence,” and developing “inclusive and diverse campus communities.” We are determined that our graduates have needed critical thinking tools and the ability to apply them.

Assessment of these abilities occurs in our senior seminar (GEOG 489-Geography Capstone) in review of a concise one-page written critical analysis of a published geographic article and the results of a written exam, approximately one-third of which is devoted to analysis of various physical, cultural and human systems using geographic principles.

B) Who was assessed?

1. Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. Students entering the major (38 of them in 09-10) were assessed for ability to write and speak. Graduating senior majors, (27 of them in the Spring Quarter of 2010) were assessed in the required GEOG 489-Geography Capstone (2-credit hour class required of all majors) for this outcome.

2. Outcome—Critical Thinking and Application: Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and describe physical, human and cultural systems and/or issues, using sound geographic principles.
Graduating senior majors, (27 of them in the Spring Quarter of 2010) were assessed in the required GEOG 489-Geography Capstone (2-credit hour class required of all majors) for this outcome.

C) When was it assessed?

1. Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. These skills are assessed at two points in students’ careers. (A) Admission interviews and analyses of written essays occur through the course of each academic year, as students apply for the geography major. (B) Capstone assessment of majors occurred during Spring Quarter, 2010 (at the end of the students’ careers, as noted above).

2. Outcome—Critical Thinking and Application: Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and describe physical, human and cultural systems and/or issues, using sound geographic principles. This assessment occurred during Spring Quarter, 2010, at the end of the students’ careers, as noted above. (Individual instructors assess the acquisition of critical thinking skills in both core and advanced coursework in the appropriate subfields of the discipline throughout students’ geography careers.)

3. What was learned?

[In answering this question, please report results in specific qualitative or quantitative terms, with the results linked to the outcomes you assessed, and compared to the standard of mastery (criterion) you noted above. Please also include a concise interpretation or analysis of the results.]

1. Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms.

Findings (Spring 10):

A) All applicants to the major are required to write a diagnostic essay of 500 words which is reviewed by the chair using a rubric modified from the CWU Writing Rubric and discussed with the student during an oral interview. From that interview comes an acceptance of the student as a new major—and assignment of an advisor—or an opportunity (after discussion of the chair’s assessment) for the student to work with the writing center to clarify the essay and resubmit it to the chair. The chair also reviews a checklist (a crude rubric) of oral communication skills with the student at the end of the interview. The effectiveness of this introductory assessment will become increasingly clear as new majors move through their coursework and into the capstone class, but majors accepted in the last year are quite aware of the department’s emphasis on oral, written and geospatial (mapping, aerial photography, etc.) communication skills.

B) This set of assessments relates to work accomplished in GEOG 489—Geography Capstone.

Written Assignments (40 of the 100 points for the course) findings for Spring 10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Competence (36+)</th>
<th>Competent (28+)</th>
<th>Low Competence (24+)</th>
<th>Not (23-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>(72%)</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average score: Not calculated
Two students failed to meet competency standards (according to the instructor’s rubric), largely as a result of carelessness in meeting the written assignments. On the other hand, a slightly higher percentage of this group (92% versus 86%) achieved competence or high competence than the group assessed last year. We are beginning to build a data set against which future assessments can be compared, and had only a limited basis for comparison to previous groups. We are not satisfied with the percentage of students in the low area, and will deal with that in upcoming courses.

*Oral Presentation Assignments* (30 of the 100 points for the course) findings for Spring 10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Competence (27+)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent (21+)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Competence (18+)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not (17-)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average score: Not calculated

Again, while one student failed to meet a minimum competency standard (according to the instructor’s rubric) a higher percentage of this year’s students were in the upper two competency levels than last year, by 6%. This is not particularly significant, but helps us develop our growing body of data for future assessments. This “oral presentation” assessment includes an assessment of students’ use and understanding of mapping and other geospatial tools. Mastery of oral and geospatial communication is a growing effort in our department, and improvement is expected.

2. Outcome—Critical Thinking and Application: Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and describe physical, human and cultural systems and/or issues, using sound geographic principles.

*Critical Thinking and Application Assignments* (30 of the 100 points for the course) findings (Spring 10):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Competence (90+)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent (80+)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Competence (70+)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not (60-)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average score: Not calculated

Two of our graduating geography majors failed to demonstrate competence in this student learning outcome, while the remainder demonstrated quite satisfactory levels of critical thinking skill. This is the first time we have assessed this outcome and will now begin building a data base for future assessment and comparison. Our increasing efforts to more clearly lay out learning opportunities and expectations to majors in advanced coursework (sophomores, juniors and early seniors) will strengthen this learning.

4. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?

*In answering this question, please note specific changes to your program as they affect student learning, and as they are related to results from the assessment process. If no changes are planned, please describe why no changes are needed. In addition, how will the department report the results and changes to internal and external constituents?*

Based on these findings, our other conversations and observations, and a slowly improving understanding of the process, faculty members have agreed to increase the level and clarity of classroom instruction as it relates to all our student learning objectives. Additionally, the department will add our student learning
objectives to our web page, along with a list of the classes in which students can expect to meet those objectives—in the hope that students will take an increased interest in meeting them within the context of the importance of this knowledge to success in the field of geography the graduate will pursue. We will, no doubt, continue as a group to adjust course emphases in our capstone and in core classes.

This listing of learning objectives—and the skills needed for a successful career in geography—will lead into a list of the skills an educated geographer will need in a particular aspect of the discipline. We have agreed to increase our emphasis on “key” concepts, themes and vocabulary, and help faculty who are teaching the intro sequences of physical, human, techniques, regional and resource geography to focus on helping students wrap their minds around what geographers do. For increasing clarity, we will continue our focus on writing, oral, geospatial and critical thinking requirements in appropriate coursework and re-examine it as needed.

As changes and improvements occur, we will report them through university channels, our webpage and our email list-serves.

5. What did the department or program do in response to the feedback from last year's assessment report?
   [In answering this question, please describe any changes that have been made to improve student learning based on previous assessment results. Please also discuss any changes you have made to your assessment plan or assessment methods.]

The chair and a junior faculty member are meeting to develop better tools for clearly and comprehensively assessing student learning relative to our stated outcomes. A primary goal for the latter part of the 09-10 academic year, and for this year, is finding a way to assess student attitudes relative to geography and aspects of our discipline. The chair has been asking other geography chairs across North America for their tools and success in this area.

The chair, the instructor for our capstone course and two particularly interested faculty members met (and have continued meeting) to discuss the types and value of rubrics to be used in entry interviews and exit (capstone) assessments. An effort was made by the chair and the capstone instructor to use rubrics in assessment of learning related to certain outcomes—as opposed to simply grades—this past year. It is expected that these efforts will continue to be refined, and learning outcomes can and will be more accurately assessed through each of our majors’ careers at Central.

We have taken concrete steps to improve our assessment abilities, and will be taking more. It clearly is a process that the current chair intends to have well-developed and well-understood by the time of his retirement in June of 2012.

6. Questions or suggestions concerning Assessment of Student Learning at Central Washington University:

As noted in numerous conversations across campus, it would certainly simplify this process if we had increased resources to get faculty to assessment workshops or some sort of strategy session.