Department of Geography  
College of Arts & Sciences  
M.S. & Ph.D. in Geography  
2010-2011 Graduate Outcomes Assessment Report

Graduate Assessment Committee:  
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Report approved by departmental faculty: September 2011

Mission Statement

The Masters and PhD programs in Geography specialize in three broad areas including cultural/historical geography, resource management, and transportation/urban geography. These degree programs are designed for students to master the theoretical knowledge and skills to design, implement, and present original geographic research in oral and written form. Therefore, masters and doctoral students study geographic research methods and analysis, the history and philosophies of geography, and knowledge of current geographic research.

Assessed Student Learning Outcomes

1. Graduate students will develop the ability to communicate geographic information effectively orally and in writing at the appropriate masters or doctoral level.

2. Graduate students will develop apposite knowledge in geographic literature and research at the appropriate masters or doctoral level.

3. Graduate students will develop skills in tools for geographic data collection and methods of analysis at the masters or doctoral level.

4. Advanced graduate students will be able to develop geographic creative components, theses, or dissertations that marshal evidence, analyze data, and synthesize meaningful conclusions.

5. Advanced PhD students will be able to identify and discuss significant geographic trends within their (three) chosen specialty areas of geography.
**Student Learning Outcome 1.** Graduate students will develop the ability to communicate geographic information effectively orally and in writing at the appropriate masters or doctoral level.

1) Assessment method used: Samples of student writing are collected from graduate courses as appropriate. Furthermore, all creative component, thesis, and dissertation proposals are assessed. These artifacts are evaluated using Rubric E (see Plan). Artifacts sampled from graduate courses were evaluated in August 2011 by three faculty members who were compensated with Assessment funds. These three raters met to plan the process, scored a small number of papers, met again to compare methods and results to “norm” their evaluations to improve inter-rater reliability, and then evaluated the remaining artifacts independently and reported their final scores.

Creative component, thesis, and dissertation proposals were evaluated using the same rubric by faculty members on the students’ research committees. In general this resulted in three assessments per artifact, though some research committees have more than three members (especially Ph.D.), but some committee members fail to return a rubric to the Assessment Committee.

Additionally, oral communication skills were evaluated using Rubric J by students’ research committee members during all creative component, thesis, or dissertation presentations (proposals and final defenses). Again, the typical number of assessments per student defense was three, but the actual total varies for the reasons stated above.

In the cases of Rubrics E and J for defenses, no norming processes are feasible and each committee member scores students based on his or her own internal criteria. Also, some faculty members serve more heavily on student committees than others, possibly skewing results based on those faculty members’ expectations.

In all assessments, no identifying student information is listed on the rubrics except to differentiate masters from doctoral students for proposals. Because seminar papers are anonymized before delivery to the Assessment Committee for evaluation, while the number of students in each classification is known, the authorship of individual papers is not and so scores are aggregated for the papers assessed. This is quite reasonable because, in theory, instructors of graduate courses do not differentiate between masters and doctoral students in their grading and assessments. Though instructors may implicitly expect more from doctoral students, no explicit statements of such or grading differences are evident on course syllabi.
a) Number of students assessed/not assessed:
   **Defenses**
   - Proposals: 9/0 M.S. students & 3/0 Ph.D. students who defended
   - Presentations: 14/0 M.S. students & 4/0 Ph.D. students who defended
   **Seminar Papers**
   - Papers: 18/0 M.S. students & 4/16 Ph.D. students (department-wide).

b/c) Process of student selection and student products evaluated:
   **Defenses**
   - All thesis/dissertation proposals assessed (Rubric E)
   - All presentations (proposal and final) assessed (Rubric J)
   **Seminar Papers** (30 artifacts were collected but 8 proved unusable)
   - 5-6 papers are randomly chosen from each graduate course (Rubric E)

d) Process for assessing student products and summarizing results: Process described above; rubric scores are averaged by classification.

