

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY



***FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA***

23rd to 25th May 2007

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1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

A key factor in promoting and safeguarding public confidence in higher education in Sri Lanka is the maintenance of quality and standards of the University system.

A Quality Assurance Programme has been launched since 2001. Under this programme, several Institutional reviews and Subject based reviews have been completed in the University system in Sri Lanka.

The purpose of subject review is

- Evaluation of quality of education of a selected subject/programme,
- Focus on the quality of students learning experience and the level of progress and
- Evaluation of the quality of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The main objectives of subject review process are

- to identify and share good practices,
- to enable funding judgments based on review outcomes and
- to inculcate the quality culture.

The quality of the programmes offered by the Department of Geography (DoG) of the University of Kelaniya was evaluated on the following themes.

1. Curriculum design content and review.
2. Teaching, learning and assessment methods.
3. Quality of students including students' progress and achievements.
4. The extent of students feedback-qualitative and quantitative.
5. Postgraduate Studies.
6. Peer observation.
7. Skills Development
8. Academic guidance and counselling.

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

The University

The Vidyalankara Pirivena was established in 1875. It was elevated to University status on the 01st of January 1959, by the University Act No 45 in 1957.

All Universities in Sri Lanka were amalgamated into one University through an Act of Parliament in 1972; Vidyalankara University was renamed as Vidyalankara Campus of the University of Sri Lanka. The next important change occurred in 1978 when the University structure was further modified. The Vidyalankara Campus become an autonomous body and named as the Kelaniya University of Sri Lanka.

The National Higher Education Act of 1966 enabled female students to be admitted to Vidyalankara University. According to the Act of 1958 it had been exclusively for male

students. Vidyalankara Pirivena, which was located at Peliyagoda, was shifted to present location in Dalugama.

The University of Kelaniya consists of six faculties, namely Commerce & Management, Humanities, Medicine, Science, Social Sciences and Graduate Studies. There are forty-two academic departments associated with the first five faculties, sated above.

There are four educational Institutions affiliated to the Kelaniya University. They are

1. The Postgraduate Institute of Pali & Buddhist Studies.
2. The Postgraduate Institute of Archeology
3. The Institute of Gampaha Wickramarachchi Ayurveda
4. The Institute of Aesthetic Studies

Faculty of Social Sciences

The Faculty of Social Sciences consists of five departments. This has the highest number of student intake each year. 600 students were enrolled in 2006. The Department of Sport Science was established in 2006. All the other departments conduct General degree as well as Special degree courses. One of the recent trends in the Faculty of Social Sciences is that the lecturers in the Faculty of Social Sciences share their specialties with other faculties. Interfaculty lecturing has become a new trend. The faculty possesses modern Information Technology base, some of which have been donated under the SIDA–SAREC Project. Laboratories, libraries and relevant facilities are available to enhance knowledge and skills of both staff and students.

Since 1996 the Postgraduate diploma programmes as well as degree courses have been re-structured. The Postgraduate academic courses conducted by various departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences are submitted by the Board of Study on Social Sciences to the faculty of Postgraduate studies and subsequently approved by the Senate.

Under the supervision of the faculty staff, Certificate courses, Diplomas, Postgraduate Diplomas, M.A. (one year), MSSc (2 years), M’Phil and PhD programmes are conducted.

Department of Geography

At the initial stages of the development of the University of Kelaniya, it consisted of limited number of departments including Geography as one of them.

Today, the academic staff of the department of Geography (DoG)consists of

- Professor N.K. Dangalle (BA, MA, PhD)
- Mr. U.A. Chandrasena (BA, PGDip, MSc)
- Mr. S.K. Jayakody (BA, MA)
- Mr. H.D.A.G. Harasgama (BA, MA)
- Dr. R. Ratnayake (BA, MA, PhD)
- Mr. K.L.M. Dharmasiri (BA, MA, PGDip, MSc)
- Dr. N.G. Guruge (BA, MA, PhD)
- A.G. Amarasinghe (BA, M’Phil)

- A.N.D.P. Sakalasooriya (BA)

The smooth functioning of the academic activities is assisted by 3 members of the non-academic staff (e.g. Technical officer, staff assistant and an officer assistant).

The undergraduate programmes conducted by the DoG are as follows.

1. B.A. General Degree (Geography) – 3 years
2. B.A. General Degree (Development Studies) – 3 years
3. B.A. Special Degree (Economic & Social Geography) – 4 years
4. B.A. Special Degree (Environmental Geography) – 4 years
5. B.A. Special Degree (Development Studies) – 4 years.

In 2006 the number of students enrolled for undergraduate courses are as follows,

1. B.A. General Degree (Geography) – 30 students
 2. B.A. General Degree (Development Studies) – 130 students
 3. B.A. Special Degree (Economic & Social Geography)
 4. B.A. Special Degree (Environmental Geography)
 5. B.A. Special Degree (Development Studies) – 21 students
- } 25 students
(for both (3) & (4))

The DoG conducts several Postgraduate courses in Sinhala medium. They are

1. Master of Arts (M.A.)
2. Master of Social Sciences (MSSc)
3. Master of Philosophy
4. Doctor of Philosophy

In 2006 the Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning (PgDRP) was commenced to cater to the increasing demand of the country.

The DoG is equipped with facilities such as a library, Information Technology equipment for Cartography, and Aerial Photography, Local & foreign maps and other necessary equipment.

