

June 28, 2012

TO: Planning and Budget Committee

FROM: Lisa Rankin, Interim Dean, Faculty of Arts

SUBJECT: Department of Geography Action Plan

Please find enclosed the Department of Geography's Action Plan. The APR panel found that the Department of Geography offered an "outstanding" program and provided a "cohesive" and "collegial" work environment. Nevertheless, they still had seven significant recommendations.

1. Hiring two new Faculty above renewal
2. Review the Graduate Program
3. Increase Operating Budget
4. Resolve Space Issues
5. Expand Staff
6. Reduce Workload
7. Improve interaction with the Office of Research Services

I met with Department Head, Dr. Charles Mather in late February to discuss these recommendations and the department response to them. Many of the issues such as faculty and staff complement, operating budget, space and workload are ongoing university-wide, resource-related issues. Nevertheless, the Department of Geography has suggested that it become involved in various planning groups to ensure that their voice is heard in each of these areas. The Dean of Arts has also provided funds for a quarter-time staff position to help alleviate the burden of administrative duties in this very active Department. As well, promised funds from the Provost and Vice-President Academic, while not related to the operating budget, may help the Department of Geography to do more with their annual budget in the 2012-13 fiscal year. The Department of Geography is also beginning a review of its graduate program in light of the review panel's suggestions. Finally, since the APR process the Office of Research Services has begun a consultation process with members of the Faculty of Arts in order to identify specific research needs.

Overall, I found that this APR reflected very highly on the Department of Geography and that they have found very suitable ways of addressing key issues. A Progress Report will be submitted one year from now.

Lisa Rankin
Interim Dean, Faculty of Arts

c: Dr. David Wardlaw, Provost & Vice-President (Academic)
Dr. Charles Mather, Head, Department of Geography
Ms. Kim Myrick, Senior Planning Analyst, CIAP

Action Plan, Academic Programme Review (2011/12)
Department of Geography
Memorial University

Introduction

Before discussing the details of our action plan, it is important that we outline some of the key findings of the Academic Programme Review (APR) Committee. The APR Committee's report is very positive about what we have achieved since our previous APR in 2001. They found that we have an "outstanding programme that demonstrates sustained and innovative achievement in the areas of teaching, research, learning and engagement". It was pleasing to note that they recognised our cohesiveness as a Department and the high level of collegiality. These are important and ongoing goals that we work hard to maintain. The committee recognized our "sustained commitment to undergraduate and graduate instruction". This finding was no doubt supported by our detailed survey of undergraduate and graduate students that was administered by the Geography Department – with the support of CIAP – in 2008.

The APR Committee noted that we had developed our research to an "outstanding level". This is a significant development given that developing a stronger research culture was a key recommendation of our previous APR. The APR Committee also found that we demonstrate a "remarkable record of engagement in local and regional outreach", which is consistent with the University's mission statement that recognizes 'our special obligation to the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador'.

Although the APR Committee described us as a relatively small geography Department in Canada, we nonetheless 'punch well above our weight category', and we have the potential to "be at the forefront of geography in Canada". In order for us to achieve this goal the APR Committee identified several obstacles that must be addressed. These included: faculty complement, graduate programme, operating funds, space, staffing, workloads and research support.

The APR Committee's seven specific recommendations address these key constraints:

1. **Hiring of new faculty:** The Committee recommended hiring *two incremental positions* in the fields of human health and security and hydro-climatology. This is *over and above* hires that we will be making through the replacement of upcoming faculty retirements or ongoing, targeted recruitment initiatives. The justification for the two new positions is based on the growth our graduate student group and the implications that this growth will have on our overall teaching programme. It is also based on the teaching and research synergies within the Department and beyond that will come from these strategic hires.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE: We will be motivating for the new hires in the 2012 (health and security position) and 2013 (hydro-climatology position) Faculty of Arts appointment meetings. The APR Committee's strong endorsement of the need for these new hires should play an important role in strengthening our case for the new hires within the Faculty of Arts and the Office of the Vice President Academic.

