

April 21, 2006

To: Jeff Adams, Assistant Vice Provost
Office of the Provost, Montana Hall

Fr: Dave Lageson, Head
Department of Earth Sciences

Re: Assessment Plans – Department of Earth Sciences

The tenured and tenure-track faculty members in the Department of Earth Sciences have met numerous times throughout the 2005-2006 academic year to discuss past, present and future assessment strategies. This is an evolving issue that engenders serious discussion, as some feel strongly that we should do more assessment while others think our current efforts are adequate. Collectively, however, we have decided to “ramp up” our assessment efforts to help with future curricular decisions (i.e., course and program improvements), measure the *esprit de corps* of our graduating students, and hopefully obtain bits of feedback information that would otherwise be lost.

Past assessment activities have been based on a document prepared in October 2004 (in the attached folder), which summarizes long-time practices in the department. In this document, we outlined learning objectives, measurement tools and plans, and expected competencies. Of these, the measurement tools/plans are the most relevant with respect to documentation for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. These include short-term assessment tools (e.g., syllabus, quizzes, exams, problem-oriented work [sometimes called “authentic assessment”]), student course evaluations, annual faculty reviews, reviews by senior faculty for P&T documentation, and annual departmental curricular assessment during fall retreats. There are additional assessment strategies for graduate courses and graduate students as outlined in the 2004 document.

In addition to this fairly comprehensive assessment strategy, we are implementing the following assessment tools this spring:

1. **Yearly external review board meeting**, during which all aspects of the Department of Earth Sciences will be scrutinized by a group of highly respected geoscience leaders selected for their experience and diversity (to represent various aspects of the department – geology, geography, etc.)
2. **Exit survey** given in our senior capstone courses (GEOL 423 – Field Geology, and GEOG 405 – Geographic Thought).

I hope this information helps frame the assessment activities of the Department of Earth Sciences. Please let me know if you need further information or details. In advance, thanks for your input and guidance.

Department of Earth Sciences, MSU-Bozeman Assessment Management Structure

Department Head – responsible for oversight of assessment activities in the department, including “teaching evaluations” for all courses (as part of faculty annual reviews), graduate surveys, exit exams, new course proposals, curricular revisions for on-line and paper catalogs, alumni activities, etc.

Executive Committee – one tenured faculty member in geography and geology, elected by the entire faculty on a yearly (AY) basis

Curriculum and Assessment Committee – A committee consisting of tenured or tenure-track faculty members who work with the department head to implement assessment activities on a yearly basis, periodically review assessment practices, and compile and interpret the results of assessment activities. The committee will periodically provide an overview of assessment results and recommendations to the faculty. For convenience, it would be good to have at least one member also on the departmental P&T committee.

External Advisory Committee – A committee consisting of alumni and distinguished non-alumni who will meet once per year to a) provide accountability for our internal assessment activities, b) provide advise and council regarding the future direction of the department, and c) be a voice of advocacy for the department throughout the year.

Student representatives – Not formally assigned at this time (spring 2006)

Geology – Geohydrology – Snow Science – Paleontology Options
Department of Earth Sciences, MSU-Bozeman

Pyramid of Undergraduate GEO-Cognitive Skills

