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: 2012/2013   College: College of the Sciences  
Department: Geography   Program: ______________________

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.

We assessed four learning outcomes that are related to department and college goals and the themes of the university’s mission as indicated by the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcomes (performance, knowledge, attitudes)</th>
<th>Related Program/Departmental Goals</th>
<th>Related College Goals</th>
<th>Related University Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. 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. | I - Program promotes the integrative, synthesizing view of geography  
II – A diverse community caring deeply about the Earth, sharing ideas and responsibility | I - Provide for outstanding academic life in College of the Sciences.  
V - Build partnerships  
VI - Strengthen COTS contributions to education | I – Provide outstanding academic life at Ellensburg campus  
IV - Build beneficial community partnerships  
V - Achieve prominence  
VI - inclusive and diverse campus communities |
| 2. Patterns and Processes: Students will be able to identify the patterns created through the interactions of human systems and physical systems, the networks of intra-and international interdependence, and the manner in which human and physical systems modify each other and control the Earth’s surface and resources. | I - Program promotes the integrative, synthesizing view of geography  
II – A diverse community caring deeply about the Earth, sharing ideas and responsibility  
III - Observe the world in terms of its landscapes & understand the concept of place at scales local to global | I - Provide for outstanding academic life in College of the Sciences.  
VI - Strengthen COTS contributions to education | I – Provide outstanding academic life at Ellensburg campus  
V - Achieve regional and national prominence |
| 3. Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms. | I - Program promotes the integrative, synthesizing view of geography  
II – A diverse community caring deeply, sharing ideas and responsibility  
IV – Faculty and student research/civic engagement | I - Provide for outstanding academic life in College of the Sciences.  
VII-Provide productive, civil and pleasant learning environment | I – Provide outstanding academic life at Ellensburg campus  
IV - Build beneficial community partnerships  
V - Achieve prominence  
VI - inclusive and diverse campus communities |
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.

Before answering these questions, it is important to note that the Department of Geography has undergone two changes in leadership in the past year and a half, and this instability has had a detrimental effect on implementation of our assessment plan. In June 2012, after a national search, the department recommended to the dean that Dr. Kevin Archer from the University of South Florida be brought to campus as our new chair. Kevin joined our department in September 2012. As an external hire, Dr. Archer brought many new ideas and great experience, but he was not familiar with the university’s assessment procedures and therefore did not put the department’s plan fully into practice in academic year 2012/2013.

Effective May 2013, Dr. Archer was selected to become the Interim Dean of Graduate Studies & Research and John Bowen was chosen as Interim Chair of the department. Dr. Bowen is well-versed in CWU’s assessment procedures and began to more implement them during the Spring.

A) What methods were used?

We used our capstone course, Geography 489, for assessing all four of the student learning outcomes listed above. As taught in Spring 2013, the course included several elements well-suited for program assessment including:

Element 1. COMPREHENSIVE EXAM
At the end of the quarter, every student took an objective-type exam evaluating mastery of the core material in the five categories of introductory geography, as presented in the five foundation courses (GEOG 101 – World Regional Geography, 107 – Introduction to Physical Geography, 108 – Introduction to Human Geography, 203 – Maps & Cartography, and 250 – Natural Resource Conservation). The exam also covered the material presented in Geography 489.

Element 2. SELF ASSESSMENT ESSAY
A six-page assessment of the student’s individual program of study and what he or she did or did not get out of it. The first five pages corresponded more or less to each of the five required subfields of the major, and titled as such: Regional Geography; Physical Geography; Human Geography; Resource Geography; and Techniques in Geography. The last page provided the student’s overall assessment of the major.
Element 3. FIELD TRIP
The course included a field trip during which the students, working in small groups, gave brief oral presentations highlighting elements of the human, physical, and resource geography of Central Washington. The students selected the destinations so that they would complement one another and then did research in advance of presenting each site’s features and significance.

Element 4. EXIT INTERVIEW
Each student met with the Capstone instructor for an exit interview. The 15-20 minute exit interview had two main parts: first, a mock interview for a job or graduate school to which the student could reasonably apply and second, a discussion of the student’s experiences in the program. Each student brought to the meeting a hard copy printout of an actual job advertisement of graduate program description, along with a letter of application, and his or her résumé.

