The Future of Geography at Canadian Universities: A Panel Presentation

At the CAG annual meetings in Lethbridge, Alberta (June 3, 1999), a special panel session was held to discuss the future of geography at Canadian universities. The following Chairs of Geography Departments participated in this panel: Alison Gill, Simon Fraser University; Phil Howarth, University of Waterloo; Tom Johnston, University of Lethbridge; and Jim Randall, University of Saskatchewan. Iain Wallace, President of the CAG, provided some comments as a discussant. In order to provide a wider forum for this discussion, several of these presentations have been reproduced below.

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This exploration of the issues facing Geography within the University is based on several premises. The first is that the field of geography makes a number of contributions to society and to students and therefore deserves to be preserved as a separate discipline within Canadian Colleges and Universities. I am sure that there are some social and natural scientists, some administrators, and even a number of geographers who are not convinced of the need for a separate discipline of geography. However, it is not my intent at this time to try to convince those individuals of the value of the discipline. The second premise is that we, as Chairs of Geography Departments, have not been nearly as effective as a group to enhance our collective image; in organizing and lobbying administrators and the public, and in competing for scarce resources. My hope is that one of the outcomes of this session is to generate a set of strategies to ensure that the discipline will thrive on Canadian campuses in the early part of the 21st century.

I will begin my talk by describing some of the characteristics and the trends that I see from my own personal experience as Head of the Department of Geography at the University of Saskatchewan. The purpose of this description, and the descriptions that will be forthcoming from the other panellists and those in the audience during the discussion, is to begin to see the similarities and the differences across the Universities, and ultimately to avoid the mistakes and to adopt the successes from elsewhere. Given this description and these trends, I will then outline several strategies that may be adopted either by individual Departments or by the discipline of Geography as a whole.

Geography at the University of Saskatchewan: Descriptions and Trends

The Geography Department at the University of Saskatchewan is mid-sized by Canadian standards. Although we are a Ph.D.-granting Department and have approximately 35 graduate students, we have only thirteen tenured or tenure-track faculty. On average, we also have approximately 90 undergraduate majors. This number masks the much more significant role that the department and its faculty play in the administration of interdisciplinary programs within the College. Geography is the "home" to three very popular interdisciplinary programs: 1) Land Use and Environmental Studies (LUESt), drawn largely from Geography, Economics and Biology, 2) Regional and Urban Development (RUD) or planning, drawn largely from Geography, Economics, Sociology and Political Studies, and 3) Environmental Earth Sciences (EES), drawn largely from Geography, Geology and Soil Sciences. Collectively, these programs add an additional 140 undergraduate majors to "our" lists.

The Department is classified as a Social Science but is part of a combined College of Arts and Science. We are currently in the midst of one of the most significant faculty turnovers in the history of the Department. Within the next four years, five permanent faculty will have retired. In the lexicon of the day, this represents both an opportunity and a threat. Despite the loss of the wisdom associated with the retiring faculty, it is an opportunity to reinvigorate the program, to build on strengths while at the same time addressing issues within the discipline that we have not been able to focus on, and to seek out young scholars who can bring their enthusiasm, research and teaching acumen to the programs. At the same time, like other Universities in Canada, the University of Saskatchewan faces periodic budget cuts. The total number of tenured or tenure-track positions has declined from approximately 1,000 to 840 in the past five years. No vacant position is automatically renewed and a turnover of the magnitude described above makes it tempting for senior administrators looking for positions to delete.

Trends – the University and the Discipline:

Heightened Competition for Scarce Resources:

As described above, Universities have been facing another fiscal "crisis", brought on partly by cuts in federal social transfers to the provinces. This has produced a level of competition for scarce resources (read, faculty replacement) that has filtered down to individual Departments, shaping discussions in the hallways, the restructuring of programs, and introducing marketing as a formal activity into departmental meetings. It is not unreasonable to suggest that changes in departmental resource allocations are dependent primarily on two main criteria: student numbers and external research funding. At the University of Saskatchewan, despite graduating only a handful of majors every year, the Departments of Physics, Chemistry and to a lesser extent Geological Sciences have been relatively protected from the most recent rounds of faculty cuts at least partly because they bring in millions of dollars in external research funds, both from public and corporate sources. By extension, success in attracting research funding is one of the main reasons that the Colleges of Agriculture and Engineering have fared relatively better during periods of cutbacks.

