I. Programs

- Honours BA in Environmental Studies
- Honours BA in Geography
- Master of Arts in Geography
- Master of Science in Geography
- Doctorate in Philosophy Geography
- Doctorate in Philosophy Geography Specialization in Canadian Studies

II. Evaluation Process (Outline of the visit)

- This Final Assessment Report on the above programs was prepared from the following documents: 1) the self-study report produced by the academic unit; 2) the report of the external evaluation following the virtual visit; 3) the responses prepared by program leadership, and a response by Kathryn Prince, Interim Dean, Faculty of Arts.
- The site visit took place on April 23 and 26, 2023, covering both undergraduate and graduate programs and was conducted by the following three external evaluators: 1) Pascale Biron, Concordia University, 2) Mary-Louise Byrne, Wilfrid Laurier University and 3) Neil Craik, Waterloo University.
- During the site visit, the external evaluators met with the Vice-Provost, Academic Affairs, Aline Germain-Rutherford and the Vice-Provost of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, André Beauchemin, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Kathryn Prince, the Vice-Dean of Programs, Marc Charron, the Vice-Dean of Research, Brian Ray, the Department Chair, Marc Saner, the Undergraduate Program Director, Huhua Cao, the Graduate Program Director, Luke Copland, members of the support staff, regular professors and graduate students.

III. Summary of Reports on the Quality of Programs

Strengths and Challenges

At the undergraduate level, there are two main programs: Honours BA Environmental Studies (ENV) and Geography (GEG).

Environmental Studies is an interdisciplinary program, with several geography courses, but also compulsory courses in biology (BIO 1130 – Introduction to Organismal Biology), economics (ECO 1104 – Introduction to Microeconomics and ECO 2118 – Introduction to Environmental and Natural Resources Economics), and political science (POL 1102 – Politics and Globalization), as well as
several optional courses in various disciplines. As the field of environment is by its very nature interdisciplinary, the wide spectrum of course offerings in ENV is beneficial for students and meets the learning objectives the program which are to acquire knowledge about biophysical processes and environmental changes, to understand their social, economic and political repercussions as well as the influence of natural and social sciences on culture, human values, and environmental ethics; to analyze environmental problems and propose local, national, and international solutions and to prepare and interpret detailed technical reports for various audiences. One of the challenges for the Department is to ensure that the required broad environmental studies expertise to teach ENV courses is available. Currently, only one full-time professor is involved in the teaching of the ENV compulsory courses, which requires the Department to rely heavily on sessional instructors. Since the environment is at the heart of the discipline of geography it is quite feasible in the future to hire professors with a background in geography conducting research with a policy focus, which would bring highly valuable expertise to the ENV program.

The scope of the GEG program is narrower than ENV, with only GEG compulsory courses except for one statistics course taught in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics (MAT 1371). However, since geography is by nature an interdisciplinary field, with a mix of natural and social science, it remains highly relevant for students interested in environmental issues such as climate change and human adaptation, water resources and management; community organization and evolution; social interaction in urban space; and northern development in permafrost environments. This program is also the only Geography program in Ontario offered in French.

A great strength of both ENV and GEG programs is the very interesting offer of field courses, including a compulsory course (GEG 2918 – Introduction to Field Research). The students that we met were all very enthusiastic about the field courses they took (although they did mention that it came with a high financial cost). Field courses are often part of Geography undergraduate programs, but the breadth of options offered at U. Ottawa is impressive and should be maintained, ideally with financial support to students who cannot afford them.

The research-based graduate programs (MA/MSC and PhD) follow a standard model, with few courses and most of the credits associated to the thesis work. Since there are many very strong and active researchers in the Department, students are well trained and well prepared to pursue graduate studies or to enter the job market.

IV. Opportunities for Program Improvement

The external evaluators’ recommendations are contained in the Unit’s Response and Action Plan, in the appendix.

V. Summary and assessment of the Proposed Action Plan

The External Reviewer’s recommendations were addressed by program leadership via an action plan that was considered by the Graduate Program Evaluation Committee (GPEC) on January 24, 2024 and the Senate Committee on the Evaluation of Undergraduate Programs (SCEUP) at its meeting on April 4, 2024.

1 See the Appendix for the Unit Response and Action plan.
The program leadership agreed with all recommendations of the external evaluation. The actions to be taken and the timetable are clearly defined and have been endorsed by the Dean's Office. The GPEC and the SCEUP are satisfied with the program leadership's response and action plan.

