

Geography Department Assessment Plan  
January 2014

**I. Department Student Learning Statement**

The mission of the geography department is to advance the frontiers of geography through teaching, research and applications of geographic theories and insights in an effort to better understand global and regional situations and to address community issues. Our department curriculum contains courses that convey knowledge of the ways human activity in space is organized and the interactions between human activities and the physical environment. Geography possesses an integrated approach and has a global viewpoint.

Through classroom and computer laboratory experience, field work, and community involvement, students are provided with the knowledge and skills required to carry out locational analysis, and appreciate the diversity of people and places, the integration of places on the surface of the earth, and the spatial processes that affect contemporary society. To achieve our goals the faculty, staff, and students engage in a variety of research projects, and we offer a range of courses for Macalester undergraduates. The Geography Department plays an active role in Macalester's civic engagement initiatives.

**II. Department Learning Goals and Outcomes**

Learning Goals

Associated learning outcomes

1) To produce graduates with a broad understanding of the fundamental concepts and theories in three major thematic areas of our major (Urban-economic geography, cultural-political geography, and nature-society relations).

Has experience applying concepts and theories relevant to each of the three thematic areas

2) To produce graduates who demonstrate competency in core techniques/skills of geographic analysis.

- a) Can produce a well-designed map
- b) Can solve an analytical problem using geospatial techniques
- c) Can use qualitative techniques to interpret and analyze places and landscapes
- d) Can use statistical research methods to solve a geographical problem

3) To produce graduates who can apply theories and skills to issues concerning people, places and environments at local to global scales.

Can formulate and answer a research question

4) To produce graduates who have an understanding of a subfield in one major domain (Human, Nature- Society, Geospatial Techniques) of geography.

Can master the application of the fundamental concepts and theories of this major domain in geography

5) To produce graduates who appreciate diversity of people and places, the integration of places on the surface of the earth, and the spatial processes that affect contemporary society

Can understand how specific places experience these processes; & can explain how different places are connected through particular geographic processes

6) To produce graduates with strong written & oral communications skills

a) Can effectively communicate ideas in written form  
b) Can effectively communicate ideas in oral form

7) To produce graduates who can apply geographic perspectives and/or methods to enhance understanding of community issues or solving community problems

Can effectively use geographic concepts and/or methods of analysis to help answer community-generated questions.

### III. Department Assessment Strategies

#### Learning outcome

1) Has experience applying concepts and theories relevant to each of the three thematic areas (Urban-economic geography, cultural-political geography, and nature-society relations).

#### Assessment Strategy

Check transcripts of graduated majors in past 3 years to see how intermediate courses were distributed across cultural/political, urban/economic, and nature/society categories. Tabulate the proportion of students who achieved the prescribed breadth and analyze the circumstances that are associated with lack of breadth.

2a) Can produce a well-designed map

Students in Geog 225 assessed using “GIS\_Intro” Rubric

2b) Can solve an analytical problem using geospatial techniques

Students in Geog 225 assessed using “GIS\_Intro” Rubric

2c) Can use qualitative techniques to interpret and analyze places and landscapes

Use “Qualitative methods” rubric to assess portfolios of graduating seniors. Students must submit a portfolio that shows proficiency in qualitative techniques

2d) Can use statistical research methods to solve a geographical problem	Students in Geog 378 assessed using “SRM” rubric
3) Can formulate and answer a research question	Students in Geog 488 assessed using the ‘question’, ‘methods’, and ‘results’ sections of the “research paper” rubric
4) Can master the application of the fundamental concepts and theories of this major domain in geography	GEOG 488 Students’ capstone paper evaluated using the ‘significance’ section of the “research paper” rubric
5) Can understand how specific places experience these processes; & can explain how different places are connected through particular geographic processes	Students in a regional geography course assessed using “geographical connections” rubric. Students who complete the regional geography course outside of the department must create a portfolio of relevant work to the chair for evaluation before the start of their final semester. The chair will use the “geographical connections” rubric for this evaluation.
6a) Can effectively communicate ideas in written form	Students in Geog 488 assessed using ‘argumentation’ section of the “research paper” rubric
6b) Can effectively communicate ideas in oral form	Students in Geog 488 assessed using the “oral presentation” rubric
7) Can effectively use geographic concepts and/or methods of analysis to help answer community-generated questions.	Students in an approved geography course assessed using “civic engagement” rubric. The faculty will maintain an updated list of qualified courses. If a student successfully petitions to have a different course satisfy the civic engagement requirement, including an internship, then the instructor of record or site supervisor must complete the civic engagement rubric.

#### **IV. Four-Year Timeline to Implement Assessment Strategies**

Dan Trudeau will coordinate the assessment of each learning outcomes according the timetable described below. In some cases, multiple faculty will participate in the implementation of a single assessment strategy. For instance, learning outcomes 6a & b are assessed in geog 488. The geography department typically offers three sections of this course per academic year and a different professor teaches each section. In this case, Trudeau will coordinate with all of the relevant instructors to make sure that the appropriate rubric is used. Furthermore, Trudeau will collect and tabulate the assessment outcome. In other cases, the instructor of record for a particular course (e.g., geog 225, geog 378) will be responsible for conducting the prescribed assessment. Lastly, a panel of geography faculty, which the chair will assemble, will assess objectives 2c and 5.

2014

Learning outcomes 1 & 5

2015

Learning outcomes 3 & 7

2016

Learning outcomes 2a-d & 6a-b

2017

Learning outcomes 4