3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

3.1. Aims

The DoG of the University of Kelaniya has two groups of aims and objectives. The first is the development of students' Geographical knowledge and the acquisition of specific skills. The more general aims and objectives involve the development of transferable skills that any University student should acquire to prepare himself/herself for the future.

In this context the aims of the DoG are to provide:

- Degree programmes producing graduates who will understand the value, relevance and applicability of Geography in a rapidly changing world;

- Degree programmes providing a high quality learning experience in an environment of internationally recognized research in order to expose students to recent developments in knowledge and techniques in the field of Geography.
- A range of learning opportunities within the modular teaching structure of the University, to enable students, not only who major in Geography but also non Geographers, to develop their academic strengths and potentials;
- Opportunities for students to acquire and develop analytical and synthetical skills specific to Geography that will be useful in their future careers;
- Students to develop a knowledge base, through various avenues including field work and research that will equip them to contribute effectively to the development process of the country.
- Access to modern techniques applied in the field of Geography that will enhance students' transferable skills;
- A friendly and responsive environment within the department that will encourage students to utilize the resources available, both physical and human, to the fullest extent possible;
- An opportunity for students from other departments in the University to study Geography at a level appropriate to their requirements;
- Support academic and non-academic staff of the department to acquire further training and skills in order to perform their duties and responsibilities effectively and efficiently;
- An environment which will produce useful citizens who will be able to view the problems with a holistic perspective.

Departmental committee is responsible for planning implementing and monitoring, the teaching and related academic programmes with a view to providing a degree programme of high quality.

3.2. Learning Outcomes

- Gain knowledge and understanding of the theoretical foundations of the discipline of Geography;
- Gain knowledge on the pivotal role played by Geography in the modern world;
- Learn how the knowledge, understanding and skills acquired can be applied in the real world situations;
- Develop a range of personal and transferable skills (analysis, synthesis, critical and independent thinking, research capabilities, information management, computer skills, team work etc.) that will equip him/her to face the modern world with confidence;
- Develop attitudes that will ensure the protection, conservation and sustainability of development.

On successful completion of the following specific programmes students will gain knowledge and understanding:

- In *Economic and Social Geography (BA Special)*: of the economic and social landscape of the world from a spatio-temporal perspective; of the economic activities,

organizations problems and resultant social landscape in a strong theoretical and conceptual backdrop.

- In *Environmental Geography (BA Special)*: of the place, role, and future of mankind in a rapidly changing and challenging global, regional and local environment; they will be able to appreciate and critically evaluate the activities of man and in consequence, the response of the environment; of the validity of the concept of sustainable development as another paradigm.
- In *Development Studies (BA Special)*: of the spatio-temporal patterns of development at global, regional and local levels; of the theoretical and conceptual foundations of development paradigms, models and theories; of the relevance and dominant character of the political economy; of the problems faced by the developing countries in a rapidly localizing world and possible ways to attain development.

4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

Undergraduate Programmes

As stated above, the undergraduate syllabi have been designed to cater for five groups of students.

The course units of the Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Development Studies are as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| i) Geographic Information System | ii) Developing World |
| iii) Urban and Settlement Studies | iv) Agriculture and Agrarian Changes |
| v) Human Resource Development | vi) Industrialization |
| vii) Resource Conservation and Management | viii) Research Methods in Development Studies |
| ix) Development Theory and Reality | x) Spatial Patterns of Development |
| xi) Spatial Patterns of Economic Activities | xii) Economic Planning I |
| xiii) Development Sociology | xiv) Development and Social Changes in Asia |
| xv) Economic Planning II | xvi) Sustainable Development |
| xvii) Economic Planning III | xviii) Project Planning and Evaluation |
| xix) Dissertation | |

The Course units of the Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Geography – Environmental Geography Stream are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| i) Practical Geography | ii) Geomorphology |
| iii) Climatology | iv) Asian Region |
| v) Bio Geography | vi) Resource Conservation & Management |
| vii) Geographical Information System | viii) Development Theory & Reality |
| ix) Land Use Studies | x) Techniques in Geography |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| xi) Global Environmental System | xii) Population and Environment |
| xiii) Philosophy of Geography | xiv) Geography of Sri Lanka |
| xv) Environmental Hazards | xvi) Field Study |
| xvii) Sustainable Development | xviii) Dissertation |

The Course units of the Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Geography – Economic & Social Geography Stream are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| i) Practical Geography | ii) Spatial Analysis of Population |
| iii) Cultural Geography | iv) Asian Region |
| v) Political Geography | vi) Spatial Patterns of Economic Activities |
| vii) Geographical Information System | viii) Industrial Geography |
| ix) Agricultural Geography | x) Development Theory and Reality |
| xi) Techniques in Geography | xii) Urban Geography |
| xiii) Geography of Tourism | xiv) Philosophy of Geography |
| xv) Geography of Sri Lanka | xvi) Regional Development |
| xvii) Field Study | xviii) Sustainable Development |
| xix) Dissertation | |

The Review Team observed that the members of the academic staff had contributed in formulating and updating the syllabi. This is a good practice that needs to be continued in future. However, the availability of three types of syllabi has caused dissatisfaction amongst the students. For example, the students who offer courses in Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Geography – Economics & Social Geography Stream, do not get adequate knowledge on physical Geographical aspects such as disasters and landslides.

On the other hand the students who offer courses in Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Geography – Environmental Geography Stream, do not get sufficient knowledge on human economic activities. The dissatisfaction of the students can be minimized by restructuring the above mentioned degree programmes.

Geographical Information System (GIS), Techniques in Geography, Research Methods are been offered in all three undergraduate Degree Programmes. This provides an opportunity for students to understand recent publications and use new techniques in their research studies.

