



Senate Committee on University Planning

Academic Review Summary: Department of Geography and Environment

Site Visit	October 28-29, 2019
Informal Response to Planning	January 29, 2020
Formal Response	April 6, 2020
Implementation Update	March 2022
Midterm Review	2024

Review Team Members:

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- Dr. Charles Mather, Professor, Department of Geography, Memorial University
- Dr. Lauren Beck, Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures/Visual and Material Culture Studies, Mount Allison University

Note: The following recommendations are taken mostly verbatim from the external review. For context they should be read in conjunction with the department’s formal response.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Geography and Environment has undergone substantial change over the past few years and adapted to changes in its faculty complement and expertise. It does, however, now face stressors that were not in place at the time of the last review. Overall, the committee recommends that the department re-think its programs, and course offerings especially related to adding more flexibility to the student learning experience. Universities in Canada and around the world are undergoing fundamental changes in how higher-education functions. The following key recommendations will begin a transformative process that will ensure the success of the department in the decades to come and address many of the President’s Strategic Pillar’s that were outlined in October 2019.

1. The department must develop a strategic plan

A highly structured program format is not preferred by today’s students, who want to be able to follow their own interests. The department needs to be proactive and embrace new ideas and take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

The department performs very well in some aspects of what it does; however, a common streamlined program platform needs to be developed with all faculty members contributing equally to its design. This can begin with reassessing how the programs are offered and moving away from siloed programs that prevent GENV students from taking GENS courses, and vice versa.

Rigid pre-requisites, particularly in GENS, have been cited by students and faculty alike as a major barrier to students being able to complete programs in the department. While the Committee recognizes that the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) has external oversight of B.A and B.Sc. programs, the department must do a better job of relaxing the number of pre-requisites, particularly for third/fourth year courses, and which prevent students from pursuing GENV courses because their timetables are full with pre-requisites for GENS courses. Cross-listing GENV and GENS courses, and encouraging

students from both streams to take the same courses, will build significant flexibility as well as interdisciplinarity into the degree programs.

Furthermore, at present there is no policy-related component in the department, yet a professional geographer's time (whether they specialize in Geography and Environmental Studies or Science) will be spent reading, developing, and writing policy. The department must support students as they prepare for the workforce, not just for graduate studies.

An issue was identified regarding the Environmental Science B.Sc. having a lack of policy/social sciences courses. This needs to be resolved and restrictions on students doing anything outside of that program (and the other two department programs) need to be lifted. The Review Committee supports the Department's efforts to continue to explore new and innovative interdisciplinary course offerings (e.g. Geocomputation Major, Indigenous Environmental Science Minor), in a way that does not compromise their existing degree offerings in the B.A. and the B.Sc. The Department should have a strategic planning session around their programs. This should lead to a strongly articulated plan for sustaining the existing degree programs, while beginning to build toward new ones.

Other issues include the necessary hiring from the Review Committee's perspective of an additional environmental scientist with a background that preferably includes GIS and remote sensing. The lab teaching space issue seems to be an unknown factor that also requires consultation between the Department and the Administration.

## **2. Undergraduate Programs**

The department should be looking at how programs are offered in other, comparably sized university geography departments for models of course and program delivery. The number of required courses in each program should be reduced to allow students greater flexibility in designing a program based around their individual interests.

Another issue that must be addressed is the department's straddling two faculties and how the two faculties treat teaching staff differently, with lower teaching loads in the sciences as well as different faculty of science regulations when it comes to pre-requisites. GENV and GENS students must not have the design and structure of their programs dictated by Administrators or Department Heads who are not themselves members of the department. Department members must have complete oversight over the structure of GENS and GENV programs. The university should furthermore determine which Dean oversees the department, as at present both the Deans of Social Sciences and of Science appear to influence the department's direction, and faculty (depending on whether they are appointed to the Faculty of Social Sciences or the Faculty of Science) turn to different Deans for administrative reasons. The department head, moreover, should not have to attend meetings in both faculties, as this increases the administrative burden on the department.

**Note:** Appointments are to a Department or Program, not a Faculty. The Dean of Social Sciences and Business is the Dean of this Department. The Department Head is not required to attend Science Heads.

## **3. Reduce and Standardize Undergraduate Courses**

Courses that have not been taught recently should be removed from the calendar. A core set of mandatory courses should be developed that can be taught to larger groups of third- and fourth-year students from both the GENV and GENS streams.