

# **SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT**

**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**



**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF RUHUNA**

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## 1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

Subject review process evaluates the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline. It is focused on the student learning experience and on student achievement. It is designed to evaluate the quality of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. However, the responsibility for quality and standards lies within the institution itself, since it alone has the power to control and to change existing practices.

Review process was conducted according to the guidelines given in the quality assurance handbook for Sri Lankan universities, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002. The Department of Geography (DoG), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (H&SS), University of Ruhuna (UR) submitted a self evaluation report (SER) consisting of twelve sections, namely: Introduction; Aims, learning outcomes and programme details; Students, staff and facilities; Curriculum design, content and review; Teaching, learning and assessment methods; Quality of students including student progress and achievements; Extent and use of student feedback; Postgraduate studies; Peer observation; Skills development; Academic guidance and counseling; and Other activities in the department. The quality of education was reviewed according to the aims and learning outcomes given in the (SER).

The following eight aspects of education were reviewed at the subject level:

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

The review team visited the DoG from 29<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008. The agenda of the three day visit is attached (see annexure 1).

The evaluation of eight aspects was based on:

Meetings held with the Vice Chancellor, Dean, Head of Department, academic staff, non-academic staff, student counselors of the Department, undergraduates representing special and general degree programmes, some postgraduate students representing different postgraduate programmes and supportive staff in the Department;

Observations of university Library, physical facilities of the Department of Geography including Geology Lab, Cartography Lab, Meteorological Station, Map Storage, Department's computer labs, Geo-informatics lab, S.S.T.O., Class rooms, Lecturers' rooms, Departmental library, etc.; and

Observation of teaching and practical classes of undergraduates and students' presentations; and Reviewing available documents at the Department.

Each of the eight aspects was judged as good / satisfactory / unsatisfactory, based on strengths, good practices and weaknesses in each.

## 2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE DEPARTMENT

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1978, the Ruhuna Campus of the former University of Sri Lanka, with the four faculties referred to was ceremonially declared open by the Prime Minister of the time, Mr. J.R. Jayawardene fulfilling a long cherished desire of the people of the South to have a university in the region. Meanwhile, the structure of higher education was being reviewed, and the government decided to replace the former single University of Sri Lanka with six campuses with a system of independent universities, university colleges, campuses and institutions. Accordingly, under the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978, the status Ruhuna campus was converted to that of a University College. This meant that the four faculties of the Ruhuna University College came to be affiliated to corresponding faculties of older universities. Thus, the Faculties of Arts and Medicine were affiliated to the corresponding faculties of the University of Colombo, while Agriculture was affiliated to the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Peradeniya, and the Faculty of Science, University of Kelaniya.

The Ruhuna University College was elevated to fulfill university status as from 1<sup>st</sup> February 1984 and its first Vice Chancellor was Prof. G.P. Samarawickrema. The Ven. Pandit Paravahera Pannananda, B.A. (London), Hony. D. Litt. (Sri J'Pura) was appointed as Chancellor of the new university on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 1984.

Following its beginning in 1978 with four faculties, Agriculture, Arts, Medicine and Science, with about 40 academics, 50 non-academics and 275 students, the University of Ruhuna has made great strides in the past thirty years in the academic, research and outreach spheres, achieving enviable growth in academic stature and intellectual and infrastructure resources. Presently, it has seven faculties including Engineering and Management and Finance with a total of about 450 academics, 8,000 non-academics and about 5, 000 students and has hitherto produced nearly 10,000 graduates. The latest addition to the faculties of the university is the establishment of the Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Science and Technology.

As outlined in the University Corporate Plan (2002-2006) the Vision, Mission, and Goals of the university are as follows:

**Vision:** “Vision is to be an outstanding internationally respected academic centre of excellence which proudly affirms its Sri Lankan identity and which is committed to rigorous scholarship, academic freedom, sound moral values and social responsibility”.

**Mission:** “In pursuit of its vision the University of Ruhuna will strive to produce outstanding internationally accredited graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable, with life-long of learning, and to strive through quality teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of scholarship and the enrichment of the educational, cultural, economic, and natural environments of the society we serve”.

The intended objectives in order to achieve the university’s mission are:

To create a student-centered teaching and learning environment that will encourage students to reach their full potential, and that will produce graduates of distinction, committed to

lifelong learning, integrity and professionalism, capable of being responsive leaders and communicators in their fields;

To conduct original scholarship and basic and applied research, and produce creative works of international excellence for its quality and impact on both academic and user communities;

To promote and enhance partnerships with the community and respond to the cultural, economic, social and technological needs of the country and particularly of the Southern Region;

To create an environment in which staff and students can achieve their full potential; and

To be fully accountable for the effective management of public and private resources bestowed upon the institution.

Amongst its goals, the University has given the priority to create a student-centered teaching and learning environment that will encourage students to achieve their full potential. To reach this goal, the University has formulated several important objectives and strategies.

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences was founded with the establishment of the Ruhuna University Collage affiliated to the University of Colombo. On obtaining a fully-fledged university status, the H&SS started operating as an independent body. Now it is a well-established faculty offering Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral Degrees in a wide spectrum of disciplines of diverse character.