However, the Review Team is of the view that, more emphasis should have been given on Mathematics and Statistics, in designing undergraduate syllabi.

Postgraduate Programmes

As stated above, the DoG conducts five Postgraduate programmes. The main subject areas covered by each Postgraduate programme are as follows.

(I) Master of Arts (Course Work)

- Tropical Environment
- Economic and Social Development of Sri Lanka
- Resources and Development
- Urban and Regional Development
- Population Studies
- Research Methods in Geography

- Dissertation (8,000 – 10,000 words)

(II) Master of Social Sciences (Course work and Research)

- Tropical Environment
- Economic and Social Development of Sri Lanka
- Resources and Development
- Urban and Regional Development
- Population Studies
- Research Methods in Geography
- Dissertation (Not less than 30,000 words)

(III) Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning. (Pg. DRP)

- Regional Development and Poverty Analysis
- Perspective Planning, State Policies and Development Projects
- Statistics for Regional Planning
- Maps, GIS and Remote Sensing Techniques
- Research Methodology, Rapid Rural Participatory Method
- Observation and Evaluation of Development Projects

The Review Team observed that the syllabi of the Postgraduate courses have been updated periodically. The Diploma in Regional Planning was introduced in 2006. The above programmes are been conducted only in Sinhala medium. The Review Team felt that at least one Postgraduate course should be conducted in English medium. This would provide an opportunity to non – Sinhala officials employed in North and East of Sri Lanka to benefit from such programmes.

In the opinion of the Review Team Curriculum Design, Content and Review of the DoG could be judged as GOOD.

4.2. Teaching Learning and Assessment Methods

Teaching (Undergraduate Programmes)

Several teaching methods have been adopted to provide knowledge, skills, and to generate high quality graduates. Most lecture courses are taught by using “Power Point” method. Both handouts and Power Point presentations are prepared in English. This is a positive way to sustain students’ interest and improve their language skills.

Number of course units where the fieldwork component is involved has increased during the past 05 years. e.g. GEOG 21546, GEOG 41526, DVST 22516, DVST 31526.

The Review Team observed that it is important to maintain these courses as students are very keen to follow them. The staff also gets an opportunity to evaluate student’s abilities and their hidden talents.

Some of the staff members in the DoG share their knowledge with other departments by providing undergraduate lecturers in selected course units, e.g. lectures on Tourism are conducted in the Department of Economics; lectures on land use are conducted in the Department of Zoology; lectures on Environmental Archeology are conducted in the Department of Archeology, and lectures on Research Methods are conducted in the Institute of Gampaha Wickramarachchi Ayurvedha.

Besides the above mentioned undergraduate courses the staff members conduct lectures in Postgraduate courses, which are held in other departments in the University. e.g. Lectures on Research Methods are conducted in the Departments of Mass Communication and Political

Science. The Review Team is of the view that interfaculty teaching is a good practice that need to be encouraged and continued in future.

Learning Activities (Undergraduates Programmes)

At several occasions these activities have been observed and studied by the Review Team (e.g. Development Studies – DVST 11014, Research Methods DVST 31526, Geographical Information System 31516). The environment of learning is an essential requirement to improve efficiency in learning. It was quite obvious that the learning “environment” is not suitable as some of the first year lectures are held in large halls where the basic facilities are lacking. What is written on the white board is not clear and there was no sound system for a class with 100 students. The Review Team agreed that more emphasis should be paid to improve and maintain a good learning “environment”.

In learning activities, undergraduates have more facilities to get information from the websites, the main library and the departmental library. Some of the undergraduates had the practice of meeting their tutors, supervisors frequently to clarify certain problems. One of the suggestions made by the Geography Special students is that, using visual presentations and the Power Point method would be more attractive in undergraduate teaching.

Assessment (Undergraduate Programmes)

All undergraduate answer scripts are marked by two examiners. In the case of Special degree answer papers the second examiners are appointed from outside the Kelaniya University. It was evident that all examination papers are moderated and some of the comments made by the moderators are properly maintained. This method provides an opportunity to improve the standards of question papers.

The assessment method adopted for the undergraduate degree programmes are as follows:

Degree Programme	End of Semester	Assignments	Tutorials
B.A. General Degree (Geography)	60%	20%	10% + 10%
B.A. General Degree (Development Studies)	60%	20%	10% + 10%
B.A. Special Degree (Economic & Social Geography)	80%	10%	10%
B.A. Special Degree (Environmental Geography)	80%	10%	10%
B.A. Degree (Development Studies)	80%	10%	10%

One of the basic principles of the course unit system is its flexibility. However, the undergraduates’ theses are marked by two examiners in the DoG, where the first examiner is the supervisor. The Review Team felt that the first examiner (supervisor) who has been working very closely with the student has a tendency to be bias. This practice should be changed.

Teaching (Postgraduate Programmes)

There are five Postgraduate programmes conducted by the DoG. The two programmes that are conducted purely on course work are:

- (i) Master of Arts
- (ii) Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning

The programme which is based on course work & research is, Master of Social Science (MSSc). The two Postgraduate courses conducted on research work are

- (i) Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- (ii) Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

In the taught courses, the medium of instruction is Sinhala. The “Power Point” method is used in lectures. Handouts are given both in Sinhala and English medium. A course on Research Methods is offered in all Postgraduate courses. E.g. Research Methodology for M.A./MSSc and Research Methods in Regional Planning for the PgDRP programme.

