

**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
STRATEGIC PLAN - DRAFT
Final Draft - 5/22/2014**

Vision Statement

We aim to *be a focal point for the integrative study of physical and human systems at Texas A&M University*. We aspire to sustain the human environment through research, teaching, and service activities that promote discovery, interpretation and application of knowledge about the biophysical, spatial and human processes that pattern the earth's surface.

Mission Statement

To develop and sustain research and academic programs through which our undergraduate and graduate students are stewards and proponents of the discipline based on a command of geographic knowledge, applications of geospatial technologies and theories, and professional skills in research, teaching and to apply and disseminate the knowledge we develop for the benefit of society.

Values

As a Department we value scholarly inquiry, service, and collegiality. We sustain a culture of scholarly excellence. We honor the principle of academic freedom, never forgetting that this freedom is purchased and justified by an absolute pledge of honesty and integrity. We recognize and respect the responsibilities entrusted to us by the citizens of Texas, including our responsibility to work to improve the lives of Texans. We also value collegiality and respect, manifest through transparency of decision-making processes ranging from undergraduate curriculum to graduate admissions to service assignments; shared sense of Departmental responsibilities and duties toward goals of Department, College, and University; mutual respect for the opinions and achievements (teaching, research, service) of colleagues; desire for equity in workload and compensation within the Department, College, and University; and a commitment to diligent service in Department, College, and University.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>We are a collegial and well-managed department. There is a sense of working for the common good (both for the Department and the College), and nearly all faculty are involved in governance.</p> <p>We maintain healthy interdisciplinary and international collaborations in support of our teaching, research, and outreach missions.</p> <p>We make significant contributions in SCH production and high impact teaching/learning activities. Our teaching contributes to the core curriculum, the Geography Department majors (Geography and GIST) and to the Environmental Programs in the College of Geoscience.</p> <p>Our faculty are excellent teachers who are consistently recognized with prestigious teaching awards.</p> <p>Our department has a healthy distribution of faculty by rank and everyone maintains an active research and outreach program.</p>	<p>We do not have sufficient faculty and instructors to meet our teaching <u>potential</u> and we rely too heavily on non-tenure track instructors for large amounts of SCH production.</p> <p>We lack adequate space for innovative teaching and research. Our teaching laboratories are unattractive, uninviting, and inhospitable, often in small spaces, limiting our ability to provide high-impact teaching and research opportunities.</p> <p>Our modest level of extramural funding is insufficient to compete with peer institutions. This produces an excessive reliance on GATs to fund graduate students. We infrequently obtain GAR or Fellowship awards to supplement GATs, hence limiting the number of graduate students in the program and negatively influencing the graduation rate for MS and PhD students.</p> <p>Our faculty does not receive national recognition in terms of awards and invited talks compared to our peers.</p>

Opportunities	Threats
<p>Development of international collaborations through Memorandums of Understanding with foreign institutions in support of international educational and research opportunities.</p>	<p>Faculty attrition in response to faculty salaries being well below the national mean, and because of difficulties associated with spousal accommodation.</p>
<p>Geographers are well suited to be members of large interdisciplinary teams (e.g. the University Grand Challenges). The linkages within our discipline and to others could be strengthened thereby increasing our interaction with the private sector and developing relationships with various government agencies.</p>	<p>Reductions in GAT funding resulting from the core curriculum changes may adversely affect the graduate program. Reduced funding for graduate student tuition, coupled with reductions in federal research support may result in fewer highly qualified graduate students enrolling in the program.</p>
<p>The Geospatial Research Center will create new opportunities for collaboration and external funding in which our faculty are able to lead and contribute to large multidisciplinary teams.</p>	<p>Reliance on an international graduate applicant pool is not sustainable with current funding availability and English-language restrictions.</p>
<p>New recruiting strategies have the potential to increase enrollments in GIST and GEOG majors.</p>	<p>Uncertainty about future institutional resource availability (space, personnel, infrastructure) may reduce the success of growing our programs.</p>
<p>Development of an on-line GIS professional MS program and the new GIST BS degree has the potential to increase SCH, WSCH and head count. It also has the potential to serve a broader audience and to make significant contributions to the workforce of the energy and geospatial intelligence industries, as well as opportunities in the public sector.</p>	<p>The cost of a college education is rapidly approaching the point where it will exceed the income potential of the typical Geography graduate.</p>

Critical Issues

- 1) **Increase in undergraduate majors and students:** We aim to increase the number of undergraduate majors in Geography and in the new BS degree in Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIST). We will also continue to maintain and increase the number of undergraduate students taking our core curriculum courses, particularly in human geography (e.g. GEOG 201, 201, among others). Success in this area will increase the overall SCH/WSCH numbers for the department and college, as well as graduation rates and head count and thus commit towards educating Texans. The consequences of failure include diminished operating, student fee and merit pool funding from the college and TAMU.
- 2) **Increase in Research Funding:** Increase our success rate (including the number of proposals, grant size, and the support provided to students) in securing external research support to sustain our graduate program. Success in this area will increase our national visibility, increase the number of publications and citations, increase GAR's, and decrease our reliance on GATs for funding the graduate program. The consequences of failure include the inability to attract the best graduate students to our programs.
- 3) **Elevate our Research and its Impacts:** Prioritize high impact research topics and publish the majority of our most significant and groundbreaking scholarly papers in higher impact journals, books, and conference proceedings, as well as nominate our most deserving colleagues to high prestige awards. Success in this area will increase our national and international visibility and contribute to TAMU's Vision 2020 objectives. The consequences of failure include not moving up in the research rankings and not being invited to talks, panels and other prestigious national and international collaborations.
- 4) **Access to Quality Teaching Space:** Space is critical for meeting the strategic goals of teaching and research set out by the Department. This is particularly problematic for GIST classes at all levels and the upper division physical geography classes that need laboratories. There is great potential for growth in GIST and if we want to increase the quality of our teaching and the number of students, we will need to repurpose some rooms for teaching, or seek access to additional space. Growth in majors and in core curriculum courses can also be limited by a lack of adequate space for teaching manifested by an inability to acquire good, large rooms at optimal times. The rooms and times problem may result in less efficient teaching (more faculty are needed to teach the same number of students), which will make it difficult for us to contribute significantly to College enrollment goals without additional resources.
- 5) **Retention:** Faculty retention is a critical issue because our salaries (collectively and individually) are below our College and our peer Departments. Moreover, as the national economy improves, our top performers (in research and teaching) may receive salary offers that greatly exceed present salary levels. Attrition, therefore, would undermine our overall productivity in research and SCH/WSCH production and rankings.