VI. Conclusion

The review exercise confirmed the strength and stability of the programs offered and identified recommendations for their ongoing improvement. The members of the GPEC and the SCEUP would like to thank the external evaluators for their detailed assessment, as well as all the stakeholders involved in this cyclical program review process.

VII. Schedule and Timelines

A progress report that outlines the completed actions and subsequent results will be submitted to the evaluation committee by December 15, 2025.

The next cyclical review will take place in no more than eight years, in 2029-2030. The self-study brief must be submitted no later than June 15, 2029.
Unit Response and Action Plan

Faculty:
  • Faculty of Arts

Department:
  • Department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics

Programs evaluated:
  • Honours BA in Environmental Studies
  • Honours BA in Geography
  • Master of Arts in Geography
  • Master of Science in Geography
  • Doctorate in Philosophy Geography
  • Doctorate in Philosophy Geography Specialization in Canadian Studies

Cyclical review period:
  • 2015-2022

Date:
  • Jan 29, 2024

General comments:
On May 9, 2023, the Geography, Environment and Geomatics Department received a copy of the “External Review Report” produced in the context of the cyclical program evaluation. The external reviewers were tasked to review six different programs (two at each of the undergraduate, Masters and Doctorate levels). We were extremely pleased with the positive evaluation of all our programs.

We thank the three external reviewers for agreeing to review several programs at the same time, for meeting in person with ten different groups (central administration, faculty administration, staff, full-time professors, part-time professors, graduate students and undergraduate students), and for providing new insights into our programs.

The reviewers included observations into our newest courses and programs (specifically those connected to the one-year course-based *MSc in Anthropocene*, which started in Sept 2022). While this was not required, it led to helpful, timely insights (see Recommendation 6).

The report makes six recommendations. None of them are characterized as “urgent”, but all are characterized as “important”. We take all recommendations seriously and feel confident that will be able to address them. The six recommendations and our responses are included below.
**Recommendation 1:** Undertake a curriculum mapping exercise for both undergraduate programs (GEG and ENV) in order to develop a clear understanding of the role of the required courses within the programs’ structure

**Unit response:**
The review of required courses in the curriculum structure started early this year. This included a curriculum review aimed at better integrating the two undergraduate programs, GEG (Geography) and ENV (Environmental Studies). We also collated all learning outcomes from all courses into a single database. Currently, two strategies are being pursued:

1) The department builds on the GEG/ENV cross-listing exercise started three years ago. This will make courses available to students in both the GEG and ENV programs. This should make it easier for students to find relevant courses and foster cross-disciplinary learning and collaboration.

2) Additionally, the department is exploring unifying the first- and second-year courses of the GEG and ENV programs. This integration aims to provide a strong foundational knowledge base for students in both programs while emphasizing the common areas of study. From the third year onwards, specific courses will be maintained or created for each program, allowing for specialization in the unique aspects of GEG and ENV.

These strategies aim to optimize the curriculum structure, enhance interdisciplinary connections, and provide students with a comprehensive educational experience that prepares them for their respective fields. As an accompanying measure, we continue to update the curriculum mapping. We have a map posted in our corridors for all students to see, but this requires continues update. We may move to a web-based format in the future.

**Decanal response:** The Faculty looks forward to receiving the proposed changes and encourages the department (all departments) to engage in frequent review of program offerings.

**Priority Level:** IMPORTANT

**Actions to be undertaken:**
Review of cross-listing opportunities between the GEG and ENV programs.

**Assigned to:** Undergraduate committee.

**Timeline:** First iteration: Senate submission in May 2024. Revisited bi-annually.

**Curriculum change?** No.

(Aside from minor changes: cross-listing, renaming, streamlining, or pruning of obsolete courses).

**Priority Level:** IMPORTANT

**Actions to be undertaken:**
Reach a near-consensus among the full-time professors on combining the first- and second-year courses of the GEG and ENV programs

**Assigned to:** Undergraduate committee.

**Timeline:** Decision made before April 2024.

**Curriculum change?** Yes.
**Recommendation 2: Hire more full-time professors in Environmental Studies**

**Unit response:**
We are, of course, aware of our need for additional full-time professors, and appreciate that the external reviewers also noticed this need and expressed it clearly in their report. Especially with retirements in mind, this will become more acute in the coming 2-3 years. We are aware that two-thirds of our undergraduate students are in the ENV program. This is, therefore, also a fiscal issue. We anticipate hiring one professor in ENV in 2023 and will continue to make the case for additional full-time positions to the central administration. Our strategy is developed by the community of full-time professors in consultation with students, part-time professors, and the Dean’s office. The Chair of the department is tasked with pitching our strategy and plan to the faculty and central administration. Our pitches will be accompanied by the program review and mapping of undergraduate courses.