The courses are designed to provide theoretical and practical knowledge for the officers, who are employed, in government sector and non-governmental organizations. In addition to lectures, field programmes, with duration of 4-5 days are held to enhance their practical experience. The Review Team observed that it would be beneficial if more specialized visiting staff could participate in conducting Postgraduate courses.

Learning (Postgraduate Programmes)

A high proportion of the students who follow Postgraduate courses are employed, and a large number of students get registered for Postgraduate courses, especially for MSSc and PgDRP. The Review Team expressed their concern about the total number of candidates who complete the MSSc programme. It was quite clear that a large number of candidates complete only the course evaluation examination, and do not submit their theses. This is a pattern that needs to be discouraged.

Assessment (Postgraduate Programmes)

Several assessment methods have been adopted for the evaluation of five Postgraduate programmes.

Postgraduate Programme	Thesis	Course work	Assignments
M. A. in Geography	-	100%	-
M’Phil in Geography	100%	-	-
PhD in Geography	100%	-	-
MSSc	-	100%	-
Diploma in Regional Planning	80%	-	10% + 10%

The Review Team is of the view that, continuous assessment method need to be adopted for all Postgraduate programmes where only course work is involved.

M.A. students maintain a record book to record their supervisory sessions with the respective supervisor. This is a good practice that should be followed by all the Postgraduate programmes.

It is the view of the review Team that the Teaching Learning and Assessment Methods could be judged as GOOD.

4.3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements

Undergraduate Students

The DoG has adopted several measures to maintain the quality of students. In selecting students for Special degree courses only one out of three is selected. It is a pre-requisite to have a pass in Geography at the G.C.C. (Advanced Level) examination to follow Geography in the first year of the university. Those who have offered Commerce or Social Sciences are permitted to follow Development Studies in the University. Further, undergraduate students

who wish to apply for a Special course in Geography should have scored a GPA of 2.8 (Only 25 students will be selected to follow Geography special each year).

Attendance of students is also considered as an important requirement to maintain quality of students. This is strictly followed in Geography Practical classes where course units such as GIS and Cartography are taught. Several assessment procedures are followed to evaluate the performance of the undergraduates. Depending on the credit value that the students should acquire, the assessment procedure also varies. The dates of submission of assignments are strictly followed. The students who fail to submit on the due date lose a percentage of the assigned marks.

For the students who follow the GEOG 22026 and DVST 22526, the fieldwork component is essential. Marks are been awarded for either the group or individual presentations. With a view to enhance the quality of students, a new course unit, GEOG 42526 (fields survey) has been introduced for the Special final year students.

The quality of undergraduates is based on aspects such as the knowledge, experience, improvement in presentation skills and improved knowledge of English. One of the important ways of observing the progress of undergraduates is the improvement in English. Students, who hardly knew Geographical English terms, manage quite well when they reach the 4th year of undergraduate studies. Progress of undergraduates is clearly shown in the use of computers and extracting information from websites as references in their assignments.

Progress and achievements depend basically on the attendance and not on the dropout rates of students. It was quite clear that the dropout rates were nil. In each year there had been several cases where the students miss the batch for obvious reasons like pregnancy, ill health, short visits abroad etc. Progress and achievements are indicated by the performance of students at the final year. It was reported that 50 percent of the students who follow Special courses obtain either 2nd class Lower or Upper division degrees. However, the number of students getting first classes is quite rare. The final year results of the undergraduates show that the rate of completion of the degree is quite high. In other words to complete the degree, the candidate has to complete minimum requirement of English level I. This is a remarkable achievement because when the undergraduates enter in the 1st year, a majority of them were very poor or below the average level in English knowledge.

Postgraduate Students

The basic objectives of conducting the five Postgraduate programmes (M.A., MSSc, PgDRP, M'Phil & PhD) are to provide theoretical and practical knowledge for the officers who are employed in the government sector and the Non-governmental Organizations.

Bylaws pertaining to the Postgraduate courses have been designed to main high quality of the above mentioned five courses. The students who have successfully completed Geography as a subject for their first degree are eligible to register for the M.A. in Geography Programme. The candidates who wish to get registered for the MSSc programme should have at least a second class (lower division) by completing a Special degree in Geography. The Postgraduate diploma in Regional Planning is designed to absorb the candidates who hold degrees in Science, Commerce and Social Sciences with at least one-year work experience. The applicants are closely evaluated and those who get through the interview are selected. These methods are practiced to maintain quality of Postgraduate students.

The increasing number of applicants for the MSSc & PgDRP shows that the two programmes are popular. One of the reasons for being popular is that the medium of instruction is only Sinhala. However, the officials working in North and East do not get an opportunity to follow these courses.

The quality of Postgraduate students is being maintained by providing facilities to participate in field trips where the duration is 4-5 days. The Postgraduate students who come from different disciplines get socialized and exchange their views freely at the presentation stage. This is a very good opportunity to provide training to the young officers who do not have much experience in their service.

It is quite difficult to get a clear picture of the information on progress and achievements of the Postgraduates. In courses of M.A., MSSc and PgDRP almost 95% - 98% complete the course work and sit for the end of year examination. However, the proportion of Postgraduate students who strictly follow the by-laws and submit their theses on due date is insignificant. This situation is caused by several factors. e.g. transfers to remote areas, marriage and change of residence, excess workloads in the office, high responsibilities during the by-election period. Change of respective supervisor can also lead to undue delay in submitting theses. This that has to be periodically monitored by the Board of Management for the Postgraduate studies in Geography.

