

Evaluation Report for Program Review Face to Face Meeting University of Wisconsin-Whitewater: Geography (BA, BS, BSE), 2025-2026

Date: April 16, 2026

In Attendance: Dean Jason Janke (L&S); Department Chair Dale Splinter; faculty and staff in the Geography program: Peter Puleo, Jeff Olson; Program Review Team Chair Pascal Letourneau; Program Review team members Shoji Nakayama; Assessment Representative Katy Casey

Overview of review team evaluation, program comments:

The program review chair highlighted several strengths of the program, particularly its emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning. This focus helps distinguish the program and provides students with meaningful engagement in high-impact practices (HIPs), contributing to a high-value student experience and supporting relatively stable enrollment.

The review team identified several opportunities for growth. These include expanding outreach to high school students to increase awareness of the major among prospective students, rather than relying primarily on those already enrolled at the institution. The team also noted the value of more systematic tracking of students throughout the program, as well as stronger data on post-graduate outcomes. Additionally, assessment was identified as an area for improvement, with a need to focus more intentionally on measuring student learning rather than primarily documenting task completion.

In response, the department chair noted that efforts to engage high school students are already underway through two College Credit in High School (CCHS) courses, with plans to add an environmental science course. There is an opportunity to increase enrollment in these offerings, which currently serve approximately 6–8 high school students. The department also indicated that tracking of graduates is more robust than reflected in the report. The Academic Department Associate (ADA) maintains an internal tracking spreadsheet, supported by student employees who assist in monitoring graduate outcomes using tools such as LinkedIn.

Discussion of Review Team's evaluation:

1 – The review team noted the necessity of technology and adequate equipment to support the curriculum. Can you share your current needs in these areas?

The department reports that its current technology and equipment needs are largely being met. Recent investments have ensured access to state-of-the-art GIS resources, along with updated computers and monitors, leaving the program well-positioned to support instruction and student learning at this time. Additionally, the department was recently able to replace a high-cost piece of equipment that had been needed for several years, representing a significant improvement.

Looking ahead, there may be a need for specialized printers to support cartography and GIS work; however, funding is currently available to address this if prioritized. While there are always opportunities to further enhance technology and equipment, the department indicates that its most immediate needs have been addressed.

A continuing challenge is that equipment and technology are funded at the college level rather than through centralized resources, which can make long-term planning and timely replacement more difficult. As a result, the department has developed a practice of maximizing existing resources and “doing a lot with a little” to effectively meet program needs.

2 – The program noted it is undersubscribed. What are some strategies to attract new students to the program, and what would that work entail?

Enrollment in the Geography major has declined since the introduction of Environmental Science. While the department has the capacity to support additional Geography majors, shared courses between the two programs are filling, largely driven by stronger student interest in Environmental Science. This appears to stem from clearer perceived career pathways in Environmental Science, whereas students have more difficulty identifying career opportunities associated with the broader field of Geography.

The program is pursuing several strategies to attract new students, including promoting minors and certificate options in Geography. However, there is some resistance from students to adding coursework beyond their primary major, making it challenging to demonstrate the value of these offerings. Faculty are also leveraging general education courses, such as CORE 140 (Global Perspectives), to highlight potential career pathways connected to Geography. New certificate programs—particularly those developed in partnership with Education and Business—are intended to appeal to students interested in the field without requiring the full commitment of a minor. Additionally, the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) certificate is viewed as especially promising, with potential for expanded outreach to high schools to raise awareness of GIS-related career opportunities.

3 – The program reported a high level of student engagement in High Impact Practices (HIPs). How does the program encourage student engagement?

The department has a strong student-centered culture with an expectation that faculty work with students. Recently, the program added participation in mentoring undergraduate researchers as part of the tenure and promotion standards. This department accounts for a large share of undergraduate research students.

After the discussion questions, the committee chair shared feedback from Interim Provost Fox. The program provided the following response:

Students in the program often exceed recommended credits to degree due to a combination of factors, including late entry into the major, pursuit of double majors or minors, and transfers from other UW campuses or programs. While these pathways can increase total credits, the department actively works to minimize unnecessary coursework by personalizing degree plans and accepting equivalent transfer courses whenever possible. Additionally, some students—particularly those in Environmental

Science—may require extra time to complete challenging science requirements such as chemistry. Overall, the program emphasizes strong advising, support, and advocacy to help students progress efficiently toward degree completion.

The program has made some efforts to engage prospective students through social media, particularly on Instagram and LinkedIn, and has contributed to video content through the college and university. However, these efforts have been inconsistent and would benefit from stronger, sustained department-wide commitment. The program acknowledges this as an area for improvement and plans to continue exploring more coordinated and effective outreach strategies.

Recommended Actions:

Recommended Action #1

Expand and revise program SLOs to more clearly communicate the knowledge and skills that will be required after completing their program of study.

For example: Students will apply geographic concepts and spatial evidence to produce written explanations and arguments that use discipline-appropriate terminology and data.

Recommended Action #2

Revise the curricular map to show multiple points throughout the program where data on SLOs can be collected.

For example: Consider spreading SLO assessment beyond 100 and 400 level courses to get a more complete picture of the curriculum.

Recommended Action #3

Report out how students are performing on the discipline specific SLOs, and how this data informs the work of the program.

Recommended Action #4

Convene external advisory committee, including alumni and employers, that can potentially lead to opportunities to help support and strengthen the curriculum through feedback, as well as increase funding, activities, and marketing.

Recommended Result:

Continuation with minor concerns

Next Self-Study and/or Progress Report Due Dates:

1 - Next FULL self-study will be due to the Dean on May 1, 2032, and to the Assessment Office on August 1, 2032.

For a copy of the full evaluation report and detailed comments, please reach out to the assessment office: assessment@uww.edu.