**Decanal response:** If all goes well, the department will be hiring two new colleagues to begin in 2024; at least one of these will contribute directly to ENV. Given the importance of ENV across the campus, the Faculty would welcome proposals for further hires in subsequent years, subject to available resources.

**Priority Level**: IMPORTANT

**Actions to be undertaken:**
Develop new pitches for positions that include the teaching of key ENV courses.

**Assigned to:**
Executive Committee of the Department in close collaboration with the Departmental Teaching and Personnel Committee (DTPC).

**Timeline:**
Underway and continuous (the need will likely remain to the end of the next review cycle in 2030).

**Curriculum change?**
No.

**Timeline:**
Date of first pitch: summer 2024, recurring annually or biannually until 2030 and beyond, dependent on outcomes.

* PRIORITY LEVEL: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT-ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. ADVISED: DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGY-ACTION TO BE DISCUSSED AND MUST BE IN PLACE BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN 4 YEARS)
**Recommendation 3:** Examine potential for overlapping courses in environmental programs and remove barriers for collaboration across faculties (Arts, Social Sciences, Sciences)

**Unit response:**

Collaboration with other units has been a theme since the creation of the ENV (and MSc Anthropocene) programs. We have been actively working on this issue. While we are somewhat marginalized in the Faculty of Arts (where we are featured under “humanities”), we hold the best expertise on campus with respect to polar science and policy, and very significant expertise in climate science and policy. Geography and Environmental Studies are integrative disciplines, and we have professors with training in the natural sciences, social sciences, medical science and humanities. We feel, therefore, legitimized to play an integrative role.

As a starting point, we initiated a “trans-faculty meeting on environmental programs” that took place on November 16, 2022. This virtual meeting was co-hosted by the Chair of our unit, a former Director of the Institute of the Environment, and a student representative from the uOttawa Sustainability Committee (SUSCOM). 130 instructors and guests were invited and there were 37 participants in attendance, with representation from all faculties. The four main topics of discussion were: How to improve information flows? How to better coordinate program development? How to integrate programs with campus-wide activities? and How to push the boundaries?

One result was the creation of a listserv where program developments can be discussed hosted by the Chair of our unit. We also had a meeting with the Deans of Social Sciences and Arts on request of the Chair of our unit and a series of lunch meetings with key interested parties.

**Decanal response:** I would describe this department as central to the Faculty, not marginalized, though I take the point that the department’s combination of expertises is in some respects unusual in an Arts faculty. There is much to be gained through cross-faculty collaboration around environmental issues and studies; the Faculty supports the further development of these collaborations.

**Priority Level:** IMPORTANT

**Actions to be undertaken:**

Continuation of the trans-faculty dialogue by organizing another trans-faculty meeting where we would (1) review the cross-listing of courses across faculties, (2) agree on next steps, and (3) assign roles.

**Assigned to:**

Executive Committee of the Department.

**Timeline:**

Start in Fall 2023 and on-going. This is highly dependent on uptake by colleagues and administrators across campus.

**Curriculum change?**

No, initially. But this could become the focal point if other units are interested in collaboration.
### Recommendation 4: Provide funding for field courses

**Unit response:**
We agree with the importance of our field courses highlighted by the evaluators, and with the goal to make both compulsory and elective field courses more financially accessible to all interested students. We also see this as a place where the broad goals of EDI could be implemented in a tangible, important way. The place of field courses will be pivotal in the efforts to review and mapping of undergraduate programs.

The current funding mechanism for field courses stipulates that they must be entirely self-funded. i.e., the fees paid by the students must cover all costs, with the Faculty of Arts providing no funding or subsidy. It is therefore challenging to reduce the costs of field courses without negatively impacting the student experience, and the quality and potential safety of excursions. Instead, the solution is to find additional funding to subsidize the amount paid by students, through external fundraising and philanthropic donations.

We will decide at our Departmental Assemblies, and in consultation with the Vice-Dean Programs, if the support should be focused on compulsory field courses or also include elective field courses.

