



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

College of Arts and Sciences

Department of Geography,
Environment, and Tourism

Strategic Plan

2020-2026

www.wmich.edu/geography

   @WMUgeography

Email: geog.info@wmich.edu

Address: 1903 W Michigan Ave, Kalamazoo MI 49008-5424



Mission

The Western Michigan University Department of Geography, Environment, and Tourism seeks to: (1) foster the acquisition of core knowledge in geography and the applications of such knowledge to real-world issues through high quality teaching and research; (2) provide an environment for student professional growth through development of critical thinking, scientific problem-solving, enhanced and diverse communication skills (e.g., written, oral, graphic), and creative capacity; (3) raise awareness, appreciation and relevance of geographic dimensions of environmental, social, cultural, political, economic, and technological issues in order to understand and address them more effectively; and (4) create and maintain a challenging and intellectually vital geographic learning community that engages students and faculty in continuing discourse, with focus on active, informed, productive, creative, open-minded, and ethically responsible professional preparation and citizenship in a complex, increasingly connected and globalized, multicultural world.



Vision

Instill a passion for the study of geography, environment, tourism, and other related subfields (e.g., GIScience, climatology, geographic education). Achieve excellence in teaching, research, and service within these fields and, by doing so, make our Department visible and recognized both nationally and internationally for its strengths. Emphasize the importance of communicating our science to, and collaborating with partners from, academic and non-academic communities.



Anti-Racism Statement

In the wake of the 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor among others, and countless other Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) throughout the history of the United States, the Department of Geography, Environment, and Tourism stands against systemic racism. We embrace diversity and are dedicated to racial justice and equity. We are committed to being actively anti-racist in the classroom and through the entirety of our work. We actively support and participate in anti-racist initiatives on campus and are committed to listening to others' experiences with racism and exclusion. We work to create an inclusive environment within which all students can thrive.



A Plan Forward

The Department of Geography, Environment, and Tourism organizes this strategic planning effort using three active descriptors, **experience**, **engage**, and **excite**, that serve to unify our outlook regardless of the type of goals and objectives that fall within each category (i.e. research and teaching are not separated and may fall under a single descriptor). The three E's are the means by which we approach our work and serve to express our commitment to excellence.

We align our strategic plan with those produced by Western Michigan University (WMU), the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), and other WMU institutions (e.g., University Libraries, Graduate College). These connections are purposefully and synergistically made throughout this document.

This strategic planning effort began at a daylong faculty retreat on May 1, 2019 initiated by the Department Chair. The retreat was structured as open-ended, small group-based brainstorming sessions inspired by the Think Big Initiative led by the WMU Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. This effort led to a cohesive set of ideas (goals and objectives) that were edited by an ad hoc committee and presented to the faculty as a whole for changes and eventual approval. We present five strategic goals each with objectives and actions.

Finalized and Adopted by Faculty: April 30, 2020

Revisions Approved: November 5, 2021

Experience

Goal 1. Emphasize experience in teaching and learning.

Learner centered, globally engaged, discovery driven

Objective 1.1 Faculty members actively engage students in thought-provoking activities in the classroom that encourage reflection on the integrative nature of geography (and related fields) as a discipline and profession.

Action 1.1.A Use teaching strategies that create student centered learning environments that engage students as active participants (i.e. active learning).



Action 1.1.B Work with current, publicly available datasets to address contemporary issues at a variety of geographic scales in classes.

Action 1.1.C Develop problem-based learning for core and procedural knowledge that integrate disciplinary and professional skills.

Action 1.1.D Participate in professional teaching development workshops and seminars.

Objective 1.2 Students have an opportunity to be engaged in learning through direct experiences outside of the classroom. *[WMU 1.2, 1.4]*

Action 1.2.A Engage students in field studies, field trips, and study abroad courses to acquire local to global experiences.

Action 1.2.B Contribute to the broader community through internships, service-learning project, field studies and other community-based work.

Action 1.2.C Experience research through faculty-led and/or student-led projects, and/or student-faculty collaborations.

Goal 2. Bolster a rigorous scholarly environment.

Discovery driven

Objective 2.1 Increase the impact of our research. *[WMU 3.1, 3.2]*

Action 2.1.A Maintain production of high-quality research articles with a focus on the highest-tier journals in our respective fields and subfields.

Action 2.1.B Engage students in research and create opportunities for the coauthorship of publications.

Action 2.1.C Conduct research on significant local topics such as Great Lakes coastal processes, Kalamazoo County public health, invasive species, etc.

Action 2.1.D Incorporate scholarship into instruction to actively engage students (e.g., share research results, show research outcomes, discuss scientific process). *[WMU 2.6]*

Objective 2.2 Acquire external grant/contract funding to support research efforts while reducing our reliance on internal funds to support graduate student assistantships. *[Graduate College 2.6]*

Action 2.2.A Continue to obtain grant/contract funding from traditional sources such as the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state agencies, etc.



Action 2.2.B Seek out and acquire grant/contract funding from non-traditional sources such as foundations, non-governmental organizations, and private entities.

Engage

Goal 3. Connect and cultivate relationships within and outside of geography.