The H&SS is located on the Main Campus of the University of Ruhuna along with the Administrative Complex and the Faculties of Science, Management & Finance, Fisheries Marine Sciences & Technology.

### **Vision**

“The vision of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences is to be a centre of academic and scientific excellence of national and international accreditation”

### **Mission is**

To develop honest, adaptable and productive citizens;

To articulate and promote interaction with society at large, with the view to contributing towards the development of the nation; and

To institute mechanisms for partnership programmes developed with the aim of improving resources

The H&SS is the largest faculty of the university having approximately an undergraduate student body of 3000 and an annual intake of over 500 students every year. The faculty offers over 400 course modules in 12 diversified disciplines per annum through the six departments operating under its aegis.

The H&SS has instituted a computer centre to enhance the students' skills in information and communication technology as focused on the potential needs of the job market. Moreover, it has launched two special programmes to advance the information technology skills and English language proficiency of the undergraduates under the IRQUE (Improving Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education) project funded by the World Bank. A Cultural Centre has been established to carry out all types of cultural activities. A Centre for Modern Languages is established to make sure that the students have opportunities to improve their language abilities well beyond their mother tongue.

The H&SS is composed of six departments as follows:

Department of Economics  
Department of History  
**Department of Geography**  
Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies  
Department of Sinhala  
Department of Sociology

The students are also assisted in their studies and extracurricular activities by the following units:

English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU)  
Computer Centre  
Resource Centre for Modern Languages  
Cultural Centre  
Centre for Conflict Studies  
Course Unit Coordinating Office

Department of Geography was a foundation member in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1979 in the Teachers' Training College buildings at Eliyakanda, Matara with only three academic staff members, one non-academic staff member and about 50 students. It was shifted to the present premises after constructing new three storey building complex with a unique architectural landscape in 1984.

Since then, it has developed with more physical and human resources and has produced about 750 special degree graduates and 7 postgraduates so far. Currently around 200 undergraduates are pursuing general and special degree study programmes under the department.

The **Vision** of the DoG is;

**To remain a nationally and internationally accredited outstanding academic center for geography committed to rigorous scholarship, academic freedom, sound moral values and social responsibility**

The **Mission** of the DoG is;

**To produce nationally and internationally accredited outstanding graduates in Geography, who are innovative, analytical and adaptable with a life-long love of learning; and to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in Geography and to the enrichment of the human and natural environment of the region we serve**

In order to fulfill that mission, the DoG always try to pursue excellence in teaching and research to the benefit of their students, academics and wider society.

At the undergraduate level, the department provides General and Special Degree Programmes. The students who seek to specialize in Geography are selected on the basis of their performance at the 1000 level course unit examinations at the end of the first year.

Under each programme, the DoG offers a wide range of course units for the undergraduates.

1. B.A. General Degree in Geography (three years)
2. B.A. Special Degree in Geography (four years)

Table 1.1: Degree programme and student registration in the department of Geography from 2005/06 to 2007/08

Programme	Duration	student number		
		2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008
Fist year	-	127	166	376
General Degree	3 years	na	na	na
Special Degree	4 years	35	26	42

Source: Department of Geography

Apart from the undergraduate courses, following Post Graduate Courses are also offered by The DoG.

1. Post graduate Diploma in Development Planning
2. Certificate Course in GIS (will be started in January, 2009)
3. MA Degree in Geography: two year programme consisting of three written papers and a viva voce examination on the dissertation
4. MPhil Degree in Geography: two year programme consisting of a thesis based on an independent research project conducted by the candidate
5. PhD Degree in Geography: Three year programme consisting of a thesis based on an independent research project conducted by the candidate

The department has improved physical and human resources providing more conducive environment for teaching and learning.

Conference Room facilitates monthly staff meetings, seminars, group discussions and conferences. A new Mini Auditorium was set up with a seating capacity over 100 within the Department in order to facilitate the staff and the students in conducting workshops, seminars and guest lectures. The Departmental Library provides resources to the staff as well as the students to improve their knowledge. It contains over 2,000 books, journals and reports. A separate reading room has been established adjoining the library in order to facilitate students. Geo-informatics lab consists of various equipments used for surveying. It benefits not only the internal students but also Geography teachers and students of Southern province. They frequently visit the lab in order to gain practical knowledge about surveying and cartographical applications. Geomorphologic Exhibition unit has a wide collection of specimens related to Geology, Geomorphology and Marine Biology. A mini Meteorological Station managed by the Department of Geography is equipped with several preliminary meteorological instruments by which daily meteorological data are collected and informed to the meteorological Department, Colombo. Cartography Lab, Map Storage, surveying equipment room, Department's computer labs, S.S.T.O., Class rooms, Lecturers' rooms, staff common room, etc., are some of the well established physical facilities. Some of these development projects are funded by IRQUE project.

The academic staff of the department comprises of 15 permanent Lecturers including three professors and 11 senior lecturers and one probationary lecturer. In addition there are two Temporary assistant Lecturers and one computer Instructor. The department has five non

academic staff members whom are contributing well for the smooth functioning of the department.

