Central Washington University
Assessment of Student Learning—Programmatic and General Education
Geography Department Report

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

Academic Year of Report: 2010-2011
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?

Our department assessed two programmatic outcomes and one General Education goal during the 2010-2011 academic year.

Programmatic Outcomes

1. Outcome—Knowledge and Awareness: Students will be thoroughly familiar with the discipline’s vocabulary, concepts and themes, and the complexity of physical, human, and cultural systems and issues. This outcome was chosen because our department has determined to assess students’ grasp of this body of knowledge, and it was last assessed in the 08-09 academic year; we believe that any geographer must have a solid grasp of these key areas and subfields of our discipline. This outcome relates to: Program Goals of “promotes the integrative, synthesizing view of geography” and “creating a diverse community caring deeply about the Earth, sharing ideas and responsibility;” the COTS Goals of “providing for an outstanding academic life in the College of the Sciences,” “building partnerships” and “strengthening COTS contributions to education;” and the University Goals of “providing an outstanding academic life at the Ellensburg camp,” “building beneficial community partnerships,” “achieving regional and national prominence,” and “developing inclusive and diverse campus communities.” We believe that all graduating geography majors, whatever their interest or pursuit of advanced knowledge through choice of electives, must know the basic building blocks and knowledge of our discipline.

2. Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. This outcome was also last assessed in the Department of Geography during the 08-09 academic year, and was assessed this year because the department has agreed to assess it each two years. We find it critical that students be able to not only understand the keys to our enterprise (see 1. Outcome, above) 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, and have consciously increased our efforts to increase students’ writing and speaking skills in our upper division courses.
General Education Goal 3 (b-Written communication)

General Education Goal—Students will achieve fluency in: (a) reading; (b) writing; oral communication; and information technology. The university has agreed to assess one or two general education related goals each year. For the 2010-11 academic year, departments were asked to assess the written communication portion of Goal 3, and the Department of Geography agreed to assess writing skills in GEOG 250-Natural Resource Conservation, a core requirement of the geography major.

2. How were they assessed?

A) What methods were used?

1. Programmatic Outcome—Knowledge and Awareness: Students will be thoroughly familiar with the discipline’s vocabulary, concepts and themes, and the complexity of physical, human, and cultural systems and issues. To demonstrate mastery of these aspects of our discipline, students must successfully complete GEOG 489-Geography Capstone, designed by the department under guidance of past chairs, who generally direct the class. During the 10-11 academic year, the 100 points possible in the class were awarded as follows:

25—a detailed self-assessment of learning during the student’s time in the department with focus on the advanced coursework required in each of the five subfields.

15—an important article from the literature (from a leading geography journal—relative to current or ongoing issues in the field) is to be analyzed and students will write a one-page review.

15—participation as a team member in one of fifteen topical class presentations, but each student will be assessed on a formal oral presentation as an individual contribution to the team effort.

15—students will complete a comprehensive exam to test understanding of the required readings from the course text, and a compendium of common geographic knowledge taken from the five foundation courses (GEOG 101, 107, 108, 203 and 250).

15—each student will find a position description for a job which interests them (or a graduate program) and prepare an application letter and a current resume. These materials are reviewed in class and final versions are brought to an exit and “job” interview before a panel of students and instructor. He or/she will discuss their qualifications for the position, with additional time to discuss life after CWU, and how their geography major may enhance the opportunities available.

15—each student is assessed on overall class participation.

2. Programmatic Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. A) At the time of application to the major, students are required to write a diagnostic essay of 500 words which is assessed by the chair and discussed with the student during an oral interview which is also assessed by the chair. B) In the senior seminar (GEOG 489-Geography Capstone), students are required to write a six-page self-assessment essay, a one-page critical analysis of a published geographic article, do at least two short oral presentations and one fifteen-minute oral presentation, and participate in a final oral exam/interview presenting an application letter and current resume which are graded. (In the majority of our upper division geography classes, students are required to give an oral presentation. In all of our upper division classes, a written analysis, research paper, poster and/or statistical analysis and representation is required.) Assessment in A) above, is increasing, and this report relates to assessment of the outcomes discussed in B) above.
General Education Goal—Students will achieve fluency in: (a) reading; (b) writing; oral communication; and information technology. The writing skills of the 29 students enrolled in Geography 250 were assessed via an end-of-quarter writing assignment concerning a natural resource conservation issue about which each student had already given an oral presentation. Each student had to write a research paper at least four double-spaced pages in length. With the assignment, students were given a copy of the detailed rubric that was later used to assess the quality of their writing. The rubric, consistent with the university’s writing rubric, had five main elements, each of which was measured with several more specific criteria. Points were available for each criterion and in each category (e.g., 25 points for Rhetoric of Discipline). The standard of mastery was 70%.

