

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY



***FACULTY OF ARTS AND CULTURE
EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA***

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1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

The subject review process introduced by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors and the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, now directed by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council, has been designed to evaluate the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline, for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in a university. It specifically focuses on the quality of the student learning experience and student achievement.

Higher education is a 'public good' and plays a crucial role in the economic and social development in Sri Lanka. As public institutions engaged in the delivery of this public good, the universities in Sri Lanka have a responsibility to maintain and improve upon the high standards and the quality of higher education.

This report presents the findings of a review of the quality of education provided by the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts and Culture of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka (EUSL). The review was conducted at the Department from 30th June to 2nd, July 2008 adhering to the guidelines provided in the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Sri Lankan Universities*, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002. The review process was based on the Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the Department of Geography and supported by the information gathered from the three-day site visit made to the department at Vantharamoolai, Batticaloa.

The SER has been prepared under following headings:

1. Objectives, Learning Outcomes and Details of Programs
2. Design of Curriculum, Content and Review
3. Students, Staff and Facilities
4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods
5. Admissions, Quality of Students and, Student Progress
6. Student Feedback
7. Postgraduate Research and Study Program
8. Peer observation
9. Skills development
10. Academic Guidance and Counseling, and
11. Conclusion

In the review process attention was focused on the following eight aspects as given the *Quality Assurance Handbook*:

1. Curriculum design, content and review.
2. Teaching learning and assessment methods.
3. Quality of students including student progress and achievements.
4. Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative.
5. Postgraduate studies.
6. Peer observation.
7. Skills development, and
8. Academic guidance and counseling.

The evaluation of eight aspects was supplemented by the information gathered at the,

- discussions held with the, Vice Chancellor, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Culture, Head of Department, academic staff, non-academic and undergraduate students representing different years and programs.
- observation of department facilities (lecture rooms, practical rooms, staff rooms, office space, library, computer centre, etc.) and other facilities
- observation of teaching sessions
- reviewing of documents available at the department, such as question papers, minutes of departmental meetings, books, magazines and journals

Each of the eight aspects was judged as good or satisfactory or unsatisfactory paying attention to the strengths, good practices and weaknesses found in each area.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTY AND THE DEPARTMENT

The predecessor of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka, the Batticaloa University College was established in August 1981. The College comprised two faculties, namely the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Agriculture, both affiliated to the University of Peradeniya. In 1986 under Section 2 of the University Act, the Batticaloa University College was elevated to university status and named the Eastern University of Sri Lanka. Two years later, two more faculties, the Faculty of Commerce and Management and the Faculty of Cultural Studies were added. In 1991, the Faculty of Cultural Studies was renamed as the Faculty of Arts and Culture. Recently, the EUSL was expanded to include a Faculty of Health Care Studies. The EUSL has a campus at Trincomalee comprising two Faculties, the Faculty of Applied Sciences and the Faculty of Communication and Business Studies. The Swami Vipulanande Institute of Aesthetic Studies at Kallady, Batticaloa where degree programs in Music and Dancing are conducted is also attached to EUSL.

The Faculty of Arts and Culture consists of eight departments of study: Arabic, Fine Arts, Geography, Islamic Studies, Languages, Social Sciences, Comparative Religion and Social Harmony and Education and Health Care. The disciplines of Economics, Christianity, History and Hindu Civilization are conducted under the Dean of the Faculty and separate coordinators have been appointed to implement the teaching programs.

The Faculty of Arts & Culture offers a B.A. General Degree program of three year duration and a B.A. Special Degree program of four year duration. These programs are presented under a credit-based course unit system and the academic year divided into two semesters. A student following a General Degree program should collect 90 credits and 120 credits are required for a Special Degree. The evaluation of the degree program is based on the GPA system.

The Department of Geography offers course units in compliance with the policies adopted by the faculty and the revision of the curriculum (based on the semester system) was first made in 2000. Further modifications were adopted in January, 2005 following the U.G.C. policy of adopting a GPA (Grade Point Average) system that introduced a credit-based modular system. At Department of Geography a course unit is defined as approximately 45 hours of work where 30 hours are allocated for lectures and 15 hours for contacts (including tutorial assignments, tests). A course unit on Practical work includes 90 hours.

