


## **Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan – Executive Summary** **BA/BSc Geography, BSc Environmental Geosciences**

Completed by the Cyclical Program Review Committee (CPRC)

<b>Degree Programs Reviewed</b>	BA/BSc Geography BSc Environmental Geoscience
<b>External Reviewers</b>	Dr. John Kovacs, Nipissing University Dr. Kathi Wilson, University of Toronto
<b>Internal Representative</b>	Dr. Jim Schaefer, Department of Biology
<b>Year of Review</b>	2021-2022
<b>Date of Site Visit</b>	March 7-8, 2022
<b>Due Date for Implementation Report from the Program</b>	February 1, 2024
<b>Date Prepared by CPRC</b>	January 18, 2023
<b>Date Approved by Provost &amp; VP Academic</b>	February 3, 2023
<b>Signature of Provost &amp; VP Academic</b>	

Geography and Environmental Geoscience are small to medium-sized undergraduate programs housed within the School of the Environment at Trent University. The Geography Program is well established and is one of the oldest degree programs at Trent University, offering both a BA and BSc, while the Environmental Geoscience is a newer program, established in 2017.

Fieldwork is at the heart of Geography and Environmental Geoscience. Both programs emphasize the importance of field-based learning, making full use of Peterborough's natural setting in the Kawarthas. Since its inception, the Geography Program has placed a strong emphasis upon integrating teaching and research, providing students with numerous opportunities to observe and engage in research, while developing a common set of related practical skills.

With experiential learning at its core, Environmental Geoscience is a professionally accredited program that equips students with the skills needed to tackle pressing environmental challenges from climate change to contaminated groundwater to geohazards; it also fulfills all the knowledge requirements needed to apply to Professional Geoscientists Ontario (PGO) and eventually become a registered Professional Geoscientist (P.Geo.).

## Overview

During the 2021-2022 academic year, two undergraduate programs, BA/BSc Geography and BSc Environmental Geoscience, in the School of the Environment underwent a review. Two arm's length external reviewers, Dr. John Kovacs, Nipissing University, and Dr. Kathi Wilson, University of Toronto, were invited to review the self-study documentation. The virtual visit took place on March 7-8, 2022; Dr. Jim Schaefer, internal representative, from the Department of Biology participated in the virtual visit.

This Final Assessment Report (FAR), in accordance with Trent University's Institutional Quality Assurance Policy (IQAP), provides a synthesis of the cyclical review of the degree programs. The Report considers: the Self-Study, the External Reviewers' Report, and the Program and Decanal Responses.

A summary of the review process is as follows: the academic unit completed a self-study that addressed all components of the evaluation criteria as outlined in Trent's IQAP. Appendices included: Curriculum Vitae, Course Syllabi, Data Tables, Student and Alumni Surveys, a Library Statement of Support, Reports on Information Technology and the Canadian Association of Geographer's 2020 Annual Report. Qualified external reviewers were invited to conduct a review of the programs that involved a review of all relevant documentation (self-studies, appendices, and IQAP policy) and participation in a virtual visit. During the virtual site visit, reviewers met with senior administration, faculty, students and staff.

The External Reviewers' Report identified ten (10) recommendations with the primary focus being to provide a program that is both sustainable and of high quality. Ideally, recommendations will focus on a culture of ongoing and continuous improvement, and prioritizing student-centred learning and experiences.

Following receipt of the External Reviewers' Report, the Program and Dean provided responses to the Report. Based on the four review documents, the Cyclical Program Review Committee (CPRC) then reviewed and assessed the quality of the degree programs and reported on significant program strengths, opportunities for improvement and enhancement, and the implementation of recommendations. The Cyclical Program Review Committee added an additional recommendation specific to Geography.

The Implementation Plan identifies seven (7) recommendations for implementation, and specifies the proposed follow-up and the person(s) responsible for leading the follow-up. The Academic Unit, in consultation with their Dean, will submit an Implementation Report in response to the recommendations identified for follow-up. The Report is due February 1, 2024.

## Significant Program Strengths

The reviewers comment on the importance placed on the 'impressive number of experiential learning opportunities.' Students have considerable flexibility in course selection with wide spread access to a range of opportunities, including research opportunities, field trips, field work and hands-on labs. One example of this is the School's Trent Community Research Centre courses that provide undergraduate

students with independent research opportunities. This community-based research brings together the knowledge and research needs of the community with the research expertise of Trent University faculty and students.

One strength of the programs, and more importantly in the School of the Environment, is the integration and interdisciplinary nature of the many undergraduate degree programs offered within the School. Students can draw upon the many cross-listed courses within the School to enrich their individual learning experiences. As well, students have the flexibility to select from specialty programs including the Geographical Information Systems in partnership with Fleming College and the Trent-Swansea Law degree program.

Students graduating from this program acquire valuable skills that can be used as they enter different career paths, whether it be pursuing a graduate degree or a professional designation. The programs are structured in a way that enables students, by the time of graduation, to acquire and develop professional and transferable skills suited for advanced degrees and various workplace settings. In upper year courses, there are ample opportunities for experiential learning, working with community organizations or for conducting honours research projects under the supervision of faculty who are world-class researchers. In addition, the requirements of the Environmental Geosciences program are designed to meet the knowledge requirements of Professional Geoscientists Ontario (PGO). Thus, it is not surprising that students in these programs express high levels of satisfaction and graduates feel very well prepared for employment. The external review team noted that 'The success of the alumni in obtaining relevant employment, undertaking graduate studies and professional postgraduate degrees, and their acknowledged satisfaction and recommendation of their respective programs attest to the appropriateness of skills training and effectiveness of the programs and curriculum.'