**Decanal response:** The Faculty encourages the department and the Development Office to identify suitable philanthropists.

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<th><strong>Priority Level</strong>: IMPORTANT</th>
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<td><strong>Actions to be undertaken:</strong></td>
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<td>Discuss with the central administration the feasibility of base funding and secure new philanthropic support dedicated to both compulsory and elective field courses.</td>
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<td><strong>Assigned to:</strong></td>
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<td>Department Chair with support of the Director, Stakeholder Engagement (Arts)</td>
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<td><strong>Timeline:</strong> Start: summer 2023, on-going.</td>
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<td><strong>Curriculum change?</strong> No.</td>
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**Priority Level:** IMPORTANT

| **Actions to be undertaken:** |
| Inquire into the feasibility to transform existing, minor scholarship funding into a new, merged, endowed and focussed scholarship fund dedicated to support field courses. |
| **Assigned to:** |
| Departmental Executive Committee in collaboration with the Dean’s office. |
| **Timeline:** Completed in May 2024. |
| **Curriculum change?** No. |
**Recommendation 5: Yearly workshop for sessional instructors**

**Unit response:**
Since 2022, the department has taken steps to actively involve all part-time professors in departmental activities. One of these measures includes the creation of a *WhatsApp* group, which serves as a platform for sharing experiences, asking and answering questions, and fostering communication among the majority of part-time professors.

Additionally, in further efforts to promote collaboration and professional development, we already had decided on a *voluntary* half-day workshop for all part-time professors prior to the start of classes in the fall term. This workshop provides opportunity for those interested in continuing education, for knowledge sharing, networking, and addressing any concerns or queries that part-time professors may have. We realize that this workshop requires consultation with the *APTPUO*.

**Decanal response:** The department will need to be conscious of the contractual limitations of part-time professors and should consult with the *APTPUO* prior to organizing the workshop.

**Priority Level**: URGENT

**Actions to be undertaken:**
A half-day workshop will be organized for all part-time professors. The workshop will include the following components:

1. All full-time professors will be invited to meet with all part-time professors.
2. The undergraduate chair will present important rules and share key experiences regarding part-time professors.
3. Experienced part-time professors will have the opportunity to share their own experiences.
4. New part-time professors will have the chance to ask questions and seek guidance.

These elements aim to foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and support among both full-time and part-time faculty members.

**Assigned to:**
Chair, Undergraduate Committee with support of *APTPUO* members elected to our Departmental Assembly (per our Bylaws).

**Timeline:**
Beginning of fall term (September 2023).

**Curriculum change?**
No.
**Recommendation 6:** Review the course outputs and assessment requirements for alternative credited graduate coursework, such as colloquia, graduate workshops and internships

### Unit response:

This recommendation primarily refers to two new courses which were established in fall 2022: GEG6000 Phipps-Langlois Seminars (approximately six seminars per semester over the course of two semesters, for a total of 3 credits), and GEG6001/GEG6002 Internships I & II (3 credits each). These courses were mainly set up for the benefit of students in our new course-based *MSc in Anthropocene* program, but any graduate student in the department can take them for credit, which several have done over the past year.

The evaluation for these courses last year followed the text approved by the Senate when the *MSc in Anthropocene* program was established. This specifies that students are required to attend all seminars for GEG6000 (except for one per semester in case of illness), and complete 100 hours of volunteer work per internship for GEG6001/GEG6002 (after approval from the Graduate Chair), without the need for a written report. As highlighted by the evaluators, the lack of a requirement for a report for either class has led to some lack of clarity from students as to what was expected from them. We will therefore implement mandatory written reports for both courses, starting in fall 2023.

### Decanal response:

The department should consult the experiential learning and community service learning experts on campus to identify the best practices currently being used at uOttawa for these types of reports.

### Priority Level*: IMPORTANT

### Actions to be undertaken:

For GEG6000 (Phipps-Langlois Seminars), students will be required to submit a ½-page report at the end of each bi-weekly seminar, describing the issues that the seminar covered and their thoughts about them. For GEG6001/GEG6002 (Internships), students will be required to submit a 1 to 2-page final report at the end of each internship which describes the mandate of their host organization, the activities that they worked on, the new skills that they learned, and any issues that they encountered.

### Assigned to:

Graduate Committee.

### Timeline:

Will be implemented at the beginning of September 2023, when the courses are next offered.

### Curriculum change?

No.

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