The review Team judges the Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements is GOOD.

4.4. The Extent and Use of Students Feedback

Students' feedback on teaching activities is carried out by giving opportunity to students to participate in departmental meetings and allowing them to express their views on academic matters. During residential field trips of undergraduate and postgraduate students, open discussions were arranged to get their feed back. The supervisors get the views on research projects from the final year students at practical and tutorial classes. Students' feedback is received via Temporary Assistant Lecturers. Formal questionnaires are used for each course to get the feedback from the Postgraduate students and the results of the questionnaires are discussed at the departmental meetings. The students informed that they were satisfied with the quality of learning. Although the staff encourages the students to raise their issues relating to academic work, it would be better if the system is formalized and documented as in other Universities.

It is the view of the review Team that the Extent and Use of Students Feedback at the DoG could be judged as SATISFACTORY.

4.5. Postgraduate Studies

Since 1997 the Department has been offering five Postgraduate programmes.

1. Master of Arts (M.A.) by course work
2. Master of Social Sciences (MSSc) by course work and research
3. Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning (PgRP) by course work
4. Master of Philosophy (MPhil) by research
5. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by research

The Postgraduate diploma in Regional Planning (Pg.DRP) which was introduced in 2006 is very popular. The DoG is adopting a procedure to enroll only the selected applicants. The number of postgraduates students has been rapidly increasing since 2005. Majority of them have registered for the MA degree. It was revealed at the evaluation that the staff-students ratio is affordable. At present there are two PhD students and four M.Phil students reading for their respective degrees in the DoG.

The faculty has adopted measures to encourage research activities in the DoG by funding academic staff from the recently established Research Center for Social Sciences. Also the faculty has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Jawaharlal Nehru University to provide annual short term staff scholarships. The DoG has set up a good research library and Information Center under the SIDA/SAREC programme for staff members and graduate students to enhance their knowledge. In addition, some of the staff members have obtained Postgraduate scholarships from the SIDA/SAREC programme.

However, the Review Team observed that the staff is over loaded with lectures and practicals where an average member is engaged in 12 to 18 hours of teaching. By reducing lecture hours of the members of the staff, they could be involved more actively in Postgraduate research.

It is the view of the review Team that the Postgraduate Studies could be judged as SATISFACTORY.

4.6. Peer Observation

The Review Team observed that there is no regular effective peer observation procedure in the DoG. Staff members informally discuss the problems arising during academic activities among themselves. The usual peer observation method practiced in the department is when students' make their presentations. A panel consisting of the lecturer in-charge of the particular subject is accompanied by a senior staff member where indirectly assess the performance of the lecturers. In addition, the practice of evaluation of presentations of junior staff members, by a senior member of the staff, would provide facilities to develop their presentation skills. However, it would be advantageous if true peers could attend the classes and advise each other on how their teaching methods can be improved. This can be developed into a more formal system, which ensures that it is regularly practiced and properly documented

It is the view of the review Team that the Peer observation could be judged as SATISFACTORY.

4.7. Skills Development

Skills Development of the Academic Staff

Several programmes have been launched to develop skills of the academic staff.

- *Staff Development Center:* weekly 03 hours have been allocated for the skills improvement of the Probationary lecturers
- *Jawaharlal Nehru University Training Programmes:* Academic staff members are been given an opportunity to attend short training programmes, at the JNU.
- *Facilities to attend seminars in foreign countries:* Staff members who wish to present academic papers at seminars held in foreign countries are provided with funds. (These funds are made available from the generated funds of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Staff development fund and the money received from violation of academic bonds.) It was revealed at the review meeting that the staff members of the DoG had participated in seminars held in India, China, Singapore, Indonesia and U.K.
- *Grants and Scholarships from the National Centre for Social Sciences (NCSS):* Staff members are provided with funds to pursue Postgraduate studies in foreign countries, with the funds made available by the NCSS.

- *Research Centre for Social Sciences:* This Centre provides facilities to have collaborative research projects with foreign researchers and extends funds for publications (e.g. Theses). The extension courses conducted by each Department in the Faculty of Social Sciences contribute 10 percent of the income for the sustainability of this organization.
- *Availability of Libraries at Faculty Level & Departmental Level:* Access to current publications and information facilities help in enhancing skills. Staff members who wish to update their knowledge make use of these facilities.
- *Information Technology – Equipment granted under the SIDA–SAREC programme:* Each staff member is provided with a computer and Internet facilities. These facilities have contributed in enhancing skills development, of the academic staff.

Skills Development of Non–Academic Staff

The non–academic staff consists of a Staff Technical officer, a Staff Assistant and an Office Assistant. There are no direct programmes for skills development for the non- academic staff members. Technical training programmes (either foreign or local) need to be provided to improve the skills of the staff Technical officer.

Skills Development of Undergraduates

- *Courses on GIS:* The Review Team observed that in all five undergraduate degree programmes, emphasis is placed on Geographical Information System (GIS). Currently GIS is used as a tool for presenting & analysing information. Therefore good knowledge of software pertaining to GIS is a way of developing skills of undergraduates.
- *Participation in Field Trips & Making Presentations:* The students are been given training on the collection of information from people, improving data analysis skills and enhancing presentation skills. The “Magazine of the Geographical Society”, which is published by the DoG provides an opportunity to publish articles. This is considered as an opportunity to improve students writing skills.
- *Initiation of a Department of Sports:* In 2007 a new Department of Sports has been established to improve skills of students. This is a very positive step to inculcate good will amongst students and enhance their skills.