2) Summary of assessment evidence/results:

a) Aggregate scores:

   **Defenses**
   - Written Proposals (Rubric E – scored on a 0-4 point scale):
     
     | Student Level (n) | Content | Organization | Style & Mechanics | Overall Average | # of Assessments |
     |-------------------|---------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
     | M.S. (9)          | 2.83    | 2.92         | 2.58              | 2.78            | 24              |
     | Ph.D. (3)         | 2.67    | 2.67         | 2.22              | 2.53            | 9               |

   - Oral Presentations (Rubric J – score on a 1-3 point scale):
     
     | Student Level (n) | Content | Organization | Delivery | Overall Average | # of Assessments |
     |-------------------|---------|--------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|
     | M.S. (14)         | 2.31    | 2.38         | 2.15     | 2.28            | 42              |
     | Ph.D. (4)         | 2.60    | 2.53         | 2.60     | 2.58            | 15              |

   **Seminars**
   - Papers (Rubric E):
     
     | Student Level (n) | Content | Organization | Style & Mechanics | Overall Average | # of Assessments |
     |-------------------|---------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
     | M.S. (18)         | 2.14    | 2.29         | 1.98              | 2.14            | 66              |
     | Ph.D. (4)         |         |              |                    |                 |                 |
b) Student strengths and weaknesses: A strength of our doctoral students is their ability to give oral presentations, as the average scores for all four categories of Rubric J are above 2.50 on a 1-3 point scale. The writing of all of our graduate students seems weak, as all component averages are below 3 on a 0-4 point scale. Level 3 on each rubric (except Rubric J) is defined as “Proficient” and Level 2 is “Essential”, essential being the lowest acceptable (but not desirable) level of achievement.

The results for the seminar papers sampled averaged just above 2.00 overall while the style and mechanics score was under 2. Of note, this was the first year the department fully implemented sampling from course papers and assessing all proposals, and we anticipate being able to collect a larger number of artifacts due to greater faculty awareness of the process. This was also the first year that reviewers were not all members of the Assessment Committee, as two non-members volunteered for the task (with compensation). Thus, while scores are marginally acceptable as defined by the rubric (Essential) but low in absolute terms compared to faculty expectations, time is needed to build a larger dataset and to compare trends over time before determining any needed courses of action.

Scores for each rater across each of the three categories for all 22 scored artifacts are 1.73, 1.82, and 2.11, showing strong agreement that the typical paper rates around a 2. For each category on Rubric E, the scores were quite bell-shaped in their distribution across categories. In aggregate, out of 198 total item assessments (22 artifacts times 3 reviewers times 3 categories), 8.6% were scored as a 4 (the highest score), 22.7% were scored a 3, 44.9% were scored a 2, 21.2% were scored a 1, and 2.5% were scored 0. The overall mean was 2.14, while the overall mode and median were both 2.

In 2009-10, fifteen students were assessed using Rubric E and average scores for the three categories ranged between 2.37 and 2.90. No distinctions were made between student classifications. In 2008-09, nine students were assessed and category scores averaged between 2.79 and 3.11. Thus, scores for writing have dropped slightly over the past two years. The faculty will continue to monitor writing achievement and seek ways to improve writing. However, past artifact collection and scoring was more haphazard and fewer students were assessed (especially in 2008-09) with no distinction made in student classification. As a result, the data could have been skewed by relatively larger or smaller numbers of masters versus doctoral students.
3) Faculty interpretation of results:

a) Method of sharing and discussion: First the raw data and then the draft report were circulated via e-mail for review and comment.

b) Faculty members’ response to results: One faculty member noted that stronger scores on oral presentations for doctoral students may reflect the fact that many are instructors and have given many more presentations at conferences than master’s students. A faculty member found it strange that the scores for doctoral students on proposals were consistently lower than those of the master’s students and wondered if this indicates a problem with the writing abilities of doctoral students or reflects higher expectations faculty members have for those students. Alternatively, a faculty member expressed concern that the low scores for doctoral students may point to a gap between student writing skills and their ability to prepare manuscripts for publication as expected with the department’s three-article dissertation option. Finally, another faculty member wondered if students need as much practice as possible writing proposals, perhaps in more than in just one class (5403).

4) Program improvements implemented/considered in response:

a) Actions taken resulting from discussion of evidence: None at this time. More data and evidence seems necessary first.

b) Actions being considered: Faculty continue to discuss the roles of several departmental courses in relation to writing instruction and remediation.

c) Additional assessment data needing collection: No new data collection methods are needed, just more exhaustive collection of artifacts on an annual basis is sought.
**Student Learning Outcome 2.** Graduate students will develop apposite knowledge in geographic literature and research at the appropriate masters or doctoral level.

1) Rubrics developed by the instructors of Geography 5403 (Rubric B) and 5413 (Rubric C) are used to assess this knowledge.

