In the Spring of 2007, the Department of Geography assessed students completing their M.S. degree. Two different methods, assessment of student M.S. thesis or non-thesis research presentations and assessment of research design and conclusion from M.S. thesis or non-thesis papers, were used to measure student learning outcomes. Today, we will report on results from the second method.

The objective for each question was that two-thirds or more of the students score “well-developed” or “exemplary” (see rubric). Results of the assessment of four papers are documented in the Annual Update Form shown below. The objective was met for each question. To help the department assessment committee further understand these results, these scores were compared to those from GEOG 563, a course taught in the first year of the M.S. program. Improvements in skill levels from the GEOG 563 experience to the M.S. thesis/non-thesis paper were noted, however the level of skill in problem formulation and relating findings to the larger literature could be improved.

A rubric for evaluation of research design and implementation was provided to a subset of faculty in the department (see rubric below) and they were asked to evaluate the research design and conclusion from completed M.S. thesis or non-thesis papers focusing on two skills, the ability of the student 1) to formulate geographic research projects and 2) to recognize the contributions of human and physical geography to questions of societal significance. For each skill, two questions were asked of which faculty were asked to address as they reviewed sections of each paper. For skill 1), how well did students formulate the research question and were data, experiment, and methods adequately addressed, and for skill 2) how well did students relate findings to the larger body of scientific knowledge and were they able to relate findings to issues of societal significance.

The objective for each question was that two-thirds or more of the students score “well-developed” or “exemplary” (see rubric). Results of the assessment of four papers are documented in the Annual Update Form shown below. The objective was met for each question. To help the department assessment committee further understand these results, these scores were compared to those from GEOG 563, a course taught in the first year of the M.S. program. Improvements in skill levels from the GEOG 563 experience to the M.S. thesis/non-thesis paper were noted, however the level of skill in problem formulation and relating findings to the larger literature could be improved.

After the assessment was completed, faculty were reminded, before fall courses began, to stress these skill and knowledge goals in graduate courses.