



DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Comprehensive Program Review
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Associate of Arts in Geography and the
Environment

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Recommendations: Summary and List of Recommendations

Strengths and Accomplishments

- *Quality of Instruction.* The most frequently mentioned departmental strength in the student and alumni surveys was the quality and engagement of Geography and the Environment faculty.
- *Interdisciplinary Expertise and Courses.* Faculty span the human, physical, environmental, and mapping subdisciplines but also have training in a broad range of science, technology, humanities, and social sciences. Students benefit from courses that integrate a broad range of perspectives and applications to understand local and global issues. Geography and the Environment is well positioned to address the complex challenges we face from globalization and climate change to pandemics and food security. In addition, our faculty teach courses in Gender, Sexualities, and Women's Studies, and Humanities, and our courses contribute to multiple interdisciplinary degrees in HSS, LLPA, and S&T.
- *Experiential Learning.* Most geography courses incorporate experiential, "hands-on" learning, through lab work, fieldwork, and/or field trips. Geography-based field schools have been excellent learning opportunities for students. Additional financial and/or administrative support in developing these experiences would allow the department to expand these opportunities.
- *Open Labs and Laboratory Technicians.* The Geography Open Labs and Laboratory Technicians provide critical support to both students and faculty.

Weaknesses and Limitations

- *Enrollments.* Some Geography courses have seen lower levels of enrollment since the end of the pandemic. The department faces several challenges impacting enrollment, including overlap between some Geography and the Environment courses and Earth and Environmental Sciences courses. In addition, Geography is no longer being offered as a subject area to the same extent in the public school system, which has likely reduced students' familiarity with the discipline. Enrollments have been particularly low at the David Lam campus, signaling a need for an HSS or College-wide strategy for ensuring a range of course offerings in Coquitlam. These challenges are compounded by anticipated significant reductions in the number of international students due to changes in federal student permit policy.
- *Scheduling.* Scheduling a wide range of courses taught by only seven regular faculty (plus contract faculty) across two campuses can present logistical challenges. The existing matrix challenges our ability to schedule courses using the full week without overlapping our courses and competing with other departments. In addition, 4-credit courses scheduled to meet two hours, twice per week have faced difficulties in terms of room bookings as well as relative attractiveness to students. The department has been experimenting with different scheduling options to address these concerns.

Opportunities for Growth or Renewal

- *New Concentrations:* There are opportunities to develop further courses, concentrations, minors, or post-degree diplomas. In particular, students have indicated interests in more options focused on urban geography, environment and sustainability, and geographic information systems (GIS). That said, due to current enrolment concerns, the department's approach is currently to take a cautious approach to new course development. The new HSS interdisciplinary bachelor's degree (currently under development) is planned to include a

number of geography courses as part of its core curriculum, which will likely offer an opportunity to develop new courses in the future.

- *Collaborations:* We continue to explore opportunities for Douglas College Field Schools and Virtual Exchange, COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), and research projects that support student researchers (e.g. The Lost Streams of New Westminster project run by Mike McPhee). One of our Geography Lab Technicians is working with faculty in Anthropology on a funded research project.
- *Marketing:* Students, staff, and other faculty may not know the breadth and depth of topics covered by a specialization in Geography and the Environment and more advertising and outreach can help with this. We have taken advantage of opportunities from the Marketing and Communications Office (MCO) to develop several social media posts, some of which have had tens of thousands of views.
- *Scheduling Solutions:* We will continue to work collaboratively to ensure an accessible array of course offerings that match student needs and to develop a mix of in-person and online course offerings on both campuses.