B) Who was assessed?

1. Programmatic Outcome—Knowledge and Awareness: Students will be thoroughly familiar with the discipline’s vocabulary, concepts and themes, and the complexity of physical, human, and cultural systems and issues. Senior majors, during the final year of their CWU careers, in the required GEOG 489-Geography Capstone (2-credit hour class required of all majors) are assessed for this outcome.

2. Programmatic Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. Students entering the major (admission point) are assessed for ability to write and speak. Graduating senior majors, in the final year of their CWU careers, in the required GEOG 489-Geography Capstone (2-credit hour class required of all majors) are assessed for this outcome.

General Education Goal—Students will achieve fluency in: (a) reading; (b) writing; oral communication; and information technology. Students in Geography 250 were assessed. Although 250 is a core geography course—required of all our majors—the student population of the class is diverse. The students who took part in the writing assessment in Spring 2011 included Flight Technology, Information Technology, Food Science, and Law and Justice majors, among others. Only a minority of students were Geography majors, although a few more were minors. Also, a number of the students who took the course during that quarter subsequently became majors.

C) When was it assessed?

1. Programmatic Outcome—Knowledge and Awareness: Students will be thoroughly familiar with the discipline’s vocabulary, concepts and themes, and the complexity of physical, human, and cultural systems and issues. This assessment occurred during Fall Quarter, 2010, and Spring Quarter, 2011, at the end of the students’ careers, as noted above. (Note, however, that individual instructors assess the acquisition of portions of this key knowledge in core and advanced coursework in the appropriate subfields of the discipline throughout students’ geography careers.)

2. Outcome—Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. Admission interviews and analysis of written essays occurred through the course of the 10-11 academic year, as students applied for the geography major. Capstone assessment of majors occurred during Fall Quarter, 2010, and Spring Quarter, 2011 (at the end of the students’ careers, as noted above).

General Education Goal—Students will achieve fluency in: (a) reading; (b) writing; oral communication; and information technology. This assessment occurred during Spring Quarter, 2011.
3. What was learned?

1. Programmatic Outcome—Knowledge and Awareness: Students will be thoroughly familiar with the discipline’s vocabulary, concepts and themes, and the complexity of physical, human, and cultural systems and issues.

Findings (Fall 10 and Spring 11):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Competence (90+)</th>
<th>Competent (80+)</th>
<th>Low Competence (70+)</th>
<th>Not (60-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
<td>(52%)</td>
<td>(28%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average score: 82.0

All students met our standard of a C or better in the course, and the class exceeded our expectation of a 95% pass rate. Average score is the same as that found in assessment of the 08-09 year. A higher percentage of assessed students were found in the higher two levels of competence and a lower percentage in the next two levels. This is perhaps a result of our increasing efforts to more clearly lay out expectations to majors in advanced coursework (sophomores, juniors and early seniors), although it may also be partly laid to the smaller numbers of students in the course. There is still plenty of room for improvement, and we are focused on that improvement.

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

Findings (Fall 10, Spring 11):

A) All applicants to the major are required to write a diagnostic essay of 500 words which is reviewed by the chair 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) for the student to work with the writing center to clarify the essay and resubmit it to the chair. During the academic year, of 39 students, only three were asked to rewrite their essays and given an opportunity to work with the writing center and resubmit. Interestingly, and anecdotally, as new applicants have been informed of the importance of the written essay, the writing has become clearer. Additionally, some students have been directed toward speaking classes and voice coaches. The effectiveness of these actions remains to be seen, although we are committed to improve this initial set of assessment tools.