Element 5. PAPER MAKEOVER PROJECT
Each student was required to take a research paper at least five pages long that was completed and already graded in a 300- or 400-level geography course and improve on it in the following ways: 1) fix any problems identified by the course instructor; 2) integrate information, ideas, and/or techniques taught in a different geography course (or courses) than the one for which the paper was originally written; and 3) examine the policy implications of the analysis presented in the paper and/or make a policy recommendation or recommendations based upon that analysis. Given the assignment design, it comprised a reasonable test of a student’s critical thinking abilities.

B) Who was assessed?

Twenty-five students who completed Geography 489 in Spring 2013.

C) When was it assessed?

Geography 489 is a required course for all Geography majors and is taught twice a year. Dr. Archer taught it in Fall 2012 with a small enrollment, but did no specific program assessment activities. Dr. Bowen taught it in Spring 2013 with a substantial cohort of students and made program assessment a central purpose of the course.

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.

The standard of mastery and results for each of the four learning outcomes are provided in the table below. The results are interpreted in the narrative following the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcomes (performance, knowledge, attitudes)</th>
<th>Standard of Mastery</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 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.</td>
<td>At least 70 percent (C-) score on 45 selected questions in Element 1 – COMPREHENSIVE EXAM</td>
<td>Of the 25 students in the class, 14 (56%) met or exceeded the standard of mastery. The median score was 78%.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. Patterns and Processes: Students will be able to identify the patterns created through the interactions of human systems and physical systems, the networks of intra-and inter-national interdependence, and the manner in which human and physical systems modify each other and control the Earth’s surface and resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 70 percent (C-) score on 35 selected questions in Element 1 – COMPREHENSIVE EXAM</td>
<td>Of the 25 students in the class, 14 (56%) met or exceeded the standard of mastery. The median score was 74%.</td>
<td></td>
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3. Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms.

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<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 70 percent (C-) aggregate score on Element 2 – SELF ASSESSMENT ESSAY, Element 3 – FIELD TRIP, and Element 4 – EXIT INTERVIEW</td>
<td>All of the students in the class met the standard of mastery.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

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<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 70 percent (C-) aggregate score on Element 5 – PAPER MAKEOVER PROJECT.</td>
<td>Of the 25 students in the course, 22 (88%) met the standard of mastery.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the assessments conducted in Geography 489 in Spring 2013 were mixed. Generally, students displayed good communication (verbal and written) and critical thinking skills, but fared much less well in demonstrating mastery of the material presented in core Geography courses.

It is important to note, however, that the version of the Comprehensive Exam used in Spring 2013 was new and may have been overly rigorous. The previous version had been prepared at least five years earlier. In the interim, much of the department’s faculty and – to a lesser extent – its curriculum had changed. Accordingly it seemed appropriate to revise the exam. Faculty member were encouraged to submit questions for the new version. These were compiled and the result was a new 90-question test. The same test will be used in the section of Geography 489 being taught in Fall 2013. If the students again perform poorly on average, we will have re-evaluate whether the exam is a fair measure of student 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 (e.g., advisory groups, newsletters, forums, etc.).

The results of the Comprehensive Exam, including the question-by-question performance figures, have been shared with all faculty members in the department so that those who teach in the relevant areas can adjust their instruction as appropriate to ensure that important material is well-covered.

5. **What did the department or program do in response to last year’s assessment information?**
   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.
As noted above, in Fall 2012, Dr. Kevin Archer joined our department with many new ideas. Among the most important changes he initiated was a significant reform of our curriculum, including the creation of a new Bachelor of Science degree in Geography. In Fall 2013, we submitted the paperwork to formally create the new degree and as a part of that proposal we draft a new assessment plan and new student learning outcomes.

In revising the latter, we have sought to develop an assessment plan that takes the measure of our program’s performance at more points along the way of a student’s career here on campus and beyond. As the preceding sections of this report indicate, our current assessment efforts heavily focus on the Capstone course that students typically take immediately before graduation.