GOALS

A) Increase in undergraduate majors and students:

- **Goal:** Increase the number of GEOG and GIST majors.
- **Action:** Actively recruit freshman, change of major and transfer students, including the TAPS program (General Studies).
- **Goal:** Maintain (short term, 1 to 2 yrs.) and increase (long-term, 3 to 5 yr.) headcount, SCH, WSCH and number of degrees awarded.
- **Action:** Actively recruit freshman, change of major and transfer students and promote our core curriculum (service) courses (GEOG 201, 202, 203/213 and 205) with academic advisors in other colleges. Investigate industry and agency needs and engagement opportunities.
- **Goal:** Maintain (short term) and increase (long term) GEOG SCH and WSCH at a rate higher than the CLGE average.
- **Action:** Actively promote our core curriculum (service) courses (GEOG 201, 202, 203/213 and 205) with academic advisors in other colleges.
- **Goal:** Maintain and increase teaching capacity to assist in the CLGE and TAMU's plan for academic growth, especially in light of faculty departures to administrative positions in the CLGE.
- **Action:** Maintain and add Instructional Assistant Professor (especially in Physical Geography for 213 Labs and 203) and tenure track line(s).

B) Increase in Research Funding:

- **Goal:** Increase research funding by focusing the department in strategic areas that also ensure the department is able to meet programmatic needs.
- **Action:** Initiate white paper development to identify areas of strategic growth in terms of external funding opportunities, College and Department curriculum demands, societal needs, and changes in our discipline to guide our future hiring.
- **Goal:** Evaluate the possibility for teaching releases for grant related activities.
- **Action:** Perform a 3 to 5 year staffing plan to identify what our staffing needs are for meeting our obligations to the College and Department teaching needs.
- **Goal:** Increase the use of graduate courses as incubators for research proposals and proof of concept data.
- **Action:** Task the Graduate Committee with developing a feasibility plan for this and for creating a mechanism for using IEEF (new Fee Funds) to generate preliminary data.
- **Goal:** Increase the number of proposals submitted and grants received.
- **Action:**
 - (1) Provide funds for PIs to travel to meet with program officers.

- (2) Increase GEOG participation in the Council of Principal Investigators.
- (3) Establish an internal proposal improvement program (i.e. develop a culture of reading and commenting on colleagues proposals).
- (4) Coordinate the dissemination of grant RFP's among our faculty.
- (5) Encourage applications for DDRI and other graduate fellowships. Task the Graduate Committee with establishing in how-to seminar for graduate students to help with crafting successful DDRI and fellowship applications.

C) Elevate our Research and its Impacts:

- **Goal:** Increase integration of research specialties within the Department.
- **Action:** Initiate a white paper project to identify areas of strategic growth that will take advantage of high visibility research areas to guide our future hiring.
- **Goal:** Increase the number of national awards won by the members of our faculty.
- **Action:**
 - (1) Increase the size of the Awards committee and charge them with specific tasks. In the short term, they will evaluate which awards are included in the Academic Analytics rankings.
 - (2) Identify awards that are not on the list and make requests (through the appropriate channels) to have additional awards included (e.g. NCGE Awards).
 - (3) Consult with faculty about which awards individuals may be eligible for now or in the future.
 - (4) Establish a mechanism within the Department whereby costs of association dues can be defrayed.
- **Goal:** Increase the visibility and impact of our research.
- **Action:**
 - (1) In the short term (6 months to 1 year), we will establish a task force to evaluate ways to accomplish this.
 - (2) Encourage submissions to higher impact journals.
 - (3) Investigate best practices for using social media to get information about our research out to the relevant community (*Facebook Page, Twitter, ResearchGate, Google Scholar Pages*).

- **(4)** In the long term (1-2 years), we will implement the recommendations of the task force and evaluate its effectiveness over several years.

D) Access to Quality and Additional Teaching Space:

- **Goal:** Increase our access to quality teaching space for large lecture classes in support of the goals to maintain and increase SCH and WSCH production.
- **Action:** Develop strategic relationships with select programs (e.g. Colleges of Engineering and Biomedical Sciences) to gain access to large and quality teaching space for our core curriculum (service) courses and ensure that we can increase SCH and WSCH. Investigate ways to enlarge/combine existing classrooms
- **Goal:** Obtain funds to renovate and improve existing GIST laboratory space as well as other teaching laboratories in physical geography.
- **Action:** Work with the CLGE development officer to identify and persuade donors to contribute to named laboratories. Refurbish certain classrooms and laboratories in O&M and CSA.
- **Goal:** Evaluate all Geography space to ensure more efficient use of it given the future academic needs of the department.
- **Action:** Create a Space Committee Task Force to comprehensively evaluate all GEOG space in O&M and CSA/Teague during Fall Semester 2014 and forward recommendations to the GEOG Executive Committee.