### **3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

#### **3.1. Aims**

Aims focused through the structure and function of the Department of Geography in the University of Ruhuna can be divided into three main domains: knowledge, skills, and perspectives. Within this broad context, the DoG aims to provide,

- degree courses that offer the theoretical and practical knowledge of the facts, processes, and methods of both human and physical geographical aspects under a thoroughly prepared curriculum;
- encouragement for student-centered learning opportunities such as student presentations, report writing, construction of maps to develop the applied aspects of the discipline in order to promote their skills;
- a vision to develop the students' perspective regarding Geography as an academic and professional discipline which offers important knowledge as well as analytical skills which could be applied in solving important human and environmental problems at local, regional and global scales;
- opportunities for developing advanced technological capabilities such as Advanced Cartography, Land Surveying, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Remote Sensing (RS), Computer based Statistical Analysis and Spatial Models;
- a range of innovative learning experiences within the classroom as well as outside it through methods such as field excursions, literature review, guest lectures, workshops and seminars;
- various research skills by encouraging the preparation of independent dissertations and project reports on various human and physical issues under the expert guidance of an academic supervisor;
- a friendly, responsive and supportive departmental environment which promotes an enthusiastic teaching learning experience through a good rapport among each and every stake holder (students, academic and non academic staff);
- teaching-learning experience extended to external institutions both Government and private sector; and
- a supportive environment for the academic staff in their career development.

#### **3.2. Learning Outcomes**

Overall learning outcomes of the DoG are as follows.

On successful completion of the degree programmes, students should have,

- successful application skills of Geographical knowledge and methods;
- leadership in identifying and solving environmental problems;
- analytical and communicative skills to attract suitable career opportunities;
- lifelong love for further studies and applied research in the field of Geography; and
- the highest standards of professional ethics and service.



Apart from the overall learning outcomes, several specific learning outcomes which derive out of current curriculum of the DoG can be highlighted as follows.

On successful completion of the degree programmes, the students will be able to,

- learn and apply cartographical skills using both manual and digital methods. They will be able to enhance their skills in acquiring, handling and analyzing spatial data using GIS and Remote Sensing;
- gain a conceptual and practical knowledge of areas of both human and physical environment around the department and their close interaction between each other. They will also gain an understanding on concepts, traditions and theories related to the subject of Geography and get the ability to evaluate current issues away from conventional Geographical thinking;
- develop the skills in handling, interpreting and analyzing geographical data using different statistical methods both manually and using computers;
- train themselves to respect the environmental ethics and thereby actively involved in protecting the environment around them;
- develop their ability on project formulation, writing proposals and reports and evaluation and implementation of projects. They will also gain the skill on preparation of an independent dissertation;
- broaden their understanding on physical, human, socio-economic and cultural environment and development potentialities and constraints related to Southern Sri Lanka.
- receive information and knowledge about the adolescent reproductive health and acquire the ability to make responsible decisions in view of adolescent sexual behavior.
- understand the general characteristics, causes and effects, risk and vulnerability of hydrological, geological, atmospheric and biological hazards and recognize the need of disaster assessment, preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation measures.

## **4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM**

### **4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review**

BA General and Special degree courses conform the faculty's semester system with course units based on course credits. Under the two semesters (15 weeks each) DoG offers 6 course units for the general degree students during part I and part II. Students take another two units provided by other departments and they help them to have a multidisciplinary learning environment.

BA Special degree students of the DoG follow twenty compulsory course units during all three levels. Total credits to be completed for special degree programme are 120. Out of 120, 81 credits (27 course units) can be collected from the DoG which accounted for 68% of the total credits and balance 39 credits from other disciplines. It was observed that combined classes are conducted for General and Special students for certain courses. Other special feature is that students from other departments are allowed to follow some of the courses offered by the Geography department. This is a good practice that the DoG contributes to broaden the horizon of knowledge of students and improve on the multidisciplinary nature and interdepartmental harmony of the faculty.

Within the structure of the DoG programmes, a special emphasis has been given for the recent innovative subject areas such as Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Systems.

Within the curricula, an attempt is made to discuss critical human and environmental issues prevailing in the Southern Province as the DoG believes that it has a mandate to serve the Southern Province of Sri Lanka.

The DoG is at present in the process of exploring the possibilities to incorporate the internship programme to their course unit system. The reason is that, it will benefit the students by having the opportunity to secure productive employment in both the government and private sectors.

The DoG hopes to develop their existing curricula by introducing new optional courses. thereby, students will get more opportunity to select relevant courses according to their needs. Introduction of new units has been driven by the advancements in the subject as well as in career requirements.