As an example of the changes we have proposed, below is the draft version of the new student learning outcomes (minus several columns of the standard form for the sake of readability and space) for the BS in Geography, Geographic Information Science specialization. Please note that at the time this assessment report was written, our curriculum reforms and the associated changes in our assessment plan and learning outcomes had been approved by most but not all levels of review. We expect final approval in January 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcomes (performance, knowledge, attitudes)</th>
<th>Related Program/Departmental Goals</th>
<th>Method(s) of Assessment (What is the assessment?)</th>
<th>Who Assessed (Students from what courses – population)**</th>
<th>When Assessed (term, dates)**</th>
<th>Standard of Mastery/Criterion of Achievement (How good does performance have to be?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students will demonstrate improved familiarity with the basic geography of the Earth, especially the distribution of countries, major cities, and key physical features.</td>
<td>1. Improve the ability of our students to observe and interpret the world around them in terms of its physical and cultural landscapes, and to articulate the powerful concept of place that is operative at many scales, from the local to the global.</td>
<td>Geography Comprehensive Exam Part A – a 40 question exam prepared by Geography Department faculty which tests place knowledge students should have gained in introductory core courses and which should have been reinforced in more advanced upper-level offerings.</td>
<td>Entrance: All students declaring the major.</td>
<td>Entrance: At the time major is declared, an arrangement will be made for each student to complete the Geography Comprehensive Exam.</td>
<td>Entrance: No standard of mastery for performance – testing at major entrance used to establish baseline for later assessment. Exit: Average student performance on the mapping section of the exam will be a score of 70% and at least 25 percentage points higher than the average score of students at admission to the major.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exit: Students enrolled in Geography 489: Geography Capstone Exit: Fall and Spring quarters
| 2. Students will demonstrate improved familiarity with the discipline’s vocabulary, concepts and themes. | 1. Improve the ability of our students to observe and interpret the world around them in terms of its physical and cultural landscapes, and to articulate the powerful concept of place that is operative at many scales, from the local to the global. | Geography Comprehensive Exam Part B – an 80 question exam prepared by Geography Department faculty which tests knowledge students should have gained in introductory core courses and which should have been reinforced in more advanced upper-level offerings. | Entrance: All students declaring the major. | Exit: Students enrolled in Geography 489: Geography Capstone | Entrance: At the time major is declared, an arrangement will be made for each student to complete the Geography Comprehensive Exam. | Exit: Fall and Spring quarters | Entrance: No standard of mastery for performance – testing at major entrance used to establish baseline for later assessment. | Exit: Average student performance on the multiple choice conceptual section of the exam will be a score of 70% and at least 25 percentage points higher than the average score of students at admission to the major. |
| 3. Students will demonstrate improved critical thinking ability with respect to the interactions of human systems and physical systems, the networks of intra-and international interdependence, and the manner in which human and physical systems modify each other and control the Earth’s surface and resources. | 2. Improve the ability of students to think critically about spatial patterns | Critical thinking essay assigned in Geography 250: Natural Resource Conservation | Mid-career: All majors must take 250, typically midway between admission to the major and graduation. | Exit: Students enrolled in Geography 489: Geography Capstone | Mid-career: Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters | Exit: Fall and Spring quarters | Mid-career: No standard of mastery for performance – evaluation at major entrance used to establish baseline for later assessment. | Exit: Using the same rubric and with the same general parameters (e.g., page length), the average score will be at least 25 percentage points higher than the average score of students at mid-career. |
| 4. Students will be effectively prepared by the Department of Geography for future careers. | 3. Provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful in their chosen fields. | Evidence from resume produced for and exit interview conducted during Capstone class | Exit: Students in Capstone course | Exit: Fall and Spring quarters | Exit: Fall and Spring quarters | Exit: At least 80 percent of students in Capstone will produce resumes that highlight at least 3 specific ways (specific courses, internships, significant assignments, skills |
5. Students will be effectively prepared by the Department of Geography for future careers.

3. Provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful in their chosen fields.

In conjunction with periodic program review, alumni will be surveyed concerning their experiences in the department and after graduation

**Post-program:** Alumni

**Post-program:** Every four to five years

At least 60 percent of alumni will report success in gaining relevant professional employment or admission to graduate school after graduation.

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6. Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written and a variety of graphical forms

3. Provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful in their chosen fields.

Portfolios prepared by majors for Geography 489: Geography Capstone

**Exit:** Students enrolled in Geography 489: Geography Capstone

**Exit:** Fall and Spring quarters annually

**Exit:** At least 80 percent of portfolios will contain all of the following: a) at least one paper of five or more pages in length prepared for an upper-level geography course and given a score of B or better; b) evidence of an oral presentation in an upper-level geography course given a score of B or better; and c) evidence of a poster presentation, map

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learned during Geography coursework) in which their curriculum in Geography has prepared them their chosen careers.

**Exit:** At least 80 percent of students in Capstone will be able to effectively articulate at least 3 specific ways (specific courses, internships, significant assignments, skills learned during Geography coursework) in which their curriculum in Geography has prepared them their chosen careers.

**Exit:** Students enrolled in Geography 489: Geography Capstone
6. Questions or suggestions concerning Assessment of Student Learning at Central Washington University:

None.