

Graduate Program Review Appeals Committee
Informational Session: June 22, 2006

Teaching of Geography M.A.

Program representatives: Lisa DeChano (assistant professor), David G. Dickason (professor and chair), Chanseng He (professor and graduate advisor), Thomas Kent (dean)

Program's Appeal Summary

This appeal is directed towards Provost [Delene's] ambiguous recommendation that:

“The MA in Teaching of Geography will be closed and any continuing initiative in that area integrated with an expanded program in science education and/or environmental studies.” (*Graduate Education at Western Michigan University: Our First Fifty Years and Strategic Priorities for the Future*, May 11, 2006, p. 10)

This recommendation is not one of strict closure, since it recommends contingently transferring the program to two other programs/departments. The suggested program transfer indicates that the Provost either did not understand the nature of the discipline of Geography, the mission of the Department of Geography in Applied Geography (of which the teaching of Geography is the most important historic application of Geography), nor the mission and foci of Science Education and Environmental Studies (the latter solely an undergraduate program) at Western Michigan University. This appeal is based upon the misunderstanding and misinterpretation made in the Provost's Office—one of an array of misunderstandings and misinterpretations possible when so many program decisions are being made in so short a time without collegial discourse with affected programs.

This appeal recommends that the original recommendation of the Department of Geography, also affirmed by the Graduate Program Review Team and the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences be affirmed in this appeals process—i.e., that the Master of Arts in the Teaching of Geography be combined with the Master of Arts in Geography program.

Up to the Provost level, all parties (Department of Geography, Graduate Program Review Team, Dean of College of Arts & Sciences) affirmed consolidating this program into the M.A. in Geography program (which itself was assessed as a strong program among the *ca.* forty percent of graduate programs in the College of Arts & Sciences that received a rating of “4” or “5”).

So non-controversial a recommendation did we perceive this to be that we filed only an executive summary page for this program. This appeal can therefore be read constructively in conjunction with the M.A. in Geography Graduate Program Review document (but we reproduce relevant portions of that document in this appeals document).

Merging this program with the M.A. in Geography is cost neutral. It will not be cheaper as a result of merger, nor will it be more expensive. If this initiative is combined with Science Studies or Environmental Studies it will be more expensive in that neither academic unit is prepared to host such a program in its faculty or curriculum. *If this program is merged with Science Studies or Environmental Studies, it will not be recognized by the Michigan Department of Education.* Thus consolidation with other programs outside Geography is counter-productive.

This appeal is based on the specified appeals structure, including the seven-fold criteria of the graduate program review evaluation, the Strategic Decision Constructs, and the Strategic Academic Priorities used to decide the future of all programs.

Committee's Questions *

1. Whether the M.A. is closed or merged in a more sensible way, imagine a worst-case scenario in which you received no new resources, no new or replacement faculty hires, and no additional support for TAs, and had to self-fund 100 percent of your growth. What would your program look like three to five years from now?
It would be very healthy. We'd have the faculty in place (those who'd offer courses in this area are already tenured) and wouldn't need new resources. What *would* cost money is if the University insisted on moving the program into the science department. Geography is defined as a social science. It wouldn't be recognized at the state level, either, if we moved it to another department.
2. What's the history behind the "Teaching of Geography" title?
It was initially designed for K-12. These days, however, you can make a lot more money as a geography educator with private companies, etc.
3. Is there a research component?
We have a thesis option in the Geography M.A. Most students going into Teaching of Geography choose the non-thesis option.
4. If the program becomes a specialization within the M.A. in Geography, you'd serve the No Child Left Behind cohort?
Yes. These would be students with some kind of University degree and a background in teaching.
5. You mentioned that there are also more lucrative applications.
In terms of marketplace demand, geography education is second only to biotechnology. Most of the teachers who are going back to get a Geography degree will do so in the next 10 years.
6. So it's not a big issue to close the program? Teaching in Geography would become a concentration under the Geography M.A.?
Yes, the Geography M.A. gives us a strong identity in the state.
8. How would you sum up the basis for your appeal?
The geography department is uniquely positioned to offer this program, and it's a program that doesn't just meet a need in the state of Michigan—the faculty have a nationwide reputation. In terms of graduating students, geography is ranked sixth in the country. Also, the Michigan Geographic Alliance is relocating to our campus.

* *Q&A text is not verbatim*