

Eight-Year Program Review IBHE Report Summary: see attached Resources page

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY

1. **Eastern Illinois University**
2. **BS in Geography (45.0701)**
3. **January 21, 2025**
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5. OVERVIEW

In academic year 2008/2009 the program had 7 tenure/tenure-track unit A faculty, 3 annually contracted faculty, and 1 academic service professional. In academic year 2015/2016 the program had 8 tenured unit A faculty, 2 annually contracted faculty, and 1 academic service professional. In academic year 2024/2025 the program had 7 tenured faculty and 1 annually contracted faculty; however, 3 of the 7 tenured faculty are currently administrators (GEO Department Chair, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Associate Dean, and EIU's President). Effectively, our program is down to 4 tenured faculty and 1 annually contracted faculty with full teaching loads.

Illinois does not require geography be taught in middle or high school. This results in few, if any, students arriving as freshmen as geography majors. As we learned in a survey administered to alumni for our last program review, the vast majority (>80%) reported having "discovered" geography in one of our general education courses (e.g., GEO 1100G, 1120G, 1200G, 1400G). A much smaller cohort (~10%) were exposed to geography at a community college prior to having transferred to EIU. These percentages—especially that >80% of our majors find out about geography by taking a general education course—are ubiquitous across the country.

Fall enrollment, from AY16/17 to AY 23/24, in the Geography program has decreased from 25 to 24—a 4% loss. This rate has slowed substantially from the 46% loss between our AY 08/09 and AY 16/17 reviews. Because enrollment in our program is so closely tied to overall university enrollment, as described above, declines in student numbers in our program should not be surprising. During the same time period, on-campus undergraduate enrollment at EIU—where the vast majority of our potential majors originate—declined by 46%. Further, our enrollment trends have followed those of geography programs nationwide. In the early 1990s, roughly 4,000 students in the U.S. graduated with a geography undergraduate degree. The number of graduates peaked around 2012 at just over 5,000 and has since declined to just under 4,000 (as of 2021). Minors in GIS have increased from 12 in AY16/17 to 15 in AY24/25 and Earth Science is up from 5 to 8.

Achievements: Since our last review 22 students have had an internship experience; faculty authored 37 peer-reviewed publication and presented 47 scholarly papers and posters, many co-authored with students, and obtained \$70,000 in research funding. Faculty volunteered for, were active in, and provided leadership for numerous professional organizations, including editorial positions at several professional journals; served and held positions of leadership on dozens of department, college, and university committees; mentored 61 student research projects, many funded by grant money; earned 8 Achievement and Contribution Awards and 19 other EIU and non-EIU teaching/research/service awards; and reviewed over 200 scholarly articles and books.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program

[1] Changes in the overall discipline or field

Since our last review, the discipline of geography has undergone changes with regard to publicized research trends and technological advancements that impact the “techniques” areas of the discipline such as field methods, surveying, remote sensing, and GIS. Most of the time, such changes reflect overall societal issues/challenges where geographers then focus their attention (e.g., issues related to the environment, socio-political events, changes in culture)—but the fundamental priorities of the discipline remain focused on understanding the world by employing various modes of spatial analysis as they relate to human and physical systems.

[2] Student demand

From 2016 to 2024 the program graduated, on average, 8 students (high of 12; low of 5). The program’s share of credit hour production has declined slightly at the College level since the creation of the new College of Liberal Arts & Sciences in 2018, from 4.8% to 4.1% of total College hours. But when overall EIU undergrad/on-campus enrollment is factored in, our share of credit hour production has changed very little. In AY16/17, the Geography program produced 3,963 credit hours with 5,414 on-campus students; in AY23/24, those numbers were 2,913/3,716. Geography courses are found in several interdisciplinary minors: Anthropology, Africana Studies, Asian Studies, Broadcast Meteorology, Earth Science, Environmental Impact and Sustainability, GISci, and Latin American and Latinx Studies. Further, courses in GIS and Remote Sensing are used by other programs (e.g., The School of Business, Biology, Sustainability, and the School of Technology) as part of their undergrad and grad curriculums. Our discipline’s breadth and depth bode well for collaborative opportunities with other programs across campus that explore myriad human and physical environments, but which lack our faculty’s unique spatial expertise.

[3] Societal need

Geography—the study of places and the relationship(s) between people and their environment(s)—is necessary to understand and make informed decisions about local, regional, and global problems. Geographic information and geospatial, or location-based, technologies are growing sectors of the U.S. economy, influencing many facets of life, from the use of cellular phones and apps to monitoring the spread of deadly disease. The proliferation of these technologies has increased demand for those who can analyze and interpret geographic information.