Student numbers, and the relative changes in student numbers, also serve as a buffer to resource cuts. At the University of Saskatchewan, the Departments of Psychology and Sociology have large

numbers of students, as measured by undergraduate majors and total undergraduate enrolment. Despite acquiring relatively less external research funding, these Departments have also been able to maintain their position, as measured by number of faculty. Among the most anticipated handouts at our Department Heads meetings are the biannual reports on the numbers of "three credit-unit-equivalent" students in our classes, by Department, and the relative year-to-year changes in these numbers. Fortunately, our Geography Department has been at or near the top in the College in relative change in student numbers over the last two years and this has contributed to us being viewed positively within the College. Overall, however, the discipline of Geography falls somewhere in the "middle of the pack" in both external research funding and numbers of students. It is in a much more secure position than most of the departments in the Humanities and Fine Arts (e.g., Classics, Languages, Philosophy, Religious Studies) that are having difficulty in maintaining student numbers and in generating research funding.

A third, less objective, criteria has also become important in the reallocation of resources. This is the amount of political pressure that can be brought to bear on an administration. One of the best examples at the University of Saskatchewan is the Department of Native Studies. Despite internal administrative difficulties, the College and the University cannot be seen to be taking resources away from this department. There is too much pressure from Aboriginal groups and the potential for too much adverse publicity for this to take place. Unlike Native Studies, and to a lesser extent Mathematics, Geography does not have a large external constituency that can make it an "untouchable" regardless of how we measure up according to other "objective" criteria.

Interdisciplinarity:

The concept of interdisciplinarity is currently very fashionable on our campus. As described above, Geography at the University of Saskatchewan is considered one of the most active contributors to interdisciplinarity. This should come as no surprise to other Geography Chairs since the discipline has always stressed its links with other fields, both within the natural and the social sciences, and to a lesser extent within the humanities. Planning, environmental studies and regional or area studies are but three examples of geographic inquiry that have gained prominence in broader society. This feature of Geography continues to serve as both a weakness and a strength. The weakness for the discipline is that students who would normally enroll in Geography are increasingly being captured by interdisciplinary programs that have greater name recognition and are viewed by students to be more directly oriented to specific careers. Rarely does Geography get "formal credit" for the contributions that we make to these programs. At the same time, our contributions have been informally recognized as a "qualitative" indicator during the most recent program evaluation exercise and we are more successful than others at showing our contributions in these areas.

Picking "Winners" and Strategic Planning:

Although there is nothing new about University administrations investing resources into those areas that are perceived as creative and innovative, this process appears to have become more formalized and transparent. At Saskatchewan, a "Priority Determination" process has been set up that diverts resources from existing programs and Colleges to create a pool of money from which new initiatives are to emerge. These initiatives are to be "grassroots", foster cooperation among disciplines/ interdisciplinarity, create a national or international reputation, stress societal need and external linkages, etc. Geography is well positioned to be a contributor within many of the initiatives that emerge from this process because we are already more interdisciplinary than many of our colleagues in other disciplines, and we are perceived to be more interdisciplinary. Unfortunately, a contradictory trend is also a part of this process of picking winners. Departments and programs are being told to focus their energies and resources on those things that they do best and leave the rest for others. This may be more difficult for a field such as Geography that attempts to be integrative and maintain a balance between the natural and the social sciences. Geography's lack of identity (being all things to all people) may make it less competitive than other disciplines.

This latter theme is also tied in to the trend towards certification and accreditation. The standards being constructed by many of the professional associations, such as the geosciences, require a higher degree of specialization than is normally possible in a Geography degree that combines social sciences and natural sciences, often together with general College distribution requirements. We see our own Geological Sciences Department successfully getting permission to increase the number of Geology credits their majors are allowed to take in order to meet anticipated standards that they themselves have a major hand in creating.