The curriculum of the DoG is usually reviewed from time to time in order to upgrade the content of the programmes in accordance with trends, issues and problems emerge within human and natural environment around the region. The first curricular was prepared by the Department of Geography, University of Colombo in 1979 since the DoG was affiliated to them initially. In 1980 and in 1984 the curriculum was revised under the guidance of Prof. K.U.S Sirinanda and Prof. Kanthi Ratnayaka respectively. Next syllabus revision was conducted in 1996 and all the syllabuses were revised according to the needs and opportunities in the region and in the country at that time. Before the introduction of Semester system in 2001, a new curriculum was designed according to the semester based credit system. It was done within the year 2000. The latest syllabus revision took place in 2007 under the guidance of Prof. P. Hewage. A two-day workshop was organized for reviewing and preparation of syllabuses and C1 forms of semester one in March 2007. Prof. Weerakkody served as the coordinator of the syllabus revision committee. All the staff members were present for the event. A one-day workshop was again organized to review and prepare syllabuses and C1 forms of semester two in June 2007. Prof. Jonathan Rigg, a scholar from Department of Geography, Durham University also participated for the workshop giving the DoG his valuable suggestions. Thus the DoG has followed the good practice that upgrading their syllabuses rather regularly.

In designing the new curricula, it is noticed that reform of curricular was discussed first at the department level and certain matters which need some advice and consultations were obtained from the environmental authority, Southern province Geography Teachers Association, visiting professors etc.

Our observations show that all the teachers are required to prepare a course outline with list of references before commencement of teaching. This is called C1 form. Review team had the opportunity to examine them. All the members are with the impression that the C1 forms of most of the courses are up to date.

Geography is referred to as the subject which synthesis of physical, biological, socioeconomic and cultural aspects i.e. study of man and land. The review team is of the

opinion that the content of the courses offered are adequately covered for the requirements of a degree programme of this nature. The structure of the curricular has paid special emphasis to recent innovative subjects such as GIS and remote sensing and computer based geographical data analysis. Currently these courses are offered as optional courses as the lack of computers, however in the near future DoG can expand the GIS lab under the IRQUE project which they won and can offer these courses as compulsory.

Based on curricular and content of courses we are of the opinion that aims and learning outcomes are met satisfactorily. In general, the review of the course contents of the course modules offered for the special and general degrees are appropriate for the respective programs.

However, meaningful measures have not been taken to improve the standards of English so that the students do not develop their capabilities in making use of the reading materials available in English.

***In relation to the curriculum design, content and review, the judgment of the team is GOOD.***

#### **4.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods.**

The DoG is guided by the Faculty teaching, learning and assessment strategy based on semester system. While every student is given a student handbook by the faculty when they enroll in the first year programme, the Department of Geography prepares a handbook for special degree students to provide them with necessary information regarding the courses, facilities and necessary guidelines. Majority of courses are conducted by several staff members in order to utilize the expertise of all staff for the benefit of students. Extra attention is provided as and when necessary for students by temporary staff members under the guidance of the lecturer-in-charge.

The department uses a common format for the C1 form which is given to students at the first day of each course unit. The C1 form provides every detail about the specific course unit such as date, time, place and person conducting the lecture, the title of each lecture, date of assignments and a reading list, students are able to plan their learning schedules at the beginning of each semester.

The department is currently moving to a *student centred* teaching learning method from a *teacher centred* method. Traditional classroom teaching is rarely practiced in the DoG. Interactive teaching methods are now becoming popular. The course units are taught through a combination of lectures, practical sessions, Group discussions, field excursions, study tours, guest lectures, seminars and workshops. Student projects, final year dissertation and presentations are also adopted to encourage student-centered learning environment. Students are encouraged to have an applied knowledge and skills on writing research proposals, collecting field data using both physical and human data collection tools, writing reports etc. Course units such as Research Methods in Geography; Project Formulation, Implementation and Evaluation; Dissertation are directly providing the research base for special degree students.

The DoG is now strong with many teaching learning facilities. White boards, transparencies, Multimedia, microphones and OHP facilities are available in many lecture-rooms maintained

under the DoG. The review team observed that the facilities are being used by the majority teachers. Handouts and reading materials are provided in advance or at least at the beginning of the session.

The department has a separate library with some collection of 2000 books and reputed Journals. At the beginning of the special degree programme, Part I students are given the opportunity to participate in a library tour under the guidance of a Senior Lecturer of the Department and a Senior Assistant Librarian of the Main Library, in which they are given an opportunity to enhance their awareness on the effective use of library reference sources.

Very recently the DoG is able to allocate personal computers to the majority of lecturers enhancing their capabilities of teaching and research. Usage of internet facilities is very important for teaching-learning activities. Therefore an initiative was taken to develop internet facility in the department. Current state of the software availability at the department computer lab is fairly satisfactory. However availability of computers for students' use is inadequate.

Non academic staff members are also happy with the prevailing environment in the department and support the academic administration of the department. The team is pleased with the friendly teaching and learning environment maintained in class rooms. The teaching and learning environment is conducive. The review team observed that the students are highly motivated and enthusiastic. Both academic and non-academic staff displayed a high level of commitment.

The DoG's assessment procedure is based on the faculty's examination regulations under the semester system. In general, the evaluation consists of two parts, viz., (i) in- course assessments and (ii) semester-end examinations. Two in-course assignments are given within one semester and students are offered 20% marks for them while 80% marks are allocated for the end-semester examination.