Skills Development Postgraduate Students

A high proportion of the postgraduate students who follow programmes offered by the DoG are employed. There are no special programmes designed to develop their skills. However, participation in field studies provides them an opportunity to get practical experience of theoretical knowledge. Their presentation skills are been sharpened as they learn on report writing and making presentations. Practical work on Geographical Information System (GIS) undoubtedly helps in improving skills, particularly those who follow the Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning.

In the opinion of the Review Team Skills Development at the DoG could be judged as GOOD.

4.8. Academic Guidance and Counselling

The faculty has a team of counsellors comprising two junior counsellors and one Faculty Senior Counsellor. Rev Dodamkumbure Dhammadassi serves as the chief counsellor for the

entire University. Besides Counsellors, personal tutors are arranged for each student to help and guide them in academic and personal matters. Academic guidance for final year dissertation is provided for the Geography Special students by the respective supervisors. Course details and other relevant information on academic support are given in the University handbook, and the Curriculum Learning, Teaching Evaluation Committee (CULTEC).

However, the Review Team noticed that the junior counsellors have not gained any formal training on counselling to provide high quality counselling for undergraduate students and further there is no specific place allocated for their activities, nor was their activities documented

The Review Team judges Academic Guidance and Counselling as SATISFACTORY.

5. CONCLUSIONS

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

Strengths/Good Practices

1. The undergraduate syllabi are designed to enhance knowledge and provide the necessary skills to face the challenges in the 21st century
2. Staff participation in periodic review meetings of undergraduate syllabi
3. GIS, which is a highly sophisticated data presentation technique, is taught in all undergraduate programmes.
4. Inclusion of the fieldwork component in designing curricular
5. Postgraduate syllabi also have been designed to cater to the increasing needs of the country. Master of Arts, Master of Social Sciences and Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning are the three taught courses where there is a high demand. These courses have become very popular with the inclusion of courses such as Field Studies and Research Methods.

Weaknesses

1. The main concern of the students who follow Bachelor of Arts (Special) degree in Geography – Economic and Social Geography stream is that their knowledge on the physical aspects of the world is very limited. Further, the students who follow Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Geography – Environmental Geography Stream are dissatisfied that their knowledge on human activities is limited.
2. Lack of course units in Mathematics and Statistics
3. Lack of Postgraduate courses conducted in English medium

2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

Strengths/Good Practices

1. Frequent use of 'Power Point' method in undergraduate teaching
2. Handouts and Power Point presentations are prepared in English
3. Undergraduate lectures are conducted by using appropriate English terms (bilingual).

4. Undergraduates improve their knowledge and gain valuable experience by participating in field classes.
5. Very low dropout rate and insignificant failure rate at the end of the undergraduate programmes
6. First year students, who hardly knew English, get through level I & Level II. The basic requirement to get the degree is to have a pass in level I in English. This clearly shows that the Power Point & bilingual methods adopted by the academic staff have improved the knowledge of English.
7. The assessment method practiced for undergraduate courses is 60% for the end of semester (general degree) examination. For such courses there are two tutorials and two assignments where each carries 10 marks. On the other hand for special degree courses the end of semester examination carries 80%. In addition the tutorial and the assignment carry 10% each.

Weaknesses

1. First year lectures are held in a hall without any basic facilities. There was no sound system for the students to understand what was taught.
2. What is written on the white board cannot be read by a high proportion of the students who occupy the seats at the far end. This problem can be aggravated when female lecturers deliver lectures.
3. In all undergraduate courses a considerable weightage has been given for assignments. These assignments carry either 10 or 20 marks. Mid evaluations tests are not held for any of the five undergraduate programmes. When student's performance is evaluated usually they tend to score high marks on assignments. This shortcoming can be seen in Postgraduate assessment methods too. There should be more continuous assessments to keep the interests of the students.
4. In Postgraduate courses teaching is done only in Sinhala medium. As shown earlier there can be several disadvantages.
5. One of the complaints made by both undergraduates and postgraduates is the main library being closed during the lunch hour. This can be a problem to the students who have lectures continuously from morning until noon.
6. The departmental library is not equipped to fulfill the increasing needs of students. Recent Journals on IT, GIS, Research Methodology are needed urgently.
7. Currently the DoG uses the IT equipment received as a grant from the SIDA-SAREC programme. As the demand for GIS courses increases it would not be possible to provide proper practical knowledge, when there is a large number of students (There are about 10-12 students per one computers).

3. Quality of Students, including Students Progress and Achievements

Strengths/Good Practices

1. Strict principles for the selection of students for special courses. Although there is large number of applicants, only 25 students are selected from a batch. Another measure to maintain quality is the GPA level of 2.8, which first year students should obtain at the end of the first year to be eligible to do special.

2. Additional measures that have been adopted to maintain quality of students are (i) strictly adhering to the date of submission of assignments, 80% attendance for practicals, Introduction of new course unit e.g. GEOG 42526 (Field survey)
3. Students' ability to use computers, inclusion computer based maps in their theses, etc.
4. Almost all the students get through their final year examination (both general & special). This is an indication that they have passed their level I or II in English proficiency at the University. This is one method of measuring their progress and achievements.

Weaknesses

1. One of the weaknesses in selecting students for special degree is their knowledge on Mathematics is not considered at all.
2. Some the students in remote areas do not offer Geography as a G.C.E. Advanced Level subject due to lack of equipment and teachers. Such students do not get an opportunity to do Geography when they enter the University as a pass in Geography is a pre-request. Geography is a multidisciplinary subject, where the demand is increasing annually. The Review Team felt that the first year geography syllabus should be designed in such a way that, Geography should be made available to a larger group.
3. Long delays in submitting postgraduate theses, particularly for M'Phil and PhD degrees. This situation can be rectified by making amendments in the relevant bylaws.