List of Recommendations

Number	Report Component	Recommendation	Status / Timeline
1.	1	Revise curriculum guidelines for GEOG 1170 from mapping and cartography to geospatial technologies.	Underway (assigned to committee)
2.	3	Increase support for planning and coordinating field trips and field schools / study tours.	Underway (in discussion with dean and associate dean)
3.	4	Incorporate some online and hybrid course formats while maintaining an emphasis on in-person teaching	Underway (fully online, “hybrid synchronous,” and “hybrid asynchronous” courses)
4.	4	Explore potential to offer 2 nd -year courses on more frequent basis and develop additional 2 nd -year offerings	Cautiously Underway (new climate action course introduced in Winter 2025)
5.	4	Need for clearer guidance concerning distribution of courses between New Westminster and Coquitlam campuses	Underway (in discussion with dean and associate dean)
6.	5	Continue the development of new credentials in fields such as urban studies, environment, sustainability and GIS	Cautiously Underway (new course development possible as part of new interdisciplinary HSS degree)
7.	6	Adjust section offerings of lower-enrolled courses	Underway (ongoing adjustments to education plan)
8.	6	Explore feasibility of revising 1-year physical geography courses (GEOG 1110 and GEOG 1120)	Underway (to be assigned to committee)
9.	6	Increase visibility of department for recruiting new students	Underway (participation in info fairs, social media posts, and other outreach opportunities)
10.	6	Increase awareness of course offerings among current students	Underway (distributing upcoming course information each semester, giving guest lectures for courses in other departments, etc.)

11.	6	Coordinate with Earth and Environmental Sciences (EAES) to promote environmentally-themed courses at Douglas as well as to avoid course overlap	Underway (informal discussions as well as a request to the dean for more formal discussion)
12.	6	Improve communication with advising services regarding our courses, specifically as they fulfill requirements for AA degrees.	To be undertaken
13.	7	Examine current course offerings to determine how they are aligned with programs that alumni reported transferring into at SFU and UBC, and where practical and feasible, revise courses and create new transfer courses.	To be undertaken
14.	7	Develop pathways to additional programs within Douglas College, including the Indigenous Studies Certificate	To be undertaken

External Review: Geography and Environment, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Douglas College

Completed by Andr anne Doyon, Associate Dean, Undergraduate
Studies, Faculty of Environment, Simon Fraser University

9-22-2025

[...]

1.1 Findings

The four primary findings from the self-study are:

- 1) Declining enrolments in some first-year courses, particularly at David Lam campus. Judgement.
- 2) Students perceive faculty as the strongest program asset.
- 3) Geography is well positioned for interdisciplinary contributions (environment, sustainability, urban studies).
- 4) Alumni transfer successfully to SFU, UBC, and UVic, primarily into REM and geography.

1.2 Recommendations

In this section, 14 recommendations from the self-study are discussed.

Revise curriculum guidelines for GEOG 1170 from mapping and cartography to geospatial technologies. This is appropriate. Updating the course to emphasize geospatial technologies such as GIS reflects current disciplinary and employment trends. It aligns with both student interest and employer demand and brings the curriculum up to date with comparable programs elsewhere. Increase support for planning and coordinating field trips and field schools. This is highly valid. Experiential learning is a key strength of the program, but it is labour-intensive. Faculty need adequate administrative and financial support to sustain and expand these opportunities. Without support, such activities risk being curtailed, which would reduce the distinctiveness of the program.

Incorporate some online and hybrid course formats while maintaining an emphasis on in-person teaching. This is a reasonable and balanced recommendation. Online and hybrid courses can help broaden access, especially for working students and those at the Coquitlam campus. However, maintaining in-person delivery ensures that students still benefit from labs and fieldwork. The caution around academic integrity and learning outcomes is warranted.

Explore potential to offer second-year courses more frequently and develop additional second-year offerings. This is partially valid. While student surveys show demand for more second-year options, actual enrolments in these courses are often low. Any expansion should be cautious and data-driven, perhaps by consolidating courses, rotating offerings strategically, or developing interdisciplinary options that attract a wider pool of students.

Provide clearer guidance on distribution of courses between the New Westminister and Coquitlam campuses. This is an important recommendation. Persistent enrolment challenges at Coquitlam call for a coordinated faculty- or college-wide approach. Without a clear strategy, students at that campus will continue to face gaps in access, which undermines equity and recruitment in a growing region.

Continue the development of new credentials in urban studies, environment, sustainability, and GIS. This is forward-looking and appropriate but should remain cautious. New credentials could strengthen recruitment and visibility, and support transfer to four-year degrees, but current enrolment softness and resource constraints mean that development should be tied closely to college-wide initiatives, such as the new interdisciplinary HSS degree, rather than undertaken independently.

Adjust section offerings of lower-enrolled courses. This is valid and already in practice. It is a pragmatic response to fluctuating enrolments and avoids spreading limited faculty too thin. However, care must be taken to ensure that core or required courses remain available often enough to support timely program completion.