The U.S. Department of Labor projects that the job outlook for 2023–2033 for Geographers is 3%, which is said to be “as fast as average,” with 100 job openings per year; cartographers and photogrammetrists is 5% (faster than average, 1,000 job openings per year); surveying and mapping technicians is 6% (faster than average, 7,600 job openings per year).

There will always be a need for geographers and practitioners of geography’s myriad sub-disciplines, regardless of what they are called (geographer, environmental scientist, cartographer, remote sensing specialist, urban planner, etc.).

[4] Institutional context for offering the degree

Geography is an important part of a general education and/or liberal arts curriculum, and because of its interdisciplinary nature affords students an opportunity to create unique, personalized degree experiences. Students can choose geography as a standalone degree, a minor, or coursework taken to earn a certificate or concentration to augment spatial understanding as part of another degree program (e.g. biology, business, technology, political science).

[5] Other elements appropriate to the discipline in question

b. Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement

The Geography program has engaged in robust assessment centered on individual course assessment instruments, exit and alumni surveys. A revision of the assessment process was performed in 2021 to examine the program mission and effectiveness of assessment protocols. This process revealed that many students were not engaged in the portfolio submission that previously was the primary assessment instrument. As a result, the portfolio portion of assessment was dropped in favor of pre/post-test comparison, embedded exam questions, and writing and speech assessments. All faculty have incorporated assessments into their courses and reported results on a regular basis, providing valuable data for course reflection and targeted course modification. To gather feedback on the value and cohesion of the program as a whole, exit and alumni surveys have also been added as a new assessment component. Drafts of these surveys have been prepared and are currently being reviewed and fine-tuned. Administration of the first exiting and alumni surveys is scheduled to take place in early summer 2025.

Assessment of graduate students is performed with embedded essay questions in final exams, as well as assessments of writing skills and presentation/communication abilities in courses as well as the required final internship projects. Though group numbers are small (usually 5-15), these assessments provide some objective measure of student performance. On depth of content knowledge, the student group mean ranked significant. For critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the overall mean was assessed as superior. Students, as a whole, were assessed as significant in written communication skills and satisfactory in oral communication skills. In evidence of advanced scholarship, the student mean was assessed as superior. Finally, in ethics and professional responsibility, the student mean was assessed to be superior.

c. Actions taken since the last review.

Because we made a substantial change to our program's options just prior to our last review—which was just prior to Illinois' budget impasse and the Covid years—we were able to navigate those obstacles better than other programs who had to make curricular changes during those times of uncertainty and change. However, minor changes have been made to the curriculum; for example: courses that had not been taught in quite some time and/or were not applicable to our program any longer were removed; GEO 3875 (Field Methods) was put back into our “core” course list because of the importance of those experiences for our students. Because of survey responses we received for our last review indicated that the majority of our majors originated from students taking our general education courses (e.g., GEO 1100G, 1120G, 1200G, 1400G), faculty have continued to enhance recruiting efforts in the classroom. Our program also initiated a number of 2+2 agreements with community colleges across the state. We have also begun to sunset our program's graduate-level PSM degree in GISci. This will allow two of our faculty members to focus more of their attention on our undergraduate programs in the areas of GIS and Remote Sensing. While the PSM may be going away, we are in the process of revising a graduate certificate in GISci to allow us to continue to serve other programs on campus that utilize our graduate-level GISci courses.

d. Actions to be taken as a result of the review.

The Geography program will continue to pursue recruiting activities both inside and outside of the classroom and university. The program is also discussing an upcoming merger with the other program in our department, Geology. This has been something that has been discussed for years within our department and by college/university administrators. While the merger will largely be in “name only,” it opens up the opportunity for considering a more collaborative relationship between two programs that, at present, share only one course. We also need to explore a better way of tracking our graduates and assessing their thoughts about our program (as we did for our 2015 IBHE review in the form of an emailed survey), as mentioned in part “b” (above).

Comments from the College Dean:

The B.S. in Geography remains a successful program at EIU. While enrollment in the program has decreased slightly since the last IBHE report (from 25 majors in Fall 2016 to 24 in Fall 2024), the trend is less acute than overall enrollment patterns at EIU which is important to consider given that the data suggest geography is largely a “discovery” major. Further, enrollment and graduation trends at EIU have followed those of geography programs nationwide. Nationally, the number of graduates peaked around 2012 at just over 5,000 and has since declined to just under 4,000 (as of 2021). In terms of the anticipated societal need, employment in geography-related occupations is projected to grow as fast as average (about 3%) from 2023 to 2033. Geography courses continue to remain popular general education choices and the number of students enrolled in the GIS and Earth Science minors have both increased since the last IBHE report. The program has made minor curricular changes since the last report with a focus on enhancing and streamlining program requirements.