The quest to pick winners is really just part of the much broader process of strategic planning that has gripped Canadian campuses. Almost every University now has their own mission statement, goals and objectives, and most Colleges have also been forced to create their own long range planning documents. Not only is this a valuable exercise to engage in its own right, but to be perceived to be engaged in long range planning is just as important to your prospects as the "measurable" outcomes of the planning process itself. Those Departments that follow the same path, and especially fit their long range planning statements into those articulated by their College and University, will be further ahead. For example, at the University of Saskatchewan, the four goals from our *Framework for Planning* document are, improving the quality of instructional programs, intensifying research efforts, fostering the teacher-scholar model, and responding to the needs of aboriginal peoples. Although the first three are generic, we find that Departments and Colleges have modified their programs and have successfully obtained new resources in order to address the goal of responding to the needs of aboriginal peoples.

Strategies:
So far, this paper has presented a few of the institutional trends that are taking place on our campus and suggests how Geography fits within these trends. This section of the paper lists eight strategies that individual Departments, and the discipline as a whole, can undertake in order to encourage its survival and growth.

1. Embrace interdisciplinarity and collaboration as the key characteristics that sets Geography apart from others. University administrations are looking for paths or models for institutional change and are stressing interdisciplinarity and/or collaboration as significant criteria in evaluating innovative or creative proposals for change. Since Geography already incorporates these features within its programs, this emphasis may lead to the allocation of more resources.

2. Create, circulate and maintain a set of basic indicators that we can use, selectively, when we are being evaluated within our respective institutions. This is especially important for those Departments that are in the "middle of the pack" in student numbers and research funding. College and University administrators are very impressed when you can tell them how you rank in relation to other Departments within your own discipline. I recommend five very basic indicators: i) number of majors per tenured or tenure track faculty member, ii) number of students in our classes per instructor, iii) number of graduate students per tenured or tenure track faculty member, iv) number of refereed journal articles per tenured or tenure track faculty member, and v) research $ brought in to the University per tenured or tenure track faculty member.

3. Create and market our links with agencies external to the University. At the University of Saskatchewan, we have created a Geography Advisory Council, a "quasi-Board of Directors" consisting of 15 members drawn from public and private sector organizations that are related to geography, environmental studies or planning. Not only has this created funding opportunities for faculty and graduate research, but it has also been perceived as very progressive within our College.

4. Develop and seek funding for a Departmental megaproject that embraces your Geography colleagues in human, physical and technical geography (e.g., U. of Manitoba's hazards research initiative). There are funding agencies that lend themselves to this form of social science - natural science blending (e.g., some of the Forestry-based Strategic Initiatives by SSHRC, Laval's Historical Atlas project). A successful megaproject not only boosts Departmental image within your campus, but it also fosters a greater degree of collegiality and shared purpose within the Department.

5. Foster closer ties with the secondary school education system. Engage in strategies to make the discipline of Geography more visible within the schools so that you can increase the likelihood that students entering University will be seeking Geography as a major rather than falling into the discipline by chance.

6. Incorporate your alumni as active partners in promoting and lobbying for your Department and for the discipline. This can be started by developing an Alumni Newsletter and establishing an Alumni Society. One of the indirect benefits of tracking your alumni is that their achievements and input can be incorporated into any internal Departmental evaluations.

7. Try to ensure that Geography faculty are represented on the key decision-making Committees in your College (e.g., Planning and or Budget Committees). Although there is no guarantee that this will ensure your Department immunity from cutbacks, it will at least provide some advance warning of changing initiatives and directions within the College and University. It is easier to influence change before any reports or recommendations are made public.

8. Engage in a strategic or long range planning process within the Department and ensure that the broader University goals are consulted during this process. Once again, not only does this foster collegiality, but it shows your Deans and Vice Presidents that you are following an approach that they have also adopted.