Faculty in the School of the Environment are committed to providing their students with a rich learning environment; an environment that includes mentorship, interdisciplinary perspectives, and access to research opportunities at the undergraduate level. As noted by the External Reviewers, the School is distinguished by award-winning teaching, which is supported by results from student satisfaction, ranging from high to exceptional, where student place great value on mentorship and instruction whether it be in a lab, classroom or field trip setting.

### **Opportunities for Program Improvement and Enhancement**

The Self-Study indicates that there has been a general decline in students pursuing a degree in Geography. The School will need to seek opportunities to integrate the Geography program within the School and across University programs. This would allow for greater sharing of resources and possibly boost enrolment in courses that may be experiencing lower enrolments. Some opportunities to consider may be: the expansion of online course offerings, explore cross listing of courses, summer field courses, and partnering with the School of Education to offer more Geography courses to teaching stream students.

TSE is encouraged to work with Marketing and Recruitment teams to increase advertising and recruiting strategies to attract more students to the Environmental Geoscience program, and more specifically the Geography programs where there has been a noted decline in student enrolment.

As a function of continuous improvement, the School and programs are encouraged to regularly monitor and assess the level of student satisfaction and success to ensure curriculum remains relevant, current and effective within the discipline.

## Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan identifies those recommendations that require action by the academic unit. The Chair or Director, with members of the academic unit, will be responsible for leading the follow-up in consultation, and where appropriate with Dean(s) and other university departments. The Academic Unit will report on actions taken and the status of each recommendation by the due date provided. The Dean will be responsible for Reviewing the Implementation Report and submitting the final report to the Office of the Provost.

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-Up If no follow-up is recommended, indicate 'No follow-up report is required' and provide rationale	Specific Timeline For addressing or completing recommendation	Position Responsible for Leading Follow- up
<p><b>Faculty Resources</b></p> <p><b>Recommendation 1</b> That the Human Geography program be allocated at least one more full-time faculty hire.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 2</b> That the TSE consider hiring a physical geographer or geoscientist with expertise in remote sensing and geographic information systems, as well as a replacement for the retired climatologist.</p>	<p>No follow-up required.</p> <p>Faculty resource allocations are controlled through the annual Budget approval process, and are outside the purview of this review.</p>		
<p><b>Curriculum Review</b></p> <p><b>Recommendation 3</b> That the Human Geography program either remove its first-year requirements as prerequisites for upper level courses or consider a reframing of the first-year courses to better align the program in the TSE.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 4</b> That the TSE explore options for increasing the field-based experience for their EGEO students.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 5</b> That the TSE consider developing new cross-listed courses that could benefit the Environmental</p>	<p>That the TSE reviews its required prerequisites for upper year courses, continues to monitor opportunities to cross list courses that may be relevant for EGEO, and explores opportunities to add more global content to existing courses.</p> <p>That the Implementation Report specifically:</p> <p>For GEOG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe any changes made to prerequisites and changes to the Human Geography courses to better align the</li> </ul>	<p>Any curriculum changes should be in place for September 2024</p>	<p>Director</p>

<p>Geoscience program. Moreover, that the TSE contemplate accepting online geoscience courses offered at other institutions within Canada.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 8</b> That the geography program incorporate more global content in their courses and lab assignments and consider offering world regional courses.</p>	<p>program in TSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comment on the incorporation of global content in courses and lab assignments and offering world regional courses</li> </ul> <p>For EGEO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicate if cross listed courses have been added to the environmental geoscience program</li> <li>• Discuss whether TSE has considered accepting online geoscience courses offered at other institutions</li> <li>• Determine if additional field-based experiences are required in EGEO</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b> That the TSE consider student representation at regular program meetings.</p>	<p>That the TSE reviews its membership composition for departmental meetings with the goal to add a student voice to those meetings.</p> <p>The Implementation Report should provide an update on the inclusion of students on departmental committees.</p>	For start of departmental committees – Sept 2023	Director
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b> That CUPE instructors be provided with faculty mentors, a course instructor guidebook, and that the TSE institute regular meetings with CUPE instructors.</p>	<p>No follow up required.</p> <p>The TSE already has a mentor and instructional program in place.</p>		
<p><b>Marketing</b> <b>Recommendation 9</b> That the university recruitment team coordinate with the TSE in developing new approaches for advertising the EGEO [and GEOG] programs.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 11</b> That TSE explore a name change for Geography degree, to optimize</p>	<p>That TSE liaises with Trent recruitment/communication teams to optimize advertising and recruiting for EGEO and GEOG degrees.</p> <p>That TSE discuss whether changing the name of Geography would increase student enrolment in the program.</p>	Ongoing	Director in consultation with Recruitment and Communications

advertising and recruiting with a goal to increase program enrolment.	The Implementation Report should outline any new approaches to advertising the degree programs and the results from discussions on changing the name of Geography.		
<b>Recommendation 10</b> That the School set up a plan to monitor and assess their degree programs as well as to re-examine their commitment to the Circumpolar Diploma in lieu of a new institutional wide budget strategy.	No follow up required.  This is an ongoing process within the School.  The School regularly monitors and assesses programs offered, including resources, supports and enrolments. CPRC applauds the School in this area and encourages continued monitoring of enrolment growth and the value of service teaching.  The Circumpolar Diploma falls outside the purview of the review however it is evident that there is value in continuing the Diploma as students are boosting the enrolment in a number of Geography courses.		