At the end of the semester, the grade points will be averaged to calculate the 'Grade Point Average' (GPA). The GPA will also be calculated at the end of the academic program to evaluate the overall performance of a student. The level of performance (First, Second class or ordinary pass) will be decided on the basis of the overall GPA.

The DoG uses a variety of different assessment methods as the in-course assessments. The method of assessment can vary from course to course. It is attempted to introduce innovative assessment methods like, student projects/ reports and student presentations based on field excursions. From this type of assessments both knowledge and skills can be evaluated simultaneously. Course units with a practical component, are evaluated by practical assignments. Computer-based Geographical Data Analysis, Application of GIS and Remote Sensing, Fundamentals of Geographic Information Systems and Advanced GIS techniques and applications can be highlighted as examples.

While the semester-end examination is conducted by the faculty, setting up and moderation of all the question papers and assessment of them are being done by the academic staff of DoG. A system for the assessment of semester end examination is being handled within the Department and semester-end Examination papers of the special degree students are reviewed by both internal and external examiners. The final year dissertations are marked by two

examiners excluding the supervisor. A common format is given to all examiners to maintain the consistency among evaluators.

The question papers are not divided into parts though different sections are done by different lecturers and preparation of a marking scheme is not in practice.

***In relation to the teaching, learning and assessment methods the judgment of the team is GOOD.***

#### **4.3 Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements**

Students enrolled for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences are selected by the University Grants Commission (UGC) based on its national admission policy. There are no prerequisites for a first year student to select 1000 level courses in geography. However, It was found that Z-scores of students enrolled in Geography are higher when compared with Z-scores of faculty enrollment. Therefore, it confirms that DoG is able to enroll brighter students for its' programmes.

Students for the Special Degree programme are selected on the basis of their performance at 1000 level semester end examinations. A sound criterion is adopted to select the most suitable students for the programme after considering their applications. While the student should succeed in all 1000 level courses in Geography within the first year in one sitting and obtain a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or above for all the course units within the first year in one sitting, he or she should obtain a GPA of 3.0 or above for the courses in Geography to enroll the special degree programme. There is an increasing tendency of students applying to follow the special degree in Geography.

Overall results show that more than 75% percent received second class upper divisions or lower division passes. The failure rate is nil or very limited. However no first classes are recorded in the history of the department and this should be seriously taken into consideration. Graduates waiting time for a job is not known as there is no data base. Observations suggest that communication in English is poor and rectifying this weakness is not addressed properly.

Students in the General Degree programme are not given sufficient attention to improve their skills through presentations, field trips, etc., so that their quality can be questionable.

***In relation to the quality of students, student progress and achievements the judgment of the team is SATISFACTORY***

#### **4.4. Extent and use of Student Feedback**

A standard questionnaire at the end of each semester under the guidance of the Head of the Department with the help of the Assistant Lecturers is distributed among students to obtain the student's feedback quantitatively. These questionnaires are analysed and findings are passed to coordinator and the teaching staff of each course unit to recognize and address relevant issues. Moreover a survey was conducted to obtain the feedback from passed out students.

In addition to that students also provide feedback at an informal level to the head of the department and to individual staff members. Field trips and other student activities provide opportunities for obtaining feedback from students in formally. Monthly faculty board meeting is another forum where student's feedback is obtained.

***In relation to the extent and use of student feedback the judgment of the team is GOOD.***

#### **4.5. Postgraduate Studies**

As stated earlier, the DoG offers MA Degree in Geography (minimum of two years with three written papers and a research component), MPhil degree by research (minimum of two years) and PhD degree by research (minimum of three years). Applications are invited throughout the year. The majority of applicants in these programmes are staff members of the DoG and some seven postgraduate degrees are produced so far. Research students are assigned a supervisor(s) after the approval of the proposal. In general, supervisors are from the department, however for specific cases supervisors may be appointed from other universities or research institutes.

Apart from the conventional post graduate degree programmes the DoG offers Post Graduate Diploma in Development Planning (started in June 2008) which is designed as semester modular system. There is a demand from the students that this diploma be lead to MA degree programme by adding one more year with course units and a research component. The review team is also of view that the diploma can be promoted to a MA degree so that demand for this degree increases. In addition the department has obtained the approval from the university senate to conduct certificate course in GIS (planned to be started in January 2009). The review team noted that the DoG has adequate number of senior staff with higher qualification to conduct these postgraduate programmes successfully.

In addition, online postgraduate link programme with ADGER, Norway is available for staff members. With NOMA scholarship funds some staff members from DoG benefitted from this programme.

Most of the staff members have contributed to research publications in local and international journals, paper presentations at international conferences, textbooks and other reading materials for local readership. Annual Newsletter is prepared by a Senior Lecturer who is appointed as the Editor of the News letter and distributed among all the Departments within the faculty. It enables to disseminate information regarding the Departmental activities.

It is noteworthy to mention that a Geography Teachers Association has been set up under the Department of Geography on the 06<sup>th</sup> December 2006 with the participation of more than 100 Geography teachers of the Southern Province. The aim of this event is to build up a close academic relationship between the Department and the Geography teachers in the area. In order to fulfill the aim, monthly seminars are organized successfully at the Department for the teachers.