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Introduction
Concern with defining ourselves as geographers and the nature of geography seems in itself to have become one of the defining features of our discipline. Over the past century, geography, like other disciplines, has responded to emerging scientific and technological knowledge as well as social and political pressures. The introduction of new ideas tends to be cumulative – the organization of geographical scholarship is now much more complex that it was 50 years ago. Thus, as we contemplate geography in the 21st century, I believe a key question for university departments of geography is "Can we be all things to all people?" and further, "If we cannot, does this threaten the integrity of the discipline, thus making Geography Departments vulnerable to administrative restructuring". In this presentation, I am going to try and address these questions by drawing primarily on the issues and trends that I have observed at my own university, Simon Fraser.

The Department of Geography at Simon Fraser University (SFU) is one of the larger undergraduate geography programs in Canada with

over 500 majors. At the graduate level there are around 60 students with about a third enrolled in the Ph.D. program. There are 23 Faculty members and the Department is administered through the Faculty of Arts although BSc degrees in physical geography are also offered . Unlike many other universities, SFU operates on a trimester system with three 13-week terms, although course offerings and enrolments are much less during the summer semester. The undergraduate program revamped about 12 years ago (Evenden, 1988), offers students a wide and flexible array of courses, and is currently adapting to new developments in the discipline and university.

Trends

"How does a degree in Geography help me get a job?"

One of the more evident trends in terms of students' choices of academic programs is that choices are increasingly driven by perceived employment opportunities. This has had some effect on enrolment with some decline in geography (as well as generally throughout the Faculty of Arts) during the past 2-3 years as students are drawn to more obviously job-related programs such as the Applied Sciences (Computing and Engineering) and Business. Within Geography, we have seen some students switch from the BA program to the BSc program for this reason, although this is not a strong trend. At the University level, this trend towards enrolment in job-related programs has been reinforced by government-funded initiatives that have provided targeted funding for greater numbers of students in Business and Applied Science areas.

One reads various reports suggesting that many employers prefer to hire graduates with broadly-based liberal arts education, rather than those possessing specific technical or scientific skills. Geographers would certainly seem to fit into such a category. An initiative currently being explored at SFU, that is designed to assist all Faculty of Arts programs, is the idea of "employability skills". The proposal draws heavily on the example of Dalhousie University which has developed a system whereby students receive not only an academic transcript but also a 'skills transcript'. However, despite the apparent value of a broadly-based education, opportunities for students registered in the Department's Co-op program do not seem to reflect this demand. The Co-op program, which places about 76 geography students annually in jobs as part of their degree program, is very successful, and does attract students into the Geography program. However, a high proportion of all positions require GIS skills. To some extent this may reflect the temporary and short-term nature of Co-op jobs whereby employers do not have the time or resources for training.

At the graduate level there also seems to be a trend towards more applied human geography. Now this may be a reflection of faculty interest at SFU rather than a more widespread phenomenon. Students seem drawn towards more action-oriented research in topical areas such as community economic development, sustainability etc.

The Move to Certification and Specialization

Linked to the desires of students to have specialized credentials has been an increase in certificate programs within the degree structure. At SFU we currently offer certificates in GIS, Urban Studies and offer the necessary courses for professional registration as a Professional Geoscientist (PGeo). As noted above, GIS skills are especially sought after by employers. Currently 50 students per semester take this certificate program. Growth is constrained by lack of faculty and resources. The Urban Studies certificate especially appeals to students who contemplate a career in planning. It involves core geography courses with some additional courses in political science and sociology. The articulation of how to meet the requirements for PGeo registration within the Physical Geography program is fairly recent. The PGeo (Geotechnics) for Geography students offers a broader environmental context than that offered in Earth Sciences which is more oriented towards geology. In British Columbia the PGeo is a very useful certification for those planning to work with the forestry sector or other environment-oriented agencies and is a requirement for professional advancement.