In all assessments, no identifying student information is listed on the rubric except to differentiate masters from doctoral students.

   a) Number of students assessed/not assessed:
      - GEOG 5403
      - 8/0 M.S. students & 0/0 Ph.D. students
      - GEOG 5413
      - 5/0 M.S. students & 0/0 Ph.D. students

   b) Process of student selection: all enrolled students who are GEOG majors

   c) Student products evaluated:
      - For 5403, the instructor uses student papers, student class presentations, and student-lead class discussions to evaluate student performance.
      - For 5413, the instructor uses student papers, student class presentations, and student midterm and essay exams to evaluate student performance.

   d) Process for assessing student products and summarizing results: Instructors rate rubric items as appropriate for each learning outcome. Rubric scores are averaged by classification.

2) Summary of assessment evidence/results:

   a) Aggregate scores:

   **GEOG 5403 (Rubric B – scored on a 0-4 point scale):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Level (n)</th>
<th>Standard 1</th>
<th>Standard 2</th>
<th>Standard 3</th>
<th>Standard 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.S. (8)</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. (0)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GEOG 5413 (Rubric C – scored on a 0-4 point scale):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Level (n)</th>
<th>Standard 1</th>
<th>Standard 2</th>
<th>Standard 3</th>
<th>Standard 4</th>
<th>Standard 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.S. (5)</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. (0)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Student strengths and weaknesses:

The GEOG 5403 instructor has taught the course three times. Each time, she has observed that students seem better able to communicate their understandings for Standards 1 and 2 orally than in writing. The instructor found that students struggle at both macro and micro levels in writing, particularly in conceptualizing a research project (Standard 3) and in formulating literature reviews (Standard 4). The instructor found that students struggle more with writing literature reviews associated with a research topic that they are developing than a literature review on a topic given to them.

In 2009-10, ten students were evaluated in GEOG 5403 with category scores averaging between 2.6 and 2.9. In 2008-09 average scores were between 2.56 and 3.00. The same instructor has taught the course all three times, and the results seem to be very consistent over the three years.

For 5413, the average scores were impacted by the fact that one student earned no score above a 2 (out of 4) on any item of the course rubric. Overall, the scores for items 1 and 4 were the lowest, but arguably reflect the most difficult subject matter (knows basic theories, concepts and traditions in geography and an ability to explain the various philosophies that have affected the discipline, respectively). Students performed well on the final exam, and showed considerable improvement from the midterm.

In 2009-10, eleven students were evaluated in GEOG 5413 with category scores averaging between 2.36 and 3.00. No scores were reported for 2008-09. Scores remain fairly consistent, though like Outcome 1 the lack of distinction between masters and doctoral students in older reports could hide evidence that the mix of students has been partially responsible for fluctuating scores. The same instructor has taught this course since the late 1990s, so one would expect a high degree of year-to-year consistency in the course content and instructor evaluations of student learning.
3) Faculty interpretation of results:

a) Method of sharing and discussion: First the raw data and then the draft report were circulated via e-mail for review and comment.

b) Faculty members’ response to results:

For 5403, the results above were not necessarily surprising because the course was comprised of only master’s students. For most, their second semester (spring) is the first time that they are asked to design a research project situated in current geographic literature which includes skills to synthesize and evaluate research as well as relate it to their research.

For 5413, since all of the students were master’s students, this is the first time that any of them had had a course like this in geographic thought and philosophy. Also, it is important to keep in mind that since many students come from non-geography backgrounds they have a lot to learn about our discipline’s history and development. Students sometimes perceive the amount of information covered in the course to be a bit overwhelming.

4) Program improvements implemented/considered in response:

a) Actions taken resulting from discussion of evidence:

After each of the three times the instructor has taught 5403 she has made adjustments in assignments concerning how students convey their understanding of geographic research both in written and oral form. With each assignment, the instructor now provides a different rubric that she uses to evaluate the students’ work, which helps to clarify expectations to students. The instructor also has now split the components of the research proposal into separate assignments. Each component part is evaluated by the instructor and returned to the student. The student must then make edits to each part and turn in a final proposal at the end of the semester. Students appreciate the additional practice this gives them, and also presents proposal writing as less daunting. Additionally, the instructor now organizes the students into writing groups for the semester, where they must review each other’s work and revise it based on that feedback before they turn in any assignment. Finally, the instructor also has one-on-one meetings with
students to discuss their work in the class. This has proved beneficial for students in conveying their ideas in writing.

