

External Review of the Department of Geography

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External Review Committee

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Executive Summary

This review assesses the current state and future direction of the Geography Department at the University of Victoria. This is a strong department, particularly recognized nationwide for its exceptional undergraduate programs that emphasize field-based and experiential learning. With further emphasis on strategic direction, the department is well-positioned to sustain and strengthen its contributions to UVic, the regional higher education ecosystem, and nationally.

Key Findings:

- The department has a solid reputation and healthy undergraduate enrollment, with over 440 majors and growing interest from non-majors.
- The programs deliver exceptional student experience with an emphasis on experiential and field-based learning.
- In the context of a new budget model and changing fiscal landscape for higher education, the department would benefit from a tighter curriculum.
- A strategic plan and visioning exercise will facilitate better communication of departmental strengths, ease of response to institutional opportunities and create decision pathways for greater curricular coherence.
- Graduate programs are robust, though PhD completion rates and supervision practices require improvement.
- The BSc in Climate Science is a promising new initiative but needs targeted investment and faculty support.
- Faculty and staff are dedicated and effective, but clearer role definitions and more structured support for new faculty are needed.
- The department has made commendable efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives and support Indigenous students.

Recommendations

1. Strategic Planning and Visioning
 - Develop a department-specific strategic plan and a concise vision statement that distinguishes Geography from cognate units (e.g., SES, EOS).
 - Conduct a visioning exercise to identify thematic strengths and hiring priorities.
2. Governance and Leadership
 - Create a governance document outlining leadership roles, meeting frequency, and decision-making protocols (e.g., Roberts Rules).
 - Consider elevating curriculum chairs to Associate Chair roles to support succession planning and joint responsibility for departmental affairs.
 - Consider formalizing annual review meetings for faculty.
3. Curriculum Renewal
 - Advance the undergraduate curriculum review with clear pathways and capstone courses aligned with thematic strengths.
 - Ensure decisions are made through structured processes and timelines.
 - Support and invest in the BSc Climate Science.
4. Professional Programming and Revenue Generation
 - Explore the development of an accredited Master's in Urban and/or Community Planning.
 - Expand micro credential and professional development offerings in collaboration with Continuing Studies or alternate model, as appropriate.
5. Advisory and Alumni Engagement
 - Establish an advisory group of alumni and sector partners to guide curriculum and professional training development.
6. Faculty Support and Hiring
 - Formalize annual review meetings for faculty and provide targeted support for new hires.
 - Define hiring priorities aligned with strategic goals and ensure integration across sub-disciplines.
7. Student Experience and Recruitment
 - Highlight experiential learning in outreach materials and improve high school recruitment strategies.
 - Map skill development across the curriculum and consider cost recovery for field and lab-based learning.
8. Graduate Program Oversight
 - Improve PhD supervision practices, ensure projects are appropriately scoped and consider supervisory track record when allocating grad support funds.
 - Provide more support for grad student tri-council funding applications.
9. Infrastructure and Resources
 - Upgrade outdated lab equipment and invest in teaching tools (e.g., drones) to support new program offerings.
 - Use shared spaces to foster collegiality among faculty.