The objectives and the learning outcomes of the programs conducted by the Department of Geography are as follows:

- Provide undergraduates the basic knowledge on fundamental principles of Geography through a series of theory courses based on a standard university Geography curriculum.
- Promote knowledge on applied aspects of Geography and planning by accommodating field survey training.
- Promote knowledge and training in special areas of regional concern and related to regional development such as groundwater hydrology of limestone aquifers and agriculture and fisheries of the rural sector.
- Promote skills in handling spatial data (basic and digital cartography) and analysis.
- Promote application skills of the training provided especially in Geographic Information System in order to serve the community to meet demands of regional, national and global needs.
- Encourage students who are specializing in geography to contribute to academic or research careers by focusing on regional development
- Provide a friendly, responsive and supportive departmental environment that may promote enthusiastic learning.

Academic staff on the Department of Geography

The relevant details of the permanent academic staff of the Department of Geography are given in Table I.

Table I - Permanent Members of the Academic Staff of the Department of Geography

Name and highest Qualification	Position (as in 01.04.2005)	Year of first appointment	Field of specialization
Ms S.Ponniah, M Phil (P'deniya)	SL I Dean	1993	Population Regional Development Planning, Urban.
Mr.M.Varnagulasingham, MA (P'deniya)	SL II HoD	1998	Regional Studies, Geography of Sri Lanka
Dr K. Rajendran BA (Jaf.); M Phil (Jaf.), Ph D (JNU)	SL I	2008	GIS,
Mr.R.Kiruparajah, B.A(Hons) (EUSL)	PL	2005	Environment, GIS

3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

3.1. Aims

- Provide undergraduates the basis knowledge on fundamental principles of Geography following a series of theory courses based on a standard university geography curriculum
- Promote knowledge on applied aspect of Geography and planning by accommodating field survey training

- Promote knowledge and training on specialization of regional concerns mainly discipline related to regional development groundwater hydrology of limestone aquifers and agriculture and fisheries of the rural sector
- Promote skill on understanding the applicability of the present training especially in Geographic Information System given in order to serve the community to meet demands of regional, national and global needs
- Encourage students who are specializing in geography (honors degree) to contribute in academic or research carriers by focusing on regional developing by offering them more advanced courses and training through research projects.
- Provide a friendly responsive and supportive departmental environment that may promote enthusiastic learning

3.2 Learning Outcomes

The Faculty of Arts & Culture, Eastern University Sri Lanka offers a B.A. General Degree Programme with duration of three years and a B.A. honors Degree programme with duration of four year based on a semester courses unit system.

The Department of geography offers course units in compliance with the policies adopted by the Faculty, reform in the curriculum (based on the semester system) was first introduced in year 2000. Further modifications were adopted in January 2005 following the UGC policy of GPA (Grade Point Average) system, which introduce modularized credit based system instead of course unit system. Both curricula adopt a credit system where an inclusion of 90 credits for a general degree programme is demanded. A course unit is defined as approximately 45 hours where 30 hours allocation made for lectures and 15 hours allocation for contacts (including tutorial assignments, tests). Practical work includes 90 hours.

Students should obtain knowledge and understanding on following areas by successful completion of the degree programme (Following courses brief the courses units offered in the Department of Geography. Curriculum 2000 do not contain core and elective course units all units are considered as optional: curriculum 2005 contains fixed core and elective courses units where the special degree students required to follow all core courses and selected electives).

B.A. General degree in Geography (Geography as the main subject):

Curriculum before 2000 includes courses for first year students related to fundamentals of geography and fundamentals of Cartography, for second year students related to Environmental Geography and Resources and Conservation and third year students related to Cartography and field techniques and regional Geography of South Asia and selected Themes.

Curriculum after 2000 includes courses for first year students related to Fundamentals of geography and Fundamentals of Cartography for second year students related to physical geography Cartography & Field techniques and economic geography and third year students related to Environment Management , regional studies- Indian sub continent and geography of Sri Lanka.

Curriculum after 2005 also includes same units given in the first year and general degree programme.

B.A. (Honours) degree in Geography

Curriculum before 2000 includes course units given in the general degree programme related to Cartography and map Interpretation, elementary statistical techniques for geographers. Research techniques in Geography, Geographical thought and methodology advanced Practical Cartography, Tropical Geomorphology and Climatology, Population geography, geographical hydrology, regional development planning, political geography and geography of Sri Lanka.