Explore feasibility of revising one-year physical geography courses (GEOG 1110 and GEOG 1120). This is a sensible recommendation. These courses compete with EAES offerings and have faced enrolment declines. Revising them to highlight their distinctiveness, or restructuring delivery (e.g., condensed formats, online/hybrid), could make them more appealing and avoid duplication across departments.

Increase visibility of the department for recruiting new students. This is essential and should be prioritized. Surveys and anecdotal evidence show that many students are unaware of Geography offerings. Outreach through marketing, recruitment fairs, and social media is appropriate, but more could also be done to target high school students where geography has been de-emphasized in the curriculum.

Increase awareness of course offerings among current students. This is appropriate and feasible. Guest lectures in other courses and timely distribution of program information can quickly improve visibility at minimal cost. This is a low-risk, high-return initiative. In addition, consider advocating for Geography courses to be added to other programs.

Coordinate with Earth and Environmental Sciences (EAES) to promote environmentally themed courses and avoid overlap. This is a strong and necessary recommendation. Course overlap most likely contributes to enrolment softness. Coordination can help both programs differentiate themselves, reduce competition for the same student pool, and present a stronger joint offering in environmental fields.

Improve communication with advising services regarding how Geography courses fulfill AA requirements. This is highly valid. Miscommunication with advisors can be a factor in low enrolments, especially in lab sciences. Clearer communication would ensure that students receive accurate information and could improve retention and recruitment.

Examine current course offerings to align with transfer programs at SFU and UBC, and revise or create new transfer courses where feasible. This is strategically important. Since most students transfer, alignment with receiving institutions is critical to student success and program relevance. Consider establishing block-transfer programs with four-year degree programs. This provides a more direct pathway for students hoping to continue their education and complete a BA, BSc, or BEnv. While resource intensive, this recommendation is valid and should be prioritized in collaboration with articulation committees.

Develop pathways to additional Douglas programs, including the Indigenous Studies Certificate. This is appropriate and timely. Linking Geography to programs like Indigenous Studies, Environmental Studies, and Urban Studies enhances interdisciplinarity, strengthens enrolment, and supports institutional goals around Indigenization and sustainability.

1.3 Overall

The methodology and data are broadly valid but weakened by reliance on dated surveys and low alumni response rates. Findings on enrolments, faculty quality, and transfer success are reasonable and well supported. Recommendations are mostly sensible and actionable, though expansion into new credentials should be delayed until enrolment stabilises. Priority should be given to revising curriculum, clarifying campus distribution, strengthening experiential learning, and improving advising and visibility. These will have the greatest immediate impact on student experience and program sustainability.

2. Reflections & Recommendations

In this section, six reflections and recommendations are provided based on the content of the self-study. These are primarily issues that were introduced but might benefit from more engagement or different responses than the program's current approach.

Indigenous Knowledges and Perspectives: Student surveys identified a lack of Indigenous content and intercultural awareness, and faculty themselves acknowledged gaps in this area. While individual instructors have undertaken professional development in Indigenization, there is opportunity for a more coordinated approach. **Recommendation:** Conduct a survey/scan of Indigenous content in all Geography courses to determine what is included, how it is included, and by whom. Seek opportunities to systematically integrate Indigenous perspectives and knowledges across the curriculum. In addition to the existing professional development, this could include seeking partnerships with Indigenous scholars or communities, hiring faculty with expertise in Indigenous geographies, and building field experiences or guest lectures that center Indigenous voices.

Connections and Applied Pathways: Students expressed uncertainty about employment outcomes and asked for stronger links to careers. The recommendations focus on enrolment management and curriculum adjustments but do not directly address employability or career preparation. **Recommendation:** Develop partnerships with employers, introducing guest lectures

from industry professionals with degrees in Geography and embed/emphasize applied career skills into existing courses (e.g., spatial awareness, research, GIS, critical thinking).

Data Limitations: The student and alumni survey data used in the self-study was collected in 2022, making it several years out of date. The report acknowledges this but does not propose a plan to gather fresher insights. **Recommendation:** Conduct student and alumni surveys on a more regular cycle, consider additional methods in person or online like focus groups or group interviews. This would ensure that the program is responding to current rather than lagging student needs.