4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback

Strengths/Good Practices

1. Opportunities for students to express their views on academic matters at departmental staff meetings
2. Opportunities for students to discuss their views at the presentations and discussions related to field trips
3. In class room discussions, the lecturers get a qualitative feedback of students.
4. Final year students who compile research dissertations use quantitative techniques and GIS in analysing and presenting data. At these sessions the staff gets an opportunity to evaluate the students' feedback.
5. The Department has taken measures to get quantitative feedback of two Postgraduate Programmes. A formal questionnaire is used, to get the feedback of the students who follow the MSc & the PgDRP. The practice should be extended to Postgraduate programme such as M.A., M'Phil & PhD.

Weaknesses

1. Either qualitative or Quantitative feedback is a basic requirement in the course unit system. Quantitative feedback should be obtained by using a formal questionnaire. The answers should be analysed & data should be maintained.

5. Postgraduate Studies

Strengths/Good Practices

1. The DoG is conducting five Postgraduate programmes to cater to the increasing demand in the country. Of the five programmes two one based on course work and a research component. E.g. Master of Social Sciences (MSSc).
2. In 2006, the Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning was introduced. Both MSSc & PgDRP have attracted a large number of candidates.
3. The staff members in the DoG who are over loaded with undergraduate teaching handle most of the Postgraduate course units during the weekends.

Weaknesses

1. All the Postgraduate programmes where teaching component is involved are conducted in Sinhala medium. These courses are not available for non Sinhala candidates.
2. A continuous evaluation system is not adopted for the Master of Social Sciences programme. The evaluation is based entirely on the examinations held at the end of the year.
3. The question papers have not been structured properly (This statement is based on the question papers available for the examinations held prior to 2007).
4. The Review Team observed that the number of courses taught by visiting staff is not adequate. It was highlighted by the internal staff that they are overloaded with undergraduate teaching (average 12 - 18 hours per week). Therefore additional work during the weekends would be an additional burden to them. The pressure on internal staff could be minimized if more experienced, qualified external staff members are employed, for Postgraduate teaching.

6. Peer Observation

Strengths/Good Practices

1. There are several informal ways of conducting peer observations. Junior lecturers, who are in charge of particular lecture courses, invite senior lecturers to be present when students make their presentations. This is one way of observing the performance of junior lecturers.
2. When junior lecturers present seminar papers at research sessions, the subject matter, presentation skills are observed in an informal manner, by the senior staff members.

Weaknesses

1. Lack of formal accepted method for peer observation adopted in the DoG.
2. The courses conducted by the Staff Development Center have emphasized the importance of peer observation. However, it should not be limited to the training programmes conducted by the Staff Development Centre.

7. Skills Development

Strengths/Good Practices

1. Several avenues and sources for development of skills of the academic staff

2. Several positive measures for skills development of undergraduate students
3. Training and knowledge on GIS have enhanced IT skills of undergraduates
4. Participation in field classes has sharpened their interviewing skills and presentation skills.
5. The establishment of a Department of Sports has provided facilities for interested students to improve their skills.
6. Writing reports presenting research reports & theses, have improved the skills of postgraduate students to a great extent.

Weaknesses

1. Lack of programmes to improve technical skills of the non-academic staff.
2. Departmental staff meetings and recording of minutes are done in Sinhala. If meetings are conducted in English, the junior staff members get an opportunity to express their ideas in English which is a positive way of improving English.
3. For a large number of Postgraduate students proper understanding of GIS cannot be given with a limited number of computers. More computers are needed urgently to rectify this situation.

8. Academic Guidance & Counselling

Strengths/Good Practices

1. Academic Guidance & counseling are essential particularly for the first year students. However counselling on both personal and academic matters should be provided for all the undergraduates.
2. A team of counsellors provide necessary guidance to students both on academic and personal matters.
3. A personal tutor is appointed to serve a group of 10-15 students when they are in their first year. It is expected that this service will continue through out their University carrier.
4. Academic guidance is provided by Supervisors/Tutors when necessary.
5. Advice on selection and changing course units, are provided by the Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Evaluation Committee (CULTEC).

Weaknesses

1. Providing counselling on personal matters is a very delicate subject where the counsellors should be well trained. The Review Team observed that there are no trained counsellors available to handle personal problems.
2. Although personal tutors' service is available, students do not seek advice from Personal Tutors. They prefer to get necessary advice from the senior students. This is being encouraged by the senior students who wish to have more followers for their political parties.

Based on the observation made during the visit by the Review Team and discussed above, the eight aspects were judge 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 Students feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative	Satisfactory
Postgraduate Studies	Satisfactory
Peer Observation	Satisfactory
Skills Development	Good
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Satisfactory

The overall judgment is suspended

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Curriculum Design Content and Review

1. The students who offer courses in Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Geography – Economic & Social Geography Stream do not get adequate knowledge on Physical Geographical aspects. On the other hand those students who offer Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Geography – Environmental Geography stream do not get knowledge on human activities. It is recommended that this situation be rectified by restructuring the relevant syllabi.
2. Course units pertaining to Mathematics and Statistics are not included in undergraduate syllabi. It is strongly recommended that the DoG consider introducing course units in Mathematics and Statistics.
3. All the taught Postgraduate courses are conducted in Sinhala Medium. It is suggested that at least one programme be conducted in English medium, for the benefit of a large number of non-Sinhala students.