Department library maintains a good collection of textbooks and other reading materials which helpful for research students. Other facilities of the department are extremely useful for the postgraduate students.

***In relation to the postgraduate studies the judgment of the team is GOOD.***

#### **4.6. Peer Observations**

There was no formal peer observation on teaching and learning in the DoG until the second semester in 2008. Several probationary lecturers have had the opportunity to obtain the experience when they were engaged in the Staff Development Programme. The DoG has prepared a standard peer observation form and the teaching staff is happy to plan and implement useful and reliable peer observation strategy. It is revealed that planned peer observation is limited mostly to evaluate juniors by the senior staff. Practice of this in a much wider scale allowing juniors to observe seniors also would provide a better opportunity for the both junior and senior staff to learn on the job, the practice much more effectively.

Apart from peer observation of teaching, academic staff members have the opportunity of monitoring standards of courses by moderating exam question papers and evaluating answer scripts in two stages called first marking and second marking. A monthly staff meeting held on the second Tuesday of every month provides opportunities to share good practices among staff members and have a proper teaching-learning environment in the Department.

Apparently, peer observation is practiced to some extent in an informal way with mutual understanding. However, lack of a formal mechanism for peer observation and lack of follow up actions were noted by the review team. The review team is in view that establishing a formal mechanism for peer observation would further help to enhance the quality of teaching.

***In relation to peer observations the judgment of the review team is SATISFACTORY.***

#### **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 of 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 are making few arrangements to equip students with latent skills such as IT. Therefore students will have opportunity to improve IT skills. In addition, each course unit has compulsory presentation assignment in the special degree programme which will improve the presentation skills of the special degree students. However during the discussion held with students team was found that student engage in general degree programme are not assigned with presentation and therefore they do not have opportunity to improve their presentation skills during their undergraduate studies.

During the discussion held with students the review team found that their English language skills are at a low level. Although students are exposed in compulsory English language courses, by frequent changes in timetable the students are unable to attend the English language courses thereby they do not have much opportunity to establish proper knowledge in this language. Proper channels are not available to enhance the English proficiency in the departmental level while it provides through the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) of the university through compulsory English course units. Because the ELTU guidance is not sufficient, the department can take necessary actions to improve the student's English proficiency.

During the discussion held with the students the review team was pleased to find that the students are in opinion to change the medium of instruction to English language. This could

be one of the great achievements of the DoG to create graduates for job market. Therefore review team suggests changing the medium of instruction to English by gradual transition from first year to fourth year.

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. They are also taught basic research methodology during their studies.

The DoG is sending students to various organizations for their internship programme for a period of three to six months after student's final examination. It is appreciated that staff is very much concern about their students even after they finish their examinations.

Students in this department are members of the Geographical and Environmental Society which organises seminars to advanced level students with the assistance of the staff members, tree planting campaigns, Award Ceremonies and Concerts, A monthly research forum, research oriented field trips and also they are creative to make monthly news letter which is called "vishwaya". Apart from that, awards scheme is established for students (Galle, Matra and Hambantota) who have scored the highest marks for Geography at the Advanced Level examination. These types of extra curricula activities help them to develop and enhance their leadership qualities, organization skills and social responsibilities.

The department organises field trips for each subject for special degree students. Students generally undertake field surveys with the help of academic members in this field trip. Consequently a report is prepared and presentations are done by using the survey results.

Interpersonal skills such as communication skills, team work skills are imparted on students through group activities. In group activities members are given the opportunity to solve problems through brainstorming, discussing, learning and receiving and giving constructive feedback on self and peer as a group. Presentation/ communication skills are imparted on students by necessitating them to do presentations.

***In relation to the skills development the judgment of the team is GOOD.***

#### **4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling**

Academic guidance and counseling are operated formally and informally at department, faculty and University levels.

At university level, formally designated student counselors who are available for both academic and personal guidance and counseling are appointed. Considerable number of staff members from the DoG is appointed for this purpose each year. One of the staff members is appointed as one of the senior student counselors. The university Career Guidance unit has implemented various programmes to make the undergraduates aware of the employment opportunities available, the quality expected by the employers and acquire the skills and the knowledge necessary for responding to the labour market needs. Department of Geography has a Departmental Coordinator of Career Guidance under the Career Guidance Unit. He or she is responsible for directing students for various Career Guidance Programmes.

At faculty level Students' handbook provides information on the various degree programmes, entry requirements, Course structures, Examination regulations etc. A course unit office



(COU) provides information on academic programmes and its registration. In addition, the Dean and Head of Department give an introduction to the system, general information about the degree programmes, entry requirements, information on course structures and options etc. in the orientation programme organized for new entrants. Orientation programme organised by the student unions is an alternative informative procedure for new comers and is supported by the faculty staff members.

