

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Geography is the academic discipline that bridges the natural and social sciences. It examines relationships between human activities and the natural and built environment, with the goal of moving society towards a more sustainable and socially-just future. Geography's holistic approach bridges SSU's liberal arts curriculum – which is most evident in its five GE courses spanning the B1 (physical), D2 (historical), D5 (international) and E (integrated person) curriculum areas.

The Geography Department at SSU is a work-horse. It has the highest SFR in the School of Social Sciences, expressly because it plays such a broad and valuable role in the University's GE curriculum. The Department's upper-division curriculum serves many majors across the University as well, including ENSP, Global Studies, Geology, Biology, Anthropology and others.

This Self Study identifies the Department's many strengths, but highlights certain curricular deficiencies and scheduling bottlenecks as well. It shows how growth in this Department would serve both the major and the University. Most importantly, it lays out the Department's vision, identifying the curriculum that it would like to strengthen and the role that the Department would like to play in SSU's future.

The Department proposes to hire a new faculty member in the field of geospatial analysis and its application to human-environment interactions. A new hire would:

- Build curriculum that examines how environmental systems provide essential services for human societies, such as water storage and flood protection, soil conservation, and carbon sequestration, and analyze how these services should be sustainably managed in the face of climate change, drought, population growth, urbanization, and other major drivers of change. These courses would integrate the physical and social sciences, and utilize geospatial techniques to model these dynamic geographic processes and the impacts of different policy scenarios.
- Strengthen CIGA, the Department's geospatial analysis research center, which in the last 5 years has supported over 40 students with paid internships that provide valuable skills in the fields of remote sensing, geospatial analysis and scientific computing applied to local- and continental-scale land change and ecosystem conservation issues. This new faculty member would develop a research agenda that complements CIGA's successful teacher-scholar activities by using geospatial analysis and modeling to address complex spatial problems associated with human-environment interactions in natural, rural and/or urban landscapes.
- Provide SSU students across many majors with highly marketable skills relevant to natural resource management and conservation, land-use planning, environmental and social sustainability, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and geospatial analysis and modelling.
- Ensure the Department's ability to teach a full suite of GE courses and fulfill the FTES to which it is committed.
- Increase the Geography Department's visibility within the University as a hub of curriculum and research activities focused on sustainability.