Curriculum after 2000 includes for special degree students related to Environment Geography and Pollution Control, South Asia & East Asia, geomorphology, Elementary Statistical techniques in Geography, Cartography & Field techniques, Economic Geography, Climatology, Locational Analysis, Computer Application in Geography, research techniques in Geography, Bio Geography, Geographical Thoughts and Methodology, population Geography, Locational Models in Geography, urban Geography, hydrology, agricultural Geography, Geographical Information System, Applied Hydrology, regional development and planning, geography of Sri Lanka, applied meteorology and climatology, Advanced Cartography, Industrial Geography, tropical Climatic Geomorphology, Settlement Geography, Political Geography, and Human Resources Development.

In order to help achieve the outcomes of the above courses, emphases have been made on the following aspects:

- Providing clear details of contents, academic programmes and requirements and assessments methods
- Receive fair and appropriate assessment for progression and grading.
- Have access to adequate support and resources
- Have access to academic counseling support and to be aware of specialist help that is available elsewhere within and outside the university

Programme Details

Requirements related to selection of Geography as a main subject

In the first year (QAQ-General Arts qualifying programme) the department offers two course units where candidates will follow all two courses that may lead to special and general degree programmes depending on their performances. There are not many changes in the first year course units in 2000 and 2005 curriculum. According to 2000 curriculum in second and third years study programme, six course units are being offered in each year (both semesters) where the general degree students will select two units for one semester one unit for other semester special degree student's will select five units per semester. All ten course units offered in the fourth year are compulsory for the special degree students including a research project and dissertation.

4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

The department offers two programs of geography at the bachelor's degree level. In one of them it is offered as a major subject for the BA General Degree. In the other, it is the major subject for those who want to offer a Special Arts Degree in Geography. Students for the

Special Arts Degree in Geography are recruited at the beginning of the Second year on the performance of the examination held at the end of the First Year. The course units offered at the second and third year level in the General degree program are included in the Special Degree Program, too. However, Special Degree students are required to follow additional course units specially prepared for them. The students offering geography as a major subject in the General Arts Degree programme which carries 90 credits are required obtain 30 credits from geography course units. Of the 120 credits of the Special Arts Degree 90 should be from the major subject.

The designing of curriculum originates at the department. After a discussion at a department meeting the curriculum is then submitted to the Faculty for recommendation. If recommended it is submitted to the Senate sub committee on Curriculum Evaluation and subsequently to the Senate. The final approval is given by the Council of the University.

It is the view of the review team that the content of the syllabi of geography, both general and special, fulfils the requirements of the respective degrees. The curricula have been revised on several occasions. For example, in the year 2000 there has been a revision paralleling the introduction of the course unit system. Again in 2005 the curriculum was revised paralleling the adoption of the GPA system of assessment.

However, the review team would like to suggest the department to pay attention to the Subject Benchmark Statement on Geography published by the QA Council, Sri Lanka at the next curriculum revision. It is also suggested to include more field work components to the syllabus, especially the Special Arts Degree.

It is the view of the review team that the curriculum design, content and review of the Department of Geography can be judged as GOOD.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

In teaching various methods are adopted but the main method is the delivery of lectures. In delivering lectures other than the white board and overhead projector modern teaching aides such as multi-media are used. In some lectures latest news related to some topics (e.g. earthquakes occurred yesterday) are downloaded from the web and displayed to students. It is desirable; however, the PPT slides shown in the lectures are made readily available to students. The current practice of asking students to make photocopies of the PPT slides is not very effective. The Department must find a way to disseminate among students the knowledge gathered by lecturers. If not, the efforts made by the lecturer concerned will not bear fruits.

In addition to lectures, practicals, tutorials and assignments are used to involve students in the learning process. Students also are encouraged to make presentations using multi-media facilities. In these presentations, not only texts, but maps, diagrams and pictures are displayed.

Another practice appreciated by the review team was the assistance obtained from the Faculty of Agriculture to conduct lectures on soil. Also assistance from the Survey Generals Office/ Batticaloa is sought to teach surveying.

In Geography, field studies are a major component of the teaching package. However, field studies have not been conducted for a long period of time.

The situation with learning environment is average. The practical class used also for lectures is spacious, well ventilated and lighted and close to the department office. But the seating facilities have to be much improved. Sitting for an hour or two on those stools is not very comfortable or conducive to learning.

The other two lecture rooms are below the average situation. They are not maintained properly and look unhealthy. Rooms are too small, ill-ventilated and seem neglected. The Faculty has to make a special effort to make these rooms habitable.

Although the Library of the University houses a fair amount of books on Geography there is a dearth of journals in geography.