Department wise, academic Guidance is available to students from academic staff and other sources such as Student handbooks and C1 forms. Regular announcements, time schedules, assignment marks are communicated through notice boards in the DoG. C1 forms and handouts are distributed at the time of the lecture. A coordinator and a Teaching Assistant are appointed to each course unit and therefore students are able to reach them when they need any guidance regarding the programmes. A Coordinator, Course Assistant and teaching staff are assigned for each course unit during this task. Recently, a programme was initiated to assign the academic staff as Academic Advisors for the Special Degree Part I students. Each member of the staff has been given the responsibility of guiding and observing a group of students throughout the Degree Programme, on their academic activities. While all the staff are responsible to help students in their academic life, a Senior Lecturer is appointed as the Departmental Counselor to help with students' various other problems. She/he is responsible for providing necessary moral support which is very important in the life of the undergraduate.

As a tradition, the Special Degree Part I Students organize a get together with refreshments for the staff and senior students at the beginning of their life at the Department of Geography. The staff organizes a lunch for the final year students before they leave the Department to enter the wider society as a graduate of Geography. Both the occasions are so memorable to everyone that they help in developing a good rapport with all the members in the Department.

At the beginning of the semester information of the objectives of the courses, contents and relevant reference materials are given to students via the C1 form. Students are advised on how to prepare their dissertations regularly throughout the year and required to meet their allocated supervisors on a regular basis. All staff members generally make themselves available to students for academic guidance. The DoG also intends to start mentoring service to the students. The review team realized that the student-staff relationship is satisfactory.

***In relation to academic guidance and counseling the judgment of the team is GOOD.***

Based on the observations made during the visit by the Review Team and as per the facts discussed above the judgments given to those eight aspects under review are 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	Satisfactory
Extent and Use of Student feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative	Good
Postgraduate Studies	Good
Peer Observation	Satisfactory
Skills Development	Good
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Good

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

### 1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

The following strengths/good practices and weaknesses were identified by the review team

#### Strengths/Good Practices

- The DoG follows a systematic procedure in curricula design.
- New curricular is developed
- Department consulted different kind of stakeholders including other university academic experts in curricular formation.
- Credit system, GPA and Semester system were adopted.
- The total four year curriculum carries a weight of 120 credits.
- Independent Research Report is available for the undergraduates to follow in the final year which encourages the undergraduates to apply the theoretical knowledge to the real world.
- Internship programme is introduced.
- New course units in GIS and Remote Sensing are included in the syllabus.
- The C1 form provides week by week breakdown of the curriculum.
- Intended Learning Outcomes of courses are explicit in line with the overall learning outcome

#### Weaknesses

- Internship programme does not carry credits.
- GIS and Remote Sensing courses are not compulsory
- No elective and/or auxiliary courses are available for the undergraduates to select.
- English usage is not adequate.

The judgment assigned to this aspect is "**Good**"

## 2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

### Strengths/Good Practices

- Rich with qualified and experienced staff.
- A hand book and C1 forms are distributed among students.
- Good learning environment is maintained as Inter-relationship between students and teachers are very high.
- Aims at student centered teaching.
- Modern teaching methods are used. Multimedia, handouts, white board, OHP, etc.
- Balanced assessment method is used. 80% for end semester examination and 20% for continues assessments. Innovative different types of assignments are given.
- Practice of second marking and moderation with other university academics
- 80% of attendance is maintained.
- The students' attitudes towards the service delivered by academic and non academic staff in the department are very positive.
- Students are facilitated with Field Visits and Independent Research Report
- Maintaining a good departmental library
- Maintaining a departmental computer lab
- All the staff members are facilitated with a personal computer and a separate room

### Weaknesses

- .E-learning system is not in practice.
- Question papers are not divided into parts though different lecturers conduct different parts.
- No marking schemes are supplied for the second examiner

Judgment assigned to this aspect is "**Good**"

## 3. Quality of Students, including Student Progress and Achievement

### Strengths/Good Practices

- High quality students are assured by the selection criteria for special degree programmes.
- Failure rate is very low or nil and more than 75% of students are getting awards

### Weaknesses

- No first classes obtained by students
- Communication in English is poor
- Students in the general degree programme seems not treated adequately.
- Waiting time for a job for a graduate is not known.

Judgment assigned to this aspect is "**satisfactory**"

## 4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback

### Strengths/Good Practices

- A questionnaire is developed to evaluate the teacher.
- Informally the Head and the staff members practices an open door policy and rapport developed between undergraduates and lecturers in the department

- Feedback from passed out students is also considered.
- The undergraduates do participate in the faculty meetings and their voice is given due consideration.

#### **Weaknesses**

- Follow up actions of feedback are not seriously taken.

Judgment assigned to this aspect is "**good**"

### **5. Postgraduate Studies**

#### **Strengths/Good Practices**

- Several Post Graduate programmes are conducted.
- Professors and senior lecturers who have developed a research culture with number of publications are a strength of the department
- The senior members of the academic staff have had the opportunity to perform duties as teaching and coordinating the postgraduate programmes
- Publishing an Annual News Letter
- Southern Province Geography Teacher's Association paves way to disseminate the knowledge of the staff.

#### **Weaknesses**

- One year post graduate programme prevents some applicants to get promotions. i.e. University Lecturers.