Faculty Capacity and Succession Planning: Many recommendations call for expanding or rebalancing course offerings, yet the program has only seven regular faculty members and known scheduling constraints. Without additional capacity, delivering on these goals will be difficult.

Recommendation: Consider strategic hiring in key growth areas, such as GIS, urban geography, and Indigenous geographies. Succession planning should be considered to ensure program breadth and sustainability if faculty retirements or departures occur.

Technology and Academic Integrity: The report notes challenges with online delivery, limited lab access, and concerns about generative AI and academic integrity. However, the recommendations do not address these issues directly. These are challenges facing all post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation: Conduct a review of learning outcomes and preferences across both in person and online formats. Develop new online course formats in response to these findings, as well as current best practices in online learning. The program should also develop a clear strategy on the use of AI in coursework and assessments, ensuring both integrity and digital literacy for students.

Marketing and Outreach: Marketing is mentioned as a growth strategy, but the focus is mostly on social media. This misses a broader opportunity to re-establish geography as a visible and appealing discipline, especially given its reduced presence in the K-12 curriculum. While this may be bigger than the program, faculty, or Douglas College, it is important to participate in these discussions. **Recommendation:** Expand outreach efforts by partnering with high schools, community organizations, and school/career counsellors. Outreach could highlight geography's role in addressing climate change, urban development, and sustainability, helping to attract both domestic and international students.



**DOUGLAS COLLEGE COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW (CR)
RESPONSE FROM THE
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC AND PROVOST**

Douglas College Administration policy A38: Program Review requires a follow-up plan be developed by the Vice President, Academic and Provost, in response to the Self-Study and External Report.

FACULTY (Lead Dean/Associate Dean)	Humanities and Social Sciences	
Department / Program	Geography and the Environment	
Date Submitted	2025	
External Review Panel (ERP) [List all]	Andreanne Doyon, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies, Faculty of Environment, SFU.	
Reason for Timing of Comprehensive Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Schedule (routine) or <input type="checkbox"/> Off-cycle, due to emergent concerns (specify below) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in discipline/field/licensing <input type="checkbox"/> New program development <input type="checkbox"/> Demand/enrolment/budget concerns <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) 	
Date of last Comprehensive Review	<i>Click or tap to enter a date.</i>	
RESPONSE/RECOMMENDATIONS		
SUMMARY RESPONSE AND VPA RECOMMENDATIONS In particular, DDP name should focus on the following:	<p>In their report, the external reviewer indicates that the department of Geography and the Environment offers a wide range of current and skills-rich lower division courses that prepare students for transfer well.</p> <p>The reviewer agreed with all of the recommendations identified by the department, assessing for each, how necessary or urgent acting on recommended actions was. The reviewer recommended ensuring that the department work towards the continued visibility of courses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate risk • Indigenous geographies • Urban resilience • Spatial data ethics <p>In addition, the reviewer recommended that the department engage with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives • Connections and Applied Pathways • Data Limitations 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty Capacity and Succession Planning • Technology and Academic Integrity <p>These recommendations are important and relevant to the future of the department; I would, however, recommend <i>prioritizing</i> them in ways that align with the College’s 2025-2030 Strategic Plan’s Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand experiential learning and applied research opportunities for students (Connections and Applied Pathways) • Equip students with digital and information literacy knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to their areas of study (expanding on Technology and Academic Integrity) • Continue to build on the College’s Indigenization Strategy (Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives) <p>I also support the work that the department has contributed to the development of the new proposed degree in Sustainability and Social Innovation and encourage the department’s continued participation in this possible future degree offering.</p> <p>I would also recommend that the department coordinate with Earth and Environmental Sciences to reduce overlaps and increase interdisciplinary collaboration opportunities.</p> <p>As per the College’s routine follow-up to comprehensive program reviews, the Department is to submit its <u>Implementation and Action Plan (IAP)</u> to the Dean within 45 days of receipt of this Report, and to report back to the Dean one year after submission of the IAP to account for progress made.</p>
All Self-Study recommendations accepted?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No [If no, brief explanation.]
All External Report recommendations accepted?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No [If no, brief explanation.]
Next scheduled PR (5 – 7 years):	2032

Dr. Manuela Costantino

May 15, 2026

Vice-President, Academic and Provost

Date