A variety of assessment methods such as semester-end and mid-semester examinations, continued assessment methods like tutorials, assignments and presentations are used and they are at a satisfactory level. Of a total of 100 marks, the semester-end examination is allotted 60% while another 20% is allotted for the mid semester examination. The remaining 20% is given for assignments, practicals and presentations.

It is the view of the review team that the teaching, learning and assessment methods of the department can be judged as GOOD.

4.3. Quality of Students, including Student Progress and Achievements

The quality of students at entry (measured in terms of Z-score) is similar to that in other universities in Sri Lanka. It ranges from 1.27 in 2008 to 1.2890. However, the Z-score of students admitted to the university as special intake is less than that.

After entering the University students have progressed well. During the period from academic years of 1996/1997 to 2004/2005 94 students have followed the Special Degree program in Geography. Of them 92 had secured honors passes, the majority being the Second Class Upper Division honors (50). Another, 37 secured second Class Lower Division passes and five students obtained first class honors.

Throughout the program, various measures have been taken to ensure students' progress to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the programme. These include: monitoring performance through continuous assessments, advising guiding weaker students etc. During the discussion held with the students as well as teaching sessions observed by the review team, the students were found to be less confident in communication skills in English. Therefore the team recommended that faculty take adequate measures to improve English communication skills of the students.

However, students too want to follow their degree programs in English medium. Students have realized the value of English in securing employment after graduation. However, it is advisable to introduce a bi-lingual instruction method in the first two years and switch over to English medium at the second and third year levels.

There are opportunities for graduates in geography to secure jobs especially due to the development work being implemented in the region.

It is the view of the review team that the quality of students, student progress and achievements can be judged as GOOD.

4.4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback

During the review process, the review team has identified two types of student feedback mechanisms adopted by the Department of Geography.

- (1) Formal student feedback done through a questionnaire filled by the students
- (2) Informal and qualitative methods applied to collect student views on course units and teaching

The questionnaire to be filled by the students consists of two sections, namely the section of structured-multiple answers and the section of descriptive comments. This method has been applied by the Department this year. As it has been a recently applied method, the impact of the student feedback on improving the quality of the degree program is still to be seen. However, the collection of student feedback through a questionnaire is appreciative and needs continuous acceptance and adoption by both staff and the students. Also, the team recommended that that teacher should not participate with feed back process physically. It would generate more confidence among the students, if the mechanism permit students to submit the answered questionnaire in a sealed envelop to the SAR, who would submit an analysis of outcome through Dean to respective teachers. It is also suggested to after analyzing the student feedback and adopt necessary corrective measures.

It is found from the discussions with the academic staff and students that the informal student feedback is obtained by the relevant staff member at the end of a lecture and end of each module. However, no firm evidence is available to prove that this process has been conducted regularly. Also, it was not clear how such information has been utilized to enhance the quality of teaching.

The staff-student relationship is found to be very good and it has created a better learning environment under which a two way communication between the staff and the students is possible.

It is the view of the review team that the extent and use of student feedback can be judged as SATISFACTORY.

4.5. Postgraduate Studies

The Department of Geography offers MA, M Phil and Ph D programs. The MA taught program has 36 students. There are eight (8) M Phil and two (2) Ph D students at present. A notable feature of the M Phil program is the week-end classes conducted on English and Research Methodology. At the same time, however, the review team noted that the department has only a limited number of staff to conduct these postgraduate programs.

Another appreciative feature is the research publications and books by the members of the academic staff that are useful to the graduate students.

The department has initiated measures to encourage research activities in the department by involving in undergraduate final year research projects. To enhance the research atmosphere, the review team strongly recommends to have collaborative research activities with other

local organizations, NGOs and private sector organizations. Collaborative research activities with established faculties are also encouraged

However, review team revealed that the staff is slightly over loaded with lectures and practicals. By reducing lecture hours of the members of the staff, they could be involved more actively in post graduate research.

It is the view of the review team that the situation with postgraduate studies and research can be judged as SATISFACTORY.

4.6. Peer Observation

It was revealed during the visit that there is no regular effective method of peer observation. Teacher evaluation, course evaluation by the student is practiced in an informal manner. Also staff members informally discuss the problems related to academic activities among themselves. Anyway, the evaluation is not compulsory for any teacher at the department and it is up to the teacher to conduct. The team has seen only one instance of teacher evaluation. The prescribe form used for the evaluation has not got approval from the faculty board. Especially for the temporary staff members a practice should be adapted to continuously monitor and to provide informal feedback whenever necessary. A good practice adopted by the department is the moderation of question papers and second marking of answer scripts by the external examiners. It would be advantageous, however, if the peers could attend the classes and advise their colleagues on how teaching methods are practiced. The peer observation could be also extend to visiting staff too.