Globally engaged

Objective 3.1 Engage with the discipline at local, regional, state, national, and international scales.

Action 3.1.A Serve on panels, conduct reviews, participate on editorial boards, engage with professional organizations (e.g., IMAGIN; serve in administrative roles, give presentations) to interact with professional geographers, continue education and professional development, etc.

Action 3.1.B Build and sustain relationships with local institutions such as government, tribes, non-profits, and private companies. *[CAS 5.3]*

Action 3.1.C Consistently engage with and support a vibrant alumni community through events (e.g., career panels, talks, reunions) and other engagements. *[WMU 5.5; CAS 4.2]*

Objective 3.2 Engage with other disciplines, programs, and institutes on and off campus.

Action 3.2.A Initiate, foster, and sustain multi-/interdisciplinary collaborative research including external grant/contract submissions, publications, etc. *[WMU 2.1; CAS 5.2]*

Action 3.2.B Explore and pursue multi-/interdisciplinary teaching opportunities through cross-listing and co-teaching of courses, working to increase the number of interdisciplinary students in our courses, etc.

Action 3.2.C Consistently represent the department through service to the university and college through committees, workshops, and consortia.

Goal 4. Recruit and support an active and dynamic student population. *Learner centered*

Objective 4.1 Enhance and grow our programs. *[CAS 1.5]*

Action 4.1.A Increase the number of undergraduate students in all programs (majors, minors, certificates, co-coordinated majors such as environment/sustainability) by



collaborating with university recruiting offices and personnel while concurrently engaging with K-12 schools.

Action 4.1.B Increase the number of graduate students in all programs (standard and accelerated MS, graduate certificates) by recruiting outstanding undergraduate students, promoting/exhibiting programs at regional conferences, and through individual connections (i.e. personal and professional networking). *[Graduate College 2.3]*

Action 4.1.C Continue to build direct relationships with faculty at community colleges and support incoming transfer students by offering scholarships and other support.

Action 4.1.D Review (and revise) course offerings, objectives, syllabi, and titles to be sure they reflect disciplinary changes, technological advancements, societal change, etc. *[WMU 2.1]*

Action 4.1.E Improve student retention through the development and promotion of strategic scholarship opportunities (i.e. monetary awards for majors directed at juniors and seniors, transfers, minors), group mentoring, data-driven coordination among faculty, etc. *[CAS 4.3]*

Objective 4.2 Improve the student experience with an emphasis on inclusivity. *[CAS 2.2]*

Action 4.2.A Provide individualized attention to all students and facilitate a supportive and inclusive academic environment. Be especially supportive of students from traditionally marginalized groups including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA), women, and people with disabilities. *[WMU 4.2, 4.3; Graduate College 1.6]*

Action 4.2.B Support a wide variety of learners through multiple modes of classes (traditional, hybrid, and online). Continue to improve and develop new hybrid and online courses (e.g., GEOG 3010). *[WMU 2.5]*

Action 4.2.C Streamline course sequencing and optimize times offered in order to not impede time to degree and limit conflicts with other courses and programs. *[WMU 1.1]*

Action 4.2.D Create an open, inviting student activity space (a community space or commons) for student interaction, studying, group work, Geography Club meetings, etc.

Action 4.2.E Adopt and/or develop open educational resources (OER) in our courses to reduce cost for students. *[University Libraries 4.B S1]*



Excite

Goal 5. Build enthusiasm for the work we do.

Globally engaged

Objective 5.1 Cultivate interest in and actively promote our fields of study.

Action 5.1.A Host and/or co-host events for Geography Awareness Week and GIS Day (fall), Earth Day and GeoBee (spring), etc.

Action 5.1.B Support the Geography Club/Gamma Theta Upsilon and other student groups on campus, and facilitate collaboration between such groups.

Action 5.1.C Strengthen the Lucia Harrison Colloquium Series by inviting speakers that communicate to a broad audience including scholars conducting anti-racist research. Co-sponsor talks with other departments to expose others to our field and organize off-campus talks when possible (e.g., Kalamazoo Valley Museum).

Action 5.1.D Highlight faculty and student research/experiences through our website and social media (Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn) and continue to hone our digital media presence including promotion of alumni and emeritus faculty (e.g., importance of Lucia Harrison's contributions as early feminist voice in American geography higher education, Mary Meader, Oscar Horst, etc.). *[WMU 5.4, Graduate College 3.2]*

Action 5.1.E Create invigorating departmental spaces (e.g., visually stimulating and frequently updated exhibits/displays, consistent departmental signage to be sure students and visitors know they are in our department).

Action 5.1.F Establish a career forum series to hold geography discussions directed toward general students about critical issues we tackle (e.g., environmental sustainability and resiliency, parks, tourism, planning, agriculture, etc.).

Objective 5.2 Communicate our science to the broader public and non-expert audiences.

Action 5.2.A Increase the number of open access (OA) publications (e.g., journal articles, books) by leveraging university, college, and departmental resources to cover publishing costs.

Action 5.2.B Increase the number of presentations given at/with local and community organizations (e.g., Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Realtors Association, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, etc.).





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