For 5413, the instructor adopted a different text that may help facilitate student comprehension of different philosophies and make the content seem less overwhelming.

b) Actions being considered:

For 5403, the instructor plans on requiring more one-on-one meetings between student and the instructor because students who came voluntarily during office hours to meet with the instructor showed more improvement in all areas than those students who did not independently take advantage of her office hours. Additionally, the instructor will adjust how students lead discussion of journal articles. In the past, they have lead discussion on multiple articles on one class day, highlighting strengths and weaknesses associated with the article, posing questions to their classmates, and relating the article to potential needed research. However, by requiring students to lead discussion on articles at different points in the semester, they may incorporate feedback each time to improve their oral communication and presentation skills.

For 5413: none at this time.

c) Additional assessment data needing collection: None at this time.
**Student Learning Outcome 3.** Graduate students will develop skills in tools for geographic data collection and methods of analysis at the masters or doctoral level.

1) Rubrics developed by the instructors of Geography 5303 (Rubric A) and 6313 (Rubric D) are used to assess this knowledge.

In all assessments, no identifying student information is listed on the rubric except to differentiate masters from doctoral students.

   a) Number of students assessed/not assessed:

   GEOG 5303
   - 4/0 M.S. students & 1/0 Ph.D. students

   GEOG 6313
   - Course not taught during 2010-11 academic year

   b) Process of student selection: all enrolled students who are GEOG majors

   c) Student products evaluated:

   - For 5303, the instructor uses student papers, final project class presentations, final project written report, and course exam.
   - 6313 was not taught in 2010-11.

   d) Process for assessing student products and summarizing results: Instructors rate rubric items as appropriate for each learning outcome. Rubric scores are averaged by classification.

2) Summary of assessment evidence/results:

   a) Aggregate scores:

   **GEOG 5303 (Rubric A - scored on a 0-4 point scale):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Level (n)</th>
<th>Standard 1</th>
<th>Standard 2</th>
<th>Standard 3</th>
<th>Standard 4</th>
<th>Standard 5</th>
<th>Standard 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.S. (4)</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. (1)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GEOG 6313 (Rubric D – scored on a 0-4 point scale):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Level (n)</th>
<th>Standard 1</th>
<th>Standard 2</th>
<th>Standard 3</th>
<th>Standard 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.S. (0)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. (0)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Student strengths and weaknesses:

For GEOG 5303, the small sample size makes it difficult to make firm statements, but over time this instructor has observed the same basic areas needing constant efforts to attempt to enhance student learning, especially in rudimentary areas of data preparation, handling, and documentation (Standard 1) and basic statistical analyses (Standard 2).

In 2009-10, eleven students were assessed in GEOG 5303 with category average scores ranging between 2.73 and 3.72, while in 2008-09 nine students were assessed with averages ranging between 2.11 and 3.78.

3) Faculty interpretation of results:

a) Method of sharing and discussion: First the raw data and then the draft report were circulated via e-mail for review and comment.

b) Faculty members’ response to results:

For GEOG 5303, Standards 1 and 2 noted above are areas that, in some ways, graduate students should have already mastered from the prerequisite (basic statistics or GEOG 3333). However, either the time lag between taking the prerequisite and this course (in some cases), or struggling performance in the prerequisite (in other cases), seems to leave students less prepared for this course than the instructor would like.

More notably, there have been some wild swings in category averages over the past three years. In 2008-09, the standard relating to distance decay models (Standard 6) had the highest average at 3.78, in 2009-10 this standard set the low mark at 2.73, and this past year the average was 3.40. Similarly, the standard relating to autocorrelation concepts (Standard 5) was the low mark in 2008-09 at 2.11, the high mark in 2009-10 at 3.72, and this past year averaged 3.40.
Thus, while the overall range of category averages is fairly consistent, the topics on which students perform well or poorly seem to fluctuate from year to year. The instructor has rearranged the order of topic presentation somewhat over the past few years but in general the basic content and evaluation remains the same, so he is somewhat puzzled by these swings. As with the courses that comprise Outcome 2, however, past assessment reports did not differentiate masters from doctoral students in the reporting of category averages and so possibly the student mix (masters and doctoral) could at least play a role in annual variations.