It is recommended that a peer observation and evaluation system be formalized and implemented as a regular feature in the administration of the department. As a beginning, peer observation could be included as an agenda item in the regular meeting of the departmental committee. The review team is of the view that establishing a formal mechanism for peer observation would further help to enhance the quality of teaching.

It is the view of the review team that the situation with peer observation is UNSATISFACTORY.

4.7. Skills Development

As far as subject specific skills are concerned the department has taken special effort to provide its students with current and new knowledge in the respective subject areas. At the sessions on observation of lectures it was evident that lecturers have taken special efforts to incorporate new knowledge in their lectures. At the same time, the department and the faculty have made few arrangements to equip students with generic skills such as IT. Therefore students have opportunity to improve presentation skills. In addition each course unit has compulsory presentation assignment. However, the department has not yet equipped with a GIS laboratory. Only basic GIS is taught in the computer unit, so those students have not much privilege to develop this valuable skill. Also, English language skills are provided through ELTU in the form of a 4 credit course in the first year.

The Students are trained to make presentations using multi-media and a limited number of computers have been allocated for dissertation work. Students have also been provided with internet facilities at the computer centre.

There were reports of research projects of final year undergraduate students giving evidence that the students are being trained to conduct independent research studies that enhance their research capabilities.

However, it has to be pointed out that students must be adequately exposed to field experiences. Also, possibilities must be explored to provide training/internships for students.

During the discussion held with students the review team found that their English Language skills are at a low level. However the team was pleased to find that the students are willing to change the medium of instruction into English. This would certainly create an opportunity to equip students with English language skills resulting in an increased accessibility to the job market.

The team observed that the department curriculum does not contain course in Technical writing, this might be a draw back to develop good writing skills of the students.

The students are engaged in various extra curricular activities e.g. sports, culture, etc and they are also members of the Geographical Society that help them developing and enhancing their leadership qualities, organization skills, and social responsibilities.

It is the view of the review team that skills development is GOOD.

4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

Due to the prevailing conditions in the area student counseling appears to be one of the highly important aspect in undergraduate studies. However, academic counseling is hardly practiced. Also, the review team could not meet the academic counselors during the visit. The opinion of the Head of the department is that academic counselling does not taking any prominent place in the faculty. During the orientation programme the new students could be assigned to counselors. Apart from Counsellors personal tutors could be arranged for each student to help and guide them in academic matters. This will help staff to over come and find solution to commonly occurring problems among the students. Some times, informally students can obtain guidance from the members of the staff a however, formal is not instituted.

The students who entering to specialization of the Geography should be addressed by the Head of the Department when they first arrive at the Department. They should advised on matters such as choosing optional courses, overall view about the specialization, facilities available at the Dept. and general guidelines followed by the majoring students in the study program.

It is the view of the review team that the situation with academic guidance and counseling is unsatisfactory.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the observations made during the study visit to the Department of Geography at the Eastern University of Sri Lanka by the review team, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

Aspect reviewed	Judgment given
Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Good
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods	Good
Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements	Good
Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative	Satisfactory
Postgraduate Studies	Satisfactory
Peer Observation	Unsatisfactory
Skills Development	Good
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Unsatisfactory

The overall judgment is suspended

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the suggestions, which have been made already, the review team would like to make the following recommendations, in order to improve the quality and the relevance of the degree program implemented by the Department of Geography, at EUSL.

- Gradual introduction of English as the medium of instruction
- Provide a room within the department for students to increase interaction among students and between student and teachers
- Provide an adequate number of academic support staff
- Pay attention to the Subject Benchmark Statement on Geography published by the QA Council, Sri Lanka at the next curriculum revision.
- Detailed documentation of the curriculum including hourly breakdown of teaching and intended learning outcomes for each course is strongly recommended.
- It is also suggested to include more field work components to the syllabus, especially the Special Arts Degree.
- It is recommended to improve the curriculum by including recommended teaching materials, and details on assessment criteria used for final year research project evaluation
- analyze the student feedback and adopt necessary corrective measures
It is recommended that a peer observation and evaluation system to introduced and formalized
- Include technical writing, more field visits, training / internship in the curriculum.
- It is recommended to establish a Geographic information system laboratory in the department.
- Introduction of academic counseling and guidance system