We recommend a decision of **Program in Good Standing**

VPAA Decision:

- ☒ Program in good standing
- ☐ Program flagged for priority review
- ☐ Program enrollment suspended

VPAA Explanation:

45.0701 B.S. in Geography

The summary above describes several key developments within the B.S. in Geography program. As a discipline, geography has become much more tech-focused, with greater emphasis on field experience and geospatial technologies. The program’s course offerings have adapted accordingly, such as adding the Field Methods course to the core curriculum, and retiring courses that seemed less relevant to current undergraduates. The recent revamping (2021) of the assessment program has borne fruit in the removal of the portfolio requirement and the addition of several assessment tools that offer more targeted information throughout the major (comparative tests, exam questions, final internship projects, exit and alumni surveys). The Geography program remains dedicated to undergraduate general education, providing several engaging general education courses that are recruiting grounds for new majors. Of special note are the 2+2 year agreements with Illinois community colleges and the full exploration of a degree merger, which promises greater resource and curriculum sharing with the B.S. in Geology degree.



Resources for Completing the Eight-Year IBHE Program Review Report

Section 5. Overview

This section will focus the review for your reader.

In no more than half a page, please explain your program's mission and its relationship to Eastern's mission (and, if applicable, to the mission of graduate education). Identify similar programs in the state; distinguish your program from them. You also should identify your program's student learning objectives and career/further education objectives, and summarize significant changes, achievements (by faculty and students and the program itself), and plans for the future.

Section 6. Major Findings and Recommendations

These are the standard IBHE questions:

a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program:

- (1) changes in the overall discipline or field**
- (2) student demand**
- (3) societal needs**
- (4) institutional context for offering the degree**
- (5) other elements appropriate to the discipline in question**

What, if any, internal or external events have affected your program since the last review? Have enrollments, degree production, costs, student satisfaction, job placement, etc. changed significantly? Has the discipline's governing body approved a new name for the programs it represents; updated/revised curricular requirements; identified new markets; developed new emphases? Have nationwide demographic changes or social policies affected enrollments or requirements for good or for ill?

In addition to the items included in the "Accountability" section of the VPAA website (see the left-hand navigation box at <http://castle.eiu.edu/~acaffair/>), the resources listed below may help you to respond to item 6.a:

1. The IBHE Data Bank <http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/Data%20Bank/default.htm> includes the *Data Book*, which provides statewide discipline-based data on enrollments, degree production, and costs; as well as a variety of other data on statewide enrollments, degree production, credit hour production, and costs.
2. The Institutional Research web page available at <https://www.eiu.edu/ir/> houses EIU's Data Books and the IBHE Alumni survey results, as well as a great deal of information about EIU students (ACT scores, degrees awarded, retention rates, etc.)
3. Occupational projections are available from many professional journals and organizations, as well as:

- a. the Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://stats.bls.gov/>
 - b. ISBE's Educator Supply and Demand Report
http://www.isbe.state.il.us/research/htmls/supply_and_demand.htm
 - c. the Illinois Workforce Information Center
http://www.ides.illinois.gov/Pages/Workforce_Information_Center.aspx
4. Staff members in the Office of Institutional Research also are available to aid you in assembling and analyzing administrative data.

b. Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement

While 6.b also asks you to discuss other significant findings, it is basically the assessment section of the program review. As such, the responses here are crucial to your review's success. Departments that cannot demonstrate that their assessment programs meet the established guidelines will be expected to revise those programs within six months of the final review deadline. The IBHE's **assessment guidelines are appended to this document.**

Since your overview already identifies your student learning objectives, focus here on the assessment program and its results. What measures are you using to assess learning? How well are students achieving the objectives identified for them? What are their specific strengths and weaknesses? What changes have you made and will you be making as a result of assessment? Emphasize direct assessment, but mention the indirect measures you are using as well. Support your generalizations with specific data/evidence. And be sure to include feedback from key stakeholders—students, alums, employers, peer reviewers, etc.—since the IBHE requires it.

c. Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular

d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular

6.c and 6.d are straightforward. However, by this point, you already may have mentioned the most significant actions your department has taken/is planning to take. Do not repeat yourself. Merely refer the reader to a previous section or sections.

Section 7. Outcome

After consultation with the College Dean, the Provost's Office will indicate whether the program will be deemed "in good standing" or "flagged for priority review." The latter category is used to identify programs experiencing serious concerns—significantly low enrollments, high costs, negative accreditation findings, below-average pass rates on statewide exams, below-average employment placement rates, a continuing lack of satisfaction among students or employers, etc. Departments will be asked to examine and address the identified concern(s) and report the results in an interim review, due in 1-3 years. Typically, however, the IBHE program review results in a positive decision, and the next review is due in eight years.