

Summarized Assessment Report, 2004
Department of Geography
(B.A., B.S., M.A., Ph.D., CIP 450701)

1. Mission, Centrality, Uniqueness

The mission of the Geography Department is to (1) provide undergraduate and graduate students with an education that enables them to appreciate, understand, and study the geography of the world in which they live, (2) conduct applied and basic research that advances understanding of geographic patterns and processes in the human and physical environment, and (3) respond to the needs of society and the discipline of geography by applying knowledge and expertise to help understand and solve local, regional, and/or global problems. The Department of Geography at Kansas State University fulfills its mission to the College, University, and State by offering high quality instruction, conducting cutting-edge research using the latest tools and techniques, and providing valuable service. In the National 2000 Education Plan approved by the U.S. Congress, geography is identified as one of the five required disciplines. The broad, integrative nature of geographic research and instruction fosters both a local understanding as well as an appreciation for the significance of increased globalization. An essential element of geography is an ability to synthesize ideas at the interface of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. As a result, Kansas State University geographers play an important role in fostering strong, active, and ongoing interdisciplinary connections with faculty across the College and University. The department is home to geospatial technology education on campus and houses the Geographic Information Systems and Spatial Analysis Laboratory (GISSAL) and the Remote Sensing Research Lab (both labs are key university geospatial techniques resources). By stressing research in rural areas and small town settings, the department's doctoral program is unique in the State of Kansas and one of only a few programs with such an emphasis in North America.

2. Quality of Faculty

Outstanding faculty accomplishments are a cornerstone of the Department of Geography at Kansas State University. The exceptional research and teaching reputation earned by department faculty, combined with the national and international recognition of student achievement, ranks geography very highly among the social sciences at KSU. Faculty members are internationally recognized for their quality research and scholarship. Faculty members contribute to four core areas of geographic inquiry primarily through peer-reviewed articles in top geography journals, chapters in books at the cutting-edge of the field, editing books, extra-mural funding, and professional meeting presentations. The department's core areas of geographic inquiry are human-environment interaction, population and health, culture and landscape, and regional systems. Evidence of the outstanding productivity since the last review (FY 99 through FY 03) includes \$1,677,062 in extra-mural funding from such agencies as the National Science Foundation, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Park Service, Department of Defense, and National Institute for Global Environmental Change. Faculty members also have won national research awards from their respective specialty groups within the Association of American Geographers.

3. Quality of Students

Quality of the students may be judged based on academic performance, success in the job market, awards earned in national scholarship competitions, and in advancement to graduate school. In all these regards, geography majors have done very well. In recent years, the geography program has averaged around 60 undergraduate majors. A growing number of them are members of Gamma Theta Upsilon, an international geography honor society. Some undergraduate students have distinguished themselves by being selected as the National Geographical Society summer interns, or by winning awards. One of our undergraduate majors has received multiple awards or fellowships in last two years, including the Gene Lortz Memorial Scholarship by the Central Region of the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS), and a fellowship from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Our graduating seniors have enjoyed a good job market, as a demand exists in both the private and public sectors for people with geographic training, particularly GIS skills.

A rigorous screening process, that matches student quality and interests with faculty availability, is used to admit top quality applicants into the MA and PhD programs. Those who enter the program, have a high rate of success in completing their degree. Department faculty take pride in the number of MA and PhD graduates who publish their research in top-quality peer-reviewed journals. Another indication of the quality of PhD students is that they have competed well with students in other graduate programs at K-State for the supplemental stipend awards from the graduate school, which are given to out-of-state students with outstanding academic records.

4. Employer Demand

Geography students have been successful in the job market. Recent recipients of undergraduate geography degrees have found employment in both the private and public sectors. Within Kansas, public sector employers include the municipalities of Manhattan, Wichita, Dodge City, Winfield, and Kansas City, along with Riley and Shawnee counties, and the Kansas Department of Transportation. Nationally, federal agencies and contractors, for example the National Imaging and Mapping Agency, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey, employ Department of Geography graduates, as do private enterprises such as Environmental Systems Research, Inc.

Several MA graduates from the KSU Geography Department have moved on to well-recognized doctoral programs to continue their graduate education (e.g., University of Arizona, University of Kansas, University of Utah, and University of Washington). The job market for K-State geography PhD recipients has been good. The first three PhD recipients graduated in 2000. Altogether, nine students have earned the PhD in geography from K-State and seven hold a tenure-track positions at four-year universities throughout the United States, including the University of North Dakota (1), Morehead State University in Kentucky (2), Fort Hays State University (1), Eastern Illinois University (1), Auburn University (1), Kansas State University (1). In addition, two doctoral candidates have temporary teaching jobs while still working on their dissertation.

5. Service Provided to the Discipline, the University, and Beyond

Geography faculty provide professional service at departmental, college, university, community, state, national, and international levels. Specific activities include service on college and university committees and involvement in faculty governance, manuscript reviews for professional journals, reviews of grant proposals for federal agencies, and leadership in major geography professional organizations. The Department of Geography offers 11 courses that help students meet University General Education (UGE) requirements. Seven of these classes are at the 300-level or above. The departmental offering of GEOG 100 (World Regional Geography) to over 1,000 students per semester helps Arts & Sciences students meet their International Overlay requirement. Over 300 students per semester who need a physical science laboratory class meet this requirement with GEOG 220, Environmental Geography I.

Geography is the home of geographic information systems (GIS) education and training at Kansas State University and the department provides an important service to the campus through available courses and with the availability of the hardware, software, and human resources. The GISSAL faculty and students, housed within the department, apply the latest geographic information software in helping faculty, from multiple colleges across campus, to address research and teaching problems. The GIScience Graduate Certificate is an example of a special service that exemplifies departmental leadership in GIS.

Each faculty member contributes to the service mission of the Department. All faculty members have departmental service responsibilities. In addition, most have served at the college and university level in such areas as Faculty Senate Committee on Planning, Faculty Senate Academic Calendar Committee, Course and Curriculum Committee, Dean's Advisory Council, Search and Reappointment Committees for Associate and Assistant Deans, and directing the interdisciplinary secondary major in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences. All faculty members are also active in areas of professional service that include serving on editorial boards and as book review editor for major geography journals, organizing regional and international conferences, reviewing proposals for granting agencies, publishing book reviews, and serving on regional and national committees or advisory boards for such organizations as the Association of American Geographers, National Science Foundation, National Academies of Science, National Council for Learned Societies, and the National Council for Geographic Education.

6. Cost Effectiveness

Geography academic programs throughout the U.S. are known as efficient social science units with respect to student credit hour generation and gaining extramural support. At K-State, the geography department is well above national norms, as all faculty have an active research program in one or more aspects of knowledge associated with the field of geography. The quality and quantity of research production of the faculty is one of the prominent strengths of the program. Faculty in geography have high rates of: 1) student credit hour production, 2) research presentation at professional meetings, 3) success in obtaining extramural funding for research, and 4) publication in the top professional journals.