4) Program improvements implemented/considered in response:

a) Actions taken resulting from discussion of evidence:

The instructor of GEOG 5303 is also the instructor of GEOG 3333, and he recently moved 3333 from spring to fall (GEOG 5303 remains in the spring) to allow incoming graduate students to take 3333 as the prerequisite. The instructor integrates the two courses to the extent that 5303 largely picks up where 3333 leaves off, with some review/overlap. The instructor has also worked harder to emphasize areas relating to data documentation and analysis in 3333 that graduate students continue to struggle with in 5303.

b) Actions being considered:

The instructor of GEOG 5303 (as well as GEOG 3333) continues to adjust course material, teaching methods, and assignments to address these deficiencies. Each course stands alone in separate curricula (3333 being required for B.A./B.S. majors in GEOG, 5303 being required for all GEOG graduate students), but as noted above many graduate students take 3333 as the prerequisite for 5303. This allows the instructor to continually learn about how the students learn (or do not learn) certain aspects of the material and work towards better achievement. The same instructor has taught this course since the mid-1990s, so one would expect a high degree of year-to-year consistency in the course content and instructor evaluations of student learning.

c) Additional assessment data needing collection: None at this time.
Student Learning Outcome 4. Advanced graduate students will be able to develop geographic creative components, theses, or dissertations that marshal evidence, analyze data, and synthesize meaningful conclusions.

1) Creative components, theses, and dissertations provide data to assess these abilities. Individually, faculty members on creative component (Rubric F), thesis (Rubric G), and dissertation (Rubric I) committees rate students. As with Rubrics E and J reported for Outcome 1, there are typically three faculty members on a master's student's committee and four on doctoral committees who are assessing each student.

In all assessments, no identifying student information is listed on the rubric except to differentiate masters from doctoral students.

   a) Number of students assessed/not assessed:
       Creative components
       - 0/0 M.S. students
       Theses
       - 6/0 M.S. students
       Dissertations
       - 1/0 Ph.D. students

   b) Process of student selection: all students undertaking final defense for degree completion are assessed.

   c) Student products evaluated: Creative components, theses, and dissertations

   d) Process for assessing student products and summarizing results: Process described above; rubric scores are averaged for each product (creative component, thesis, or dissertation).

2) Summary of assessment evidence/results:

   a) Aggregate scores:

       Creative Components (Rubric F – scored on a 0-4 point scale):

       | Student Level (n) | Introduction | Methods | Data & Analysis | Conclusion | # of Assessments |
       |------------------|--------------|---------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
       | M.S. (0)         | n/a          | n/a     | n/a             | n/a        | 0               |
Theses (Rubric G - scored on a 0-4 point scale):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Level (n)</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Lit. review</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Data &amp; Analysis</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th># of Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.S. (6)</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dissertations (Rubric I - scored on a 0-4 point scale):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Level (n)</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Lit. review</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Overall Signif.</th>
<th># of Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. (1)</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Student strengths and weaknesses:

Overall, master's students perform just under the proficient level (Level 3 on a 0-4 scale) which is in line with writing scores reviewed earlier. Rubric G does not assess writing mechanics but instead the substantive areas of putting together a quality research paper (thesis), but nonetheless both the writing (Rubric E) and the organization of components (Rubric G) reveal similar levels of achievement.

In 2009-10, two theses were assessed with category scores for Rubric G averaging either 3.0 or 4.0. No data were collected in 2008-09.

There was just one dissertation defended during the assessment period, and the data indicate that one student evinced a high level of achievement. In 2009-10 three dissertation were assessed with category scores for Rubric I averaging 3.33, 3.67, or 4.00. No data were collected in 2008-09.

3) Faculty interpretation of results:

a) Method of sharing and discussion: First the raw data and then the draft report were circulated via e-mail for review and comment.

b) Faculty members’ response to results:

Most theses defended (successfully) in the department are generally of an adequate nature, accomplishing the essential goals of the activity but none especially standing out as exemplary works of research. This could be due to a bias on the part of faculty members evaluating master’s students in comparison to Ph.D. students instead of on their own merits.
However, every year there are only a handful of theses defended, and even fewer dissertations, so it will be very difficult to ever draw strong conclusions from the data or find any statistically-significant information. Instead, the practice of evaluating theses and dissertations using these rubrics, and thinking about the scoring process and the performance of individual students, allows the faculty as research committee members to continue to seek ways to address perceived student deficiencies via one-on-one mentoring.

4) Program improvements implemented/considered in response:

   a) Actions taken resulting from discussion of evidence:

      Though not directly descended from the results of this assessment method, the department did create and require a new professional development seminar for all new students, GEOG 5001, in which a variety of topics are addressed weekly relating to departmental citizenship, networking, research opportunities and skills, classroom and presentation performance, and the like. It is hoped that as each successive class of new students completes this course (it is being taught for the third time in the fall of 2011), student achievement will increase in the department, not just in terms of quality of course work and research (theses and dissertations) but also in the timely completion of same.

   b) Actions being considered: None at this time.

   c) Additional assessment data needing collection: None at this time.
**Student Learning Outcome 5.** Advanced PhD students will be able to identify and discuss significant geographic trends within their (three) chosen specialty areas of geography.

