

Final Assessment Report
Submitted by SUPR-G to SCAPA

Program:	Geography	
Degrees Offered:	MA, MSc, PhD in Geography	
Approved Fields:	Environment, Development and Health; Geographic Information Science; Physical Geography; Urban Studies	
External Consultants:	Jean Andrey, Professor University of Waterloo	Tim Moore, Professor McGill University
Internal Reviewers:	Jisuo Jin, Professor Faculty of Science, Western	Tyler Girard, Doctoral Student Political Science, Western
Date of Site Visit:	October 23–24, 2017	
Evaluation:	<i>Good Quality</i>	
Approved by:	<i>SUPR-G on January 22, 2018</i> <i>SCAPA on February 7, 2018</i>	

Executive Summary

Overall, the external reviewers considered that the department has “**maintained a high quality graduate program**” after the previous cyclical review. Strong research publications, high level of team spirit and morale, excellent level of graduate funding, and first-class graduate student space are noted as the highlights of the program. The recommendation list from the reviewers is short, as summarized in point 2 below.

1. Significant Strengths of Program:

- The program has made substantial improvement based on recommendations of the previous review in terms faculty renewal, program and course offerings, and graduate funding.
- A strong record of research and funding among primary faculty members and students: 23 of the 27 faculty members co-authored 432 papers with their graduate students during reviewed period.
- Graduate students in Geography have been “well funded” above the minimum level required by Western.
- The reviewers considered “graduate-student space in Geography at Western is first-class.”
- The current graduate students are proud of the department, appreciative of the academic, financial and administrative supports they have. Most students have a strong team spirit and they often help one another in research and social activities, including their field work. Student interactions are facilitated by the well-designed lab/cluster common space in the department. This was described as “a very strong esprit-de-corps” by the reviewers.

2. Suggestions for improvement & Enhancement:

- *Areas for improvement and opportunities for enhancement*
The Graduate curriculum needs further fine-tuning to address the large number of small enrolment (including single-student) courses, and to consider offering broader-interest courses with larger enrolment.

- *Steps the program can or should take for improvement*

Geography has a healthy and vibrant cohort of graduate students, with a high student-faculty ratio (3.5:1). But the reviewers noted that the load of graduate supervision is uneven, with 46% of the primary faculty (11 out of 24) supervising 90% of the students. This is also reflected in the refereed publication unevenness among primary faculty members (from 0 to >10 per year). This situation is expected to improve with the ongoing faculty renewal.

- *Improvements that require support or assistance beyond the program*

Faculty renewal — This is a priority for the Department of Geography, given four retirements in 2017–19, and five other eligible retirements in 2019–24. It seems that the Physical Geography stream will be affected the most by the retirements, and it is hoped that new hires in GIS, with current searches committed/supported by the Faculty of Social Science, will help the situation.

International graduate student funding — Geography currently has a strong group of international students, with fully guaranteed university funding. To maintain the current level of international student enrolment under the new funding model, a more flexible funding mechanism may be necessary, such as greater contributions from supervisors’ research grants.

Recommendations required for Program sustainability:	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline
Faculty renewal to maintain overall graduate supervision capacity and the Physical Geography field or consider realignment of fields	Department and Faculty of Social Science	Department and Faculty budget commitment	Ongoing
Develop more evenly distributed graduate supervision	Department and Faculty of Social Science	Hiring of new faculty members with vigorous research programs	Ongoing
Sustainable international graduate student enrolment and funding-level	Department and Faculty of Social Science	Department is already looking into flexible budget model and bringing graduate funding level in line with U15 programs	For new budget cycle starting 2019
Reduction of small-enrolment (including single-student) graduate courses	Department Chair		Ongoing