Overall, the APRC was very favourably impressed by the strength and vigour of the Department of Geography. The unit appears to have responded well to the previous external review recommendations by increasing its depth in areas of established expertise with new hires, and reconfiguring the undergraduate curriculum to create concentrations of courses in these areas.

The Department has successfully met the university’s challenge to develop and enlarge its graduate program. In fact, it has surpassed its graduate enrolment target. It has also maintained very respectable undergraduate enrolments. The members of the Department continue to enjoy an enviable level of success in obtaining research grants, and a robust record of refereed publications.

The evidence reveals high levels of undergraduate student satisfaction. The APRC considers that this may be due to the many opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning through field-based courses and co-op terms.

Research by faculty members in the Department covers a broad spectrum of interests ranging from natural science to humanistic enquiry. All members are publishing in appropriate peer-reviewed journals, books or book chapters and disseminating their research findings at conferences. Overall, the APRC finds the Department to be very productive. There is also an excellent level and range of funding sources and the majority of faculty members hold research grants: some large collaborative grants, some individual grants from tri-council and other sources.

The APRC generally endorses the Department’s proposed curriculum revisions and the proposed General Program and Minor in Coastal Studies (approved by the Ministry in June 2010) which will offer concentrations of courses in core areas of faculty expertise (coastal studies, geomatics, resource management and urban and development studies). The Department plans to monitor and refine the elements of the proposed new curriculum carefully once it has been implemented. In doing so, the APRC recommends that the Department consider the following recommendations: increasing the breadth of exposure to sub-disciplines; lightening the GISciences requirement; and teaching introductory material from the geographical perspective.

The graduate program has also been revised. The APRC supports the new three-tier program as it satisfies both the Department’s desire for a program that enhances collegiality among the student body and offers flexibility and focus. The APRC agrees with the Department’s decision not to offer a one-year, course based Master’s Degree.

The APRC applauded the Department’s growth and success but expressed some concern about the sustainability about the current situation and suggest that incremental resources or adjustments to course offerings be considered. In addition, the APRC suggests that workload balance be reviewed as it seems to be a major challenge for the Department. The Dean confirms that the Department will receive an incremental faculty position in water resources in 2011. As recommended by the APRC, the Provost has approved the replacement of the Department’s long standing climatologist who will be retiring. The replacement of the LEEF Chair is currently on hold pending full funding. The Faculty of Social Sciences is engaged in discussion with all its chairs and directors to address the issue of extra to load as part of its existing Workload Substitution Guidelines.
The Department of Geography was delighted with the APRC’s report and has taken time to consider the recommendations. It has already made modifications to the undergraduate curriculum as future students will be required to take a broader introduction to the discipline, and this has been facilitated by a streamlining of the geomatics requirements. They have also developed a new first year introductory course in physical geography which will be required for all Geography students.

The Provost agrees with the Dean that the Department of Geography has received a very positive and constructive external review. The Department has explained how it already has addressed or aims to address issues raised by the APRC and a number of resource requests are identified. The Department is to be congratulated on its strong undergraduate and graduate programs, its success in output of scholarship and ability to attract external funding, and its engagement with community and outreach initiatives.