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

Written Assignment (40 of the 100 points for the course) Findings for Fall 10 and Spring 11:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Competence (40+)</th>
<th>Competent (35+)</th>
<th>Low Competence (30+)</th>
<th>Not (25-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>(45%)</td>
<td>(24%)</td>
<td>(21%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average score: Not calculated
All but three students met our C or better in the writing portion of the course. While the numbers of students in the top two levels are stable over time, the percentage of students in the low and marginal competence levels rose somewhat. (Three students fell between low and not competent.) We are pleased that 69% of the students fell in the upper levels of competence, and concerned about the others. This is the first group experiencing our across-the-upper-division-curriculum requirements for student writing and analysis, and we expected better. While this may be partly a result of a limited pool (39) of students assessed, there is clearly much room for improvement, and we will begin discussing the issues.

Oral Presentation Assignment (30 of the 100 points for the course) Findings for Fall 10 and Spring 11:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Competence (27+)</th>
<th>Competent (24+)</th>
<th>Low Competence (21+)</th>
<th>Not (18-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>(69%)</td>
<td>(24%)</td>
<td>(7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average score: Not calculated

All students met our C or better in the speaking (oral presentation) portion of the course. This is an improvement of a few percentage points over our last assessment (in 08-09) of majors. This upward trend is a hoped-for result of our across-most-of-the-upper-division-curriculum requirements for student oral presentation. We will continue discussing these findings as a department.

General Education Goal-Students will achieve fluency in: (a) reading; (b) writing; oral communication; and information technology. Following the university’s writing assessment guidelines, students were classified as having either passed or not passed in each of the five categories described in the goal above. The results are summarized in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Element</th>
<th>Pass Native</th>
<th>Pass Transfer</th>
<th>Non-Pass Native</th>
<th>Non-Pass Transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>19/66%</td>
<td>8/28%</td>
<td>1/3%</td>
<td>1/3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>19/66%</td>
<td>7/24%</td>
<td>1/3%</td>
<td>2/7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>18/62%</td>
<td>9/31%</td>
<td>2/7%</td>
<td>0/0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric of Discipline</td>
<td>19/66%</td>
<td>8/28%</td>
<td>1/3%</td>
<td>1/3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions &amp; Presentation</td>
<td>10/34%</td>
<td>6/21%</td>
<td>10/34%</td>
<td>3/10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate that overall students write well. It should be emphasized that the assignment given asked students to write about a topic for which they had already given an oral presentation and received instructor feedback. A standalone assignment likely would have produced a higher proportion of non-passing scores.

Conventions and presentation comprised the one area where students performed poorly as a group. The instructor who administered the writing assessment noted that the students simply did not review the rubric well with regard to this element.

4. What will the department or program do as a result of the information learned?
Based on these findings, numerous observations and discussions, and an steadily growing understanding of the process, the department has already begun to clarify expectations of learning and teaching in our upper division coursework, with some changes already agreed. Hopefully, this clarifying of expectations
will lead to increased learning and competence of our graduates. Within the next year, more of our core classes and the capstone will undergo the same process.

In particular, we have increased emphasis of what we consider “key” concepts, themes and vocabulary, and are working to encourage faculty teaching the intro sequences of physical, human, techniques, regional and resource geography to focus on helping students wrap their minds around what geographers do. Our writing and analysis (and oral presentation) requirements have been strengthened a bit and we continue to re-examine regularly. We expect to see continued improvement in the 12-13 year, when these two outcomes will next be assessed.

To date, improvement efforts have been within the department. As necessary, we will report changes up through university channels, and, of course, inform our majors and other students of changes through our email listserv. Posters and advising.

With regard to the writing assignment, the results of this first effort substantiate our impression as instructors that students often struggle with the rudimentary requirements of good writing. We will continue to work with students to improve their writing and will encourage those who need additional help to visit the Writing Center and take advantage of other university resources.

Further, building upon this initial experience, we will continue to refine the manner in which we assess writing in order to ensure that our results are rigorous and useful.

5. What did the department or program do in response to the feedback from last year's assessment report?

As discussed above, we have been clarifying our expectations of teaching and student learning in both upper and lower division coursework. In the feedback from the 08-09 assessment of these two student learning outcomes, we received two “1” program scores. In response to the “2. How were they assessed” score area, we more clearly described the population and number directly assessed. In response to the “4. What will the department do…?” scoring, we have tightened our pedagogical and curriculum expectations and are continuously reexamining these expectations in terms of our assessment of student learning. We recognize that this is a somewhat fluid process and believe that we are making progress in preparing our graduates for careers.

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

We believe the process is becoming clearer, and have no comments at this time.