2. **Review of the graduate programme:** The APR Committee recommended a review of the graduate programme by a committee that is made up of members that are internal and external to the Department. The APR Committee makes a number of specific recommendations that should comprise

the remit of this committee including: the offering of distinct MA/MSc programmes; the introduction of a graduate level statistics course; and revisiting the format of the PhD comprehensive exam.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE: We are in agreement with this recommendation of a review, although we are not in agreement with some of the specific suggestions (e.g. separate MA/MSc streams). We would, therefore, propose that the remit of this committee to go beyond the terms defined in the APR report. We would like a comprehensive review of our graduate programme that will contribute to a strategic plan for growing and enhancing it. This will require a detailed assessment of our recent growth, a survey of recent graduate students and employers, and a set of recommendations for moving forward. We have the largest and most vibrant geography graduate programme in Atlantic Canada and it is crucial that we develop a strategic plan to both grow and sustain our programme.

The Department's Graduate Committee will begin discussing the details of this review in March 2012. We will request support for this review from the School of Graduate Studies and the Faculty of Arts.

- 3. Operating budget:** The APR committee noted that our operating budget is 'desperately low'. They noted that the low budget was hampering our ability to offer enhanced teaching opportunities and to sustain our existing teaching infrastructure. The Committee recommended that our budget be substantially enhanced. We agree. Our current budget provides little beyond allowing us to print paper and buy pens.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE: We will continue to motivate, as we do every year, for a larger operating budget. We are hopeful that the Faculty of Arts will consider our larger budget requests favourably given the APR Committee's recommendation. Our next expanded budget request will go forward in February 2012.

- 4. Space:** The APR Committee found that the space we occupy is 'clearly inadequate'. They identified new space requirements that are associated with meeting the needs of existing and anticipated faculty; the storage of large and expensive field and laboratory equipment; a wet teaching laboratory; and graduate students. The Committee also recommended clustering the administrative offices.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE: While space is a problem for everyone at Memorial, we would argue that the challenge is particularly acute for a Department like ours that has a growing graduate cohort and an active research programme. The constraints of space are likely to become more acute as we hire new research active faculty and as our graduate programme grows. We think that it is logical to think about clustering the Departmental administrative offices. As a practical way forward, we will draw up a space plan outlining our existing and future space needs. We will present this space plan to the University's Space Planning and Administration unit in September 2012.

- 5. Staffing:** The APR Committee notes that our greatly expanded graduate programme has 'not been matched by the university resources needed to fund critically needed clerical support'. They recommend the appointment of an additional half time staff position dedicated to the geography graduate programme.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE: With the support of the Faculty of Arts, we are in the process of motivating for a half-time position. This person will be responsible for two CRCs, one in archaeology and one in geography

(Blaser and Chuenpagdee), and will also support the administration of our graduate programme. The new position is a welcome development, but we will need to work hard to ensure that the complexity of this position, which will involve juggling research support for CRCs and graduate support for the Department's students, is workable and sustainable. As long as this appointment goes through the administrative requirements in Human Resources, the appointment should be in place by March 2012.

- 6. Workload:** The APR Committee noted that the workload for geography faculty at Memorial is higher than the norm at research-intensive Canadian Universities. The Committee recommended reducing the teaching load to 2+2 to "reflect the new demands of a growing graduate programme, to support increased research activity, to foster excellence in teaching, (and) to promote a greater equivalence between the Faculties of Arts and Sciences".

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE: The teaching workload for faculty at Memorial University is established through the Collective Agreement. Reducing the workload to 2+2 as recommended by the APR Committee would require agreement across the Faculty of Arts. The culture within the Department does not see teaching as an obstacle to research. On the contrary, there is consensus within the Department that teaching and research are, and should be, complementary. Nonetheless, younger faculty in geography clearly feel the pressure of a demanding teaching load, the requirement to be research active, and the need to supervise graduate students. Until the Collective Agreement changes, we will find creative ways of ensuring that younger faculty in particular are able to balance teaching, research and service.

- 7. Office of Research Services:** The APR Committee report notes the challenges that Geography faculty have had in dealing with the Office of Research Services. The challenges include bureaucratic difficulties and delays in payments. The APR Committee recommends that the ORS should support and enhance the capacity of faculty to seek funding and conduct research.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE: The problem identified by the APR Committee with the Office of Research Services should not be interpreted as a problem that is specific to faculty in the Geography Department. In other words, the solution to this problem is not to 'improve' relations between the Geography Department and the ORS. The Office of Research Services is in the process of discussing research needs with a select group of faculty in Arts (including geography). This will go some way to resolving the problems identified in the APR. Any additional or ongoing issues we have with the ORS will be negotiated through the Dean of Arts' office.

Charles Mather
6 February 2012