Department of Geography
Strategic Plan 2018 - 2023
Our Roadmap to the Future

We are the top ranked* Geography Department in a Canadian comprehensive university, amongst the top five in Canada overall, and a core environmental discipline at SFU. We focus on the spatial dimensions of human societies, the Earth’s biogeophysical environments, and the ever more complex interactions that exist among the human, natural and built environments. We offer a broad range of world-class research, educational and community-engaged opportunities. The work of the Department of Geography takes place on the unceded, ancestral territories of the Coast Salish peoples of the xʷməθkwəy̓am (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaɁ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

This Strategic Plan describes how we will continue to build on our reputation of excellence in the next 5 years. Our vision, guiding values, strategic objectives and initiatives lay the groundwork for meaningful projects that both align with, and advance broader, university-wide plans. This is a living document and our plans will continue to evolve.

Faculty Snapshot (2013 - 2017)

- Faculty members engaged in 21-23 research projects, and 145 community engagement projects, producing 30 books,

- >320 peer reviewed publications, and >160 other publications, giving >550 presentations, in 38 countries, with >160 media engagements, and >$9M in research funding, garnering 14 research and teaching awards

* 2017 QS World University Rankings
550
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS*
(Honours, Majors, Certificates)

Bachelor of Arts (BA)
Geography
Geography Environment Specialty

Bachelor of Environment (BEnv)
Global Environmental Systems
(new Fall 2016)

Bachelor of Science (BSc)
Physical Geography
Geographic Information Science

Joint Major
Business and Geography

Minors
Geography
Physical Geography

Certificates
Spatial Information Systems
Urban Studies

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT SNAPSHOT

>3800 students taught in 77 course offerings on 3 campuses
>25% of courses include experiential learning outside the classroom
>30 co-op placements
9 students had research experience in a faculty lab
>95% employment of graduands*
active Geography Student Union (GSU)

66
GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCS*

Master of Arts (MA)

Master of Science (MSc)

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT SNAPSHOT

Graduate students and postdocs from 13 countries and 6 continents benefited from

a proactive Geography Graduate Association (GGA) and

>230 hours of in classroom teaching experience, and produced

>100 publications, delivered

>70 presentations in 8 countries, and garnered

14 scholarly awards

* 2016-17 data
+ BC Student Outcomes Survey
Vision

To be the leading Geography Department in Canada, globally known for our creative, cutting-edge research that defines the evolving discipline and fuels the education of informed and responsible global citizens through innovative, engaged and relevant teaching.

Guiding Values

➤ **Space and place matter.** They drive a broader understanding of environment that includes natural, built, social and organizational environments, and necessarily includes theory, science, policy and practice and embraces other traditions of enquiry that are not motivated by questions of human-nature relations, such as the many cultural, social, and economic aspects of urban studies and sustainable communities, the geological tradition in earth sciences, and the society-space tradition in geography.

➤ **The power of ideas and skills.** We pursue and value discovery and creation of new knowledge and innovative educational approaches that foster ways of thinking, knowledge, skills and experiences that engage, inspire and challenge our students, staff, faculty, alumni and community members to become better informed and responsible global citizens.

➤ **Learning by doing.** We practice and value experiential learning in its many varied forms throughout our geography curriculum. Given the multifaceted nature of geographical knowledge, we are committed to providing active, student-centered learning environments such as fieldwork and project-based exercises. Such learning experiences promote understanding of practical applications of geographic concepts to solve real world problems; enhance critical thinking; develop communication and interpersonal skills for working effectively in teams and community settings; and, encourage the acquisition of transferable skills for various job markets.

➤ **Interdisciplinarity.** As a discipline that straddles the natural, social and information sciences we embrace interdisciplinarity and value the advances in knowledge and understanding that can be made at the intersections of disciplines.

➤ **Diversity.** We value diversity in the Department and University. It is a fundamental source of insight and innovation for our research and teaching practices, and it enriches all communities inside and outside academia. Diversity helps make space for the excluded by addressing injustices that prevent marginalized groups from participating in University life as students, faculty and staff. We are committed to learning from and putting into practice contemporary initiatives concerned with promoting equity, diversity and inclusivity in educational contexts such as indigenization and participatory research with local communities.

➤ **Collegiality.** We value an environment of equity and inclusion in which people treat one another with honesty, respect and with each other’s best interests in mind. We value fair, transparent and inclusive decision making.
Strategic Objectives

1. Faculty Renewal and Retention

Important discoveries and changes in thinking happen through cutting-edge research and research-led teaching. We seek to strengthen our world-class reputation for creative and cutting-edge research that defines the evolving discipline, and for innovative, engaged and societally-relevant teaching at all levels. The best way to do this is to hire more top-ranked faculty who will make the Department a place of sophisticated, challenging research and intellectual reflection and debate. This will attract students and strengthen our top-ranked reputation. We acknowledge the diversity of our student body. By also seeking equity, diversity and inclusivity in our faculty renewal, we will further increase the diversity and feeling of belonging in the students that we attract. We seek to further support faculty by cultivating collegial governance, formalizing mentorship, celebrating faculty success, and facilitating pedagogic innovation.

2. Student Life, Learning and Success

Each of our students deserve a functional, safe and supportive learning environment and a rewarding set of learning opportunities. We seek to improve the student learning experience by providing the infrastructure and technological backbone necessary for contemporary teaching and learning, supporting learning communities, and enhancing co-curricular activities and communication around learning opportunities and success.

3. Academic Curriculum

A geographic curriculum that reflects the latest advances in knowledge and thinking, and that is also innovative and societally relevant is central to our mission. We seek to improve curriculum quality by innovating curriculum design and delivery, advancing Indigenization of curriculum, integrating employment ready skills and knowledge of the geographic profession into curriculum, and enhancing instructional support.

4. Engagement

Individual connections and institutional collaborations are at the heart of societal change. We seek to better engage our faculty, staff, students and alumni in departmental life and create a strong and enduring alumni network. We also strive to better engage with society beyond our department by better communicating meaningful societal and environmental changes that we are making regionally, nationally and internationally through community collaborations.

5. Optimize Operational Management

Delivering educational opportunities in a way that is fiscally responsible, efficient, and judicious is central to our publicly funded institution. We seek to further optimize operational management of the department.
Initiatives

TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Faculty Renewal and Retention

- Research faculty renewal
- Hire teaching faculty
- Pursue research chairs
- Facilitate faculty retention

Student Life, Learning and Success

- Renovate the RCB Hall building to provide a safe and functional environment for contemporary geographic education
- Improve communication around learning opportunities in Geography
- Enhance research opportunities for undergraduate students
- Enhance support for student initiatives
- Facilitate student success
- Develop a richer calendar of events

Academic Curriculum

- Redesign curriculum to better reflect faculty strengths and contemporary geographic education
- Define educational goals and develop an assessment process
- Advance Indigenization of the curriculum
- Integrate employment-ready skills and knowledge of the geographic profession into curriculum
- Enhance experiential learning opportunities
- Expand offerings on Surrey campus
- Explore the feasibility of new interdisciplinary programs
- Improve student access to courses and programs
- Enhance instructional support for TAs and sessionals
Engagement

- Develop and implement a department communications plan
- Facilitate community engagement
- Encourage life-long alumni engagement

Optimize Operational Management

- Enhance office sustainability
- Enhance automation of the Spatial Information Science labs
- Rationalize printing services
- Revise staff job descriptions to meet department needs
- Develop a resources inventory
- Revise process for resource purchase prioritization
- Support staff professional development