Teaching Learning and Assessment Methods

4. Kekulawela Hall where first year lectures are held does not have adequate facilities. A sound system need to be provided for the benefit of the students who occupy seats at far end. More multimedia projectors are needed to use Power Point presentations as what is written on white board cannot be seen at the far end.
5. Besides attending lectures library is considered as a direct source of learning. The closure of the main library from 12.00 noon–1.00 pm is a cause for dissatisfaction among many students. The authorities may consider taking appropriate measures to keep the library opened from 12.00 noon to 1.00 pm
6. The independent dissertations submitted by the undergraduates are examined by two examiners. The first examiner is invariably the supervisor who has already gone

through the thesis for several times. It is recommended that for impartial judgment of research work, two independent examiners be appointed.

7. In Postgraduate assessment there is no continuous assessment system. Particularly for the MSSc programme a continuous assessment system need to be introduced.
8. A significant number of students who get registered for M.A., M'Phil, and PhD degree do not complete their thesis on time. In this regard, the respective bylaws need to be amended to improve the system.

Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements

9. At present, it is a basic requirement that the students, who wish to offer Geography, should have successfully completed Geography at the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) examinations. It is suggested that this prerequisite be relaxed to provide an opportunity to increasing number of students who wish to follow Geography at the University level. The curriculum of the first year needs to be restructured to accommodate students who have not offered Geography at the G.C.E. (Advanced Level).
10. One of the basic criteria in determining the quality of students is their ability to read and speak in English. The rate of failure is very low. This is an indication that the students have been able to complete level one English examination which is the basic requirement to get the degree certificate. It is suggested that more resources be allocated to improve English.
11. The quality and progress of Postgraduate students cannot be clearly measured as the completion rate fluctuates. Introducing several incentives be to complete their theses/ dissertations on due date, is recommended.
12. To improve quality of Postgraduate programmes at least one or two courses need to be conducted in English medium.

Extent and Use of Student Feed back

13. Undergraduate students' feedback is not obtained in a systematic manner. It is recommended that a questionnaire approved by the academic staff be used to get the feedback on course units and about the lecturer. This need to be practiced, for both general and special degree programmes.
14. It was revealed that a formal questionnaire is used to get the feedback from the MSSc programme. However it would be very useful to extend this system to all the other Postgraduate courses conducted by the DoG.

Postgraduate Studies

15. The DoG conducts five postgraduate programmes. All the taught courses are conducted in Sinhala medium. It would be beneficial if one exiting course or a new course could be conducted in English medium. The non-Sinhala officials who are attached to D.S. Offices in the North & East of Sri Lanka are denied of following these courses when they are conducted only in Sinhala medium.

Peer Observation

16. It was revealed that the members of the junior staff are given the responsibility of conducting lectures in general degree programmes. Hence, it is recommended that at least two peer observations for each course unit be held. This system would be very useful for the junior staff members.

Skills Development

17. Currently there are several programmes for skills development of academic staff and undergraduate students. However, more emphasis need to be paid on developing communication skills of undergraduates, if they wish to pursue their postgraduate studies in foreign countries, their knowledge of English and communications are essential. This could be achieved by providing facilities for undergraduates to use more English, e.g. a method where compulsory questions to be answered in English medium.
18. It is also recommended that more IT equipment be provided for skills development for both undergraduates and the academic staff.
19. It was reported by the Technical officer (one of the non-academic staff members) that she should be given an opportunity to get training in GIS. It is suggested that opportunities be made available to train non-academic staff.
20. The departmental staff meetings are ideal for junior staff to express their views, in English. It is suggested that for future reference minutes of the departmental staff meetings be maintained in English.

Academic Guidance and Counselling

21. The Faculty of Social Sciences has a team of counsellors that represents the academic staff members of the DoG. These counsellors are responsible for maintaining law and order in the University. However trained counsellors are needed to help students in their academic and personal problems. This is particularly useful for the first year students who come from remote areas. Counselling service will also be very helpful for the students who become victims during the “ragging” seasons.
22. It is recommended that the trained counsellors, student counsellors and personal tutors be advised and their services should be properly recorded for future references.

7. ANNEXES

Annex 1. LIST OF DOCUMENTS EXAMINED BY THE REVIEW TEAM

1. Syllabi
(Special) Degree – Development Studies, Economic & Social Geography, Environmental Geography
(General Degree) – Geography, Development Studies
Master of Arts / Master of Social Sciences
Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning
2. List of Examiners – Postgraduate Courses / Undergraduate Courses
3. Lecture Outlines
4. Handouts- Undergraduate Students
5. Handouts –Postgraduate Students (M.A. / MSSc / Diploma)
6. Question Papers – Undergraduate Courses / Postgraduate Courses
7. Answer Scripts – BA (General) 2007
8. Comments on Question Papers
9. Postgraduate Evaluation Sheets – 2006 and 2007
10. Field Trip Documents – from 2003 to date
11. Dissertations – BA 2006, 2007, M.A. 2005 April. MSSc 2004 – 2006
12. Research and Publications (Academic Staff)
13. Films (Human Evolution)
14. KOICA – Physical Geography (Films)
15. Students’ Assignments
16. Students’ Field Study Reports
17. Minutes of staff meetings – 2006 and 2007
18. Questionnaire Survey (2007) – BADULLA, Postgraduate Diploma in Regional Planning