Judgment assigned to this aspect is "**Good**"

### **6. Peer Observation**

#### **Strengths/Good Practices**

- Peer observation is in informal way. Moderation and second marking system are in practice. Departmental meetings are regularly held and make ground for sharing views of staff members.

#### **Weaknesses**

- No formal peer observation system.

Judgment is "satisfactory" with regard to this aspect.

### **7. Skills Development**

#### **Strengths/Good Practices**

- Presentation skills are improved by compulsory, individual and group presentations.
- Community related services make opportunities to improve, organize and develop leadership skills among undergraduates.
- Adequate facilities and courses to enhance IT skills
- Subject union (Geographical and Environmental Society) is functioning well and it paves way to disseminate their knowledge.

### Weaknesses

- ELTD courses seems not effective
- English communication is poor.

Judgment assigned to this aspect is "**Good**"

## **8. Academic Guidance and Counseling**

### Strengths/Good Practices

- Orientation program conducted by the university for fresh students gives familiar environment in the University.
- Making available the undergraduates, at the beginning of the Programme, a copy of the Faculty hand book which contains the details of the degree programmes conducted by the faculty.
- Head and all other staff functioning as student's academic counselors.
- A student counseling programme is available in the university in which several members of the Department perform duties as student counselors and one of the student counselors in the department acts as the deputy senior student counselor.
- University Career Guidance Unit contacts one staff member from the DoG to assist their students.
- Kind of formal training for staff on the student counseling and guidance are available.
- Steps are taken for personal counseling or mentoring system.
- Good rapport is maintained between the academic staff and students.
- A well trained counselor is hired from outside the university when necessary.

### Weaknesses

- No confidential place is allocated in the department for personal counseling.

Judgment assigned is '**Good**' for this aspect

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are made by the Review Team for further improvement of the programme being offered by the Department of Geography as the Review Team felt that they will be useful:

- It is advisable that GIS and Remote Sensing courses are offered as compulsory.
- Marking schemes can be provided to second examiners
- To improve the employability of the graduates of the department, it is advisable to incorporate internship programme/practical training as a compulsory credit course unit.
- It is advisable to change the medium of instruction to English by gradual transition from first year to fourth year. In addition ELTU and the Department can collectively prepare effective modules in English.
- Elective and/or auxiliary courses can be introduced if possible to make the course unit system more meaningful.
- Incorporate feedback from the undergraduates in teaching.
- Implementation of formal peer observation method and follow up actions would help increasing the productivity of the department. .

- It is important to establish alumni association for the department to get views and support to develop the department. Maintain a data base for passed out students so that waiting time for a job for a graduate can be measured.
- E-learning system can be introduced.
- Question paper can be divided into parts when different lecturers conduct different parts.
- Students in the general degree programme also are given opportunity to enhance their soft and presentation skills.
- The one year post graduate diploma can be promoted to a MA degree so that demand for this degree increases.

## **7. ANNEXES**

### **Annex 1. AGENDA FOR THE REVIEW VISIT -**

#### **Day 1: 29/12/08**

08.30 – 09.00	Private meeting of the Review Team with Prof. Colin Peiris, Quality Assurance Specialist
09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with the Vice Chancellor/Chairman, Quality Assurance Unit/Dean, Faculty of H& SS and Head, Department of Geography
10.00 – 10.30	Review team discusses the agenda for the visit with HoD (Working Tea)
10.30 – 11.30	Dept. Presentation on the Self – Evaluation Report
11.30 – 12.30	Discussion
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch
13.30 – 15.00	Observing Departmental facilities (Lecture Halls, library, Geological Unit, Computer Lab, Meteorological station etc.)
15.00 -16.00	Meeting with departmental Academic staff (working Tea)
16.00 – 17.00	Meeting with undergraduates (Special Degree Students)
17.00 – 17.30	Brief Meeting of Reviewers

#### **Day 2: 30/12/08**

09.00- 10.00	Meeting with Technical and other Non-academic Staff
10.00 – 11.00	Observing Documents (Working tea)
11.00- 12.00	Observing Teaching – Lecture (GEO 2101-LT 4, GEO 3101- S5, GEO 4101- S1)
12.00-12.30	Observing University Library facilities
12.30-13.00	Meeting with postgraduate students
13.00- 13.30	Lunch
13.30 – 14.00	Observing Teaching - Lecture (GEO 3101-S5, GEO 4101- S1)
14.00 – 15.00	Observing Student presentation based on Field excursions
15.00 – 15.15	Tea
15.15 – 16.00	Observing Student presentation (GEO 3105: mini Project)
16.00 – 17.00	Meeting with undergraduates (Special Degree Students)
17.00 - 17.30	Meeting of Reviewers

#### **Day 3: 31/12/08**

09.00 – 09.30	Observing Teaching - Lecture (GEO 4102-S1) Observing practical (GEO 3105-computer Lab)
09.30-10.00	meeting with members of Geographical and Environmental Society
10.00 – 10.30	Meeting with Counselors & Academic Advisers
10.30 – 11.00	Reviewers private meeting
11.00 – 12.00	Meeting with Head & Staff for Reporting
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch
13.00 – 17.00	Report – Writing