1) Rubrics for PhD students’ written comprehensive exams will be used to evaluate student proficiency. Each faculty member of the examination committee completes Rubric H for his/her specific specialty area. Rubrics for evaluation may vary greatly because geography is a diverse discipline.

In all assessments, no identifying student information is listed on the rubric.

   a) Number of students assessed/not assessed:
      
      **Comprehensive Exams**
      - 7/0 Ph.D. students

   b) Process of student selection: all Ph.D. students undertaking comprehensive exams are assessed. Generally three members of the student's committee write exam questions and each faculty member assesses only the answers to his/her questions on Rubric H, resulting in three assessments per student.

   c) Student products evaluated: Written answers to comprehensive examination questions (essays).

   d) Process for assessing student products and summarizing results: Process described above; rubric scores are averaged.

2) Summary of assessment evidence/results:

   a) Aggregate scores:

      **Comprehensive Exams** (Rubric H – scored on a 0-4 point scale):

      | Student Level (n) | Subject Knowledge | Content & Organiz. | Style & Mechanics | # of Assessments |
      |------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|
      | Ph.D. (7)        | 2.93              | 3.12              | 2.81             | 21              |

   b) Student strengths and weaknesses:

      Students perform fairly consistently across all three achievement categories on comprehensive examinations, with average scores hovering around 3.00.
In 2009-10 four students were assessed and average category scores were 3.00 for Subject Knowledge, 3.00 for Content and Organization, and 3.33 for Style and Mechanics. No data were collected in 2008-09.

3) Faculty interpretation of results:

a) Method of sharing and discussion: First the raw data and then the draft report were circulated via e-mail for review and comment.

b) Faculty members’ response to results:

As with the discussion regarding thesis performance in Outcome 4, the faculty would like to see scores notably better than merely “Proficient” (Level 3 on a 0-4 scale). However, the nature of doctoral work in general and comprehensive examinations in particular is very decentralized and unstandardized. While all students perform under the same conditions (three separate 6-hour examinations over different days, closed book, long-essay format), each committee member crafts his/her own questions based on the student’s coursework or other interactions with that committee member and that committee member’s areas of expertise. Hence, the nature, format, and length of each examination can vary greatly, as can the committee members’ expectations. As the examinations represent the culmination of doctoral students’ experiences up to that point in their careers, any efforts to raise these achievement levels would have to be broad-based, possibly extra-curricular, and executed over the long term.

The wide range in reported scores also reflects the fact that there is considerable unevenness among faculty in preparing students to take the exams and communicating expectations. Some faculty members tell students exactly what kinds of questions to expect; others do not.

4) Program improvements implemented/considered in response:

a) Actions taken resulting from discussion of evidence: None at this time.

b) Actions being considered: None at this time.

c) Additional assessment data needing collection: None at this time.
University Assessment Funds Used

The Department of Geography was awarded $1,800 (plus benefits) for the conduct of assessment towards Outcome 1 (writing ability), specifically the evaluation of student artifacts (papers) collected from graduate courses in Geography during the academic year. The funds were used to compensate three faculty members for their time reading the artifacts collected and scored against Rubric E.

The impact of this award was two-fold. First, most other information gathered during the year is very quickly and efficiently collected by faculty members during or right after the various student defenses (proposals, comprehensive exams, final thesis/dissertation defenses) and is tabulated as the year progresses. However, evaluation of artifacts from graduate seminars must be read and scored individually, a task generally undertaken by the 3-person Graduate/Assessment Committee. Compensating these individuals makes the task somewhat less onerous.

Second, with the ability to compensate individuals, the department was able to entice two faculty members who are not on the Graduate/Assessment Committee to engage in artifact review (along with one Committee member). As a consequence, the number of faculty in the department engaged more directly with assessment is expanded beyond the 3-person Graduate/Assessment Committee (i.e. 5 persons total), in addition to nearly all faculty being tangentially involved when they complete other rubrics after defenses, specific faculty members who teach core courses, and ultimately all faculty members are asked to review and comment on this report.

For these reasons the Department of Geography feels the award improves the graduate assessment process in the department, is being put to good use, and hence will be sought on an annual basis.