Another recent initiative at SFU has been the introduction of a BA degree in Geography with an Environmental Specialization as well as a Joint Major in Geography and Economics with an Environmental specialization. This new stream resulted from a strategic Academic Enhancement initiative at the University level in which environmental education would be enhanced across the university in the Faculties of Science (Environmental Science), Applied Science (Resource and Environmental Management) and Arts (Geography). Students in all faculties take required core courses in each of the disciplines then specialize in their own areas. As this program is new it is too early to tell if students are attracted to it.

On the one hand while certificate programs and specializations within geography attract healthy enrolments because they address the needs of students to gain more focussed knowledge and skills in their chosen areas - which in turn may enhance their employment prospects - it also poses a challenge and potentially a threat to the discipline. The certificate and accreditation programs limit the choices of students by requiring them to take certain courses. While the trade-off between flexibility and focus is a choice the students make, it can place pressure on the rest of the program by necessitating the regular offering of required courses for these programs. Faculty resources are unable to expand in many universities to meet those needs – although in the case of SFU a new faculty member was hired under the Academic Enhancement Fund to support the environmental initiative. If faculty resources are reallocated to meet the teaching needs of the certificate programs, the overall integrity of the geography program could be undermined. At the same time the splintering of the geography program into smaller-sized credentials creates something of a smorgasbord approach and again contributes to an erosion of 'identity' for the discipline as a whole.

Maintaining our Identity

In the face of closures and mergers of some geography departments in the United States, and also in Canada, a critical challenge is to ensure that the distinct contribution of geography to universities is clearly evident. Of course, to administrators that translates into funded undergraduate enrolments. While at SFU, the Department of Geography ranks third in terms of the number of undergraduate enrolments for departments in the Faculty of Arts we are nevertheless very aware of the need to maintain this position. There are several challenges. First, we need to better target students entering university from high school. In the BC school system, geography is no longer taught as a separate subject but is part of a social studies package in grades 11 and 12. Further, while exposed to some geography content, students may not have been taught by teachers who have any training in geography and perhaps have little understanding of what geography can offer at the university level. We have a responsibility to ensure that the numerous students who pass through our geography programs are adequately prepared. Perhaps more attention should be given to this segment of our student body if we are to train educators to produce the next generation of geographers. At a more immediate level we should be pro-active in our recruitment practices (see Napton, 1998).

Second, we need to consider how our identity is maintained in curricular structures with course offerings and naming. While geography is doing "well" by being able to shift into areas where clear applications can be seen such as planning, environmental studies and GIS, underlying these applications are the concepts and literature of our traditional fields of geography. The impact of the trends of certification and specialization is to diminish the visibility of what is fundamental to geographic inquiry, while still depending on it. Thus, for example, historical geography is declining in Geography but environmental history is rising in History. We are in effect giving up historical and 'traditional' cultural geography to History and Anthropology. The 'new' cultural is heavily oriented to social geography informed by social theories that transcend and merge disciplinary boundaries within the social sciences and humanities. Along with this there appears to be a decline of field work in human geography.

In physical geography, the connections with human geography seem to be diminishing as physical geographers seek to compete for funding with their counterparts in science departments. This is especially pronounced in universities such as SFU where Departments of Geography are located in Faculties of Arts where teaching loads are heavier and equipment and laboratory funding lower. At SFU the creation of the Earth Sciences Department was a reflection of such tensions.

Third, there is a need to engage at the departmental level in strategic planning. In part this is driven at SFU by a university-wide planning strategy whereby all Departments are required to develop a 3-year plan to prioritize and justify resource allocation, especially new hirings. Most universities across Canada are facing major faculty turnover as a retirement bulge occurs. This poses challenges for departments in terms of the nature of replacements. In some cases because of budgetary restraint positions may be cancelled or at least replacements delayed. Visioning processes are currently in vogue in planning circles and have a role to play in assisting departments in strategically positioning themselves with respect to their particular strengths.

With reference to the question I posed at the beginning of this presentation about whether or not we can be all things to all people, it seems that we must take careful stock of our strengths relative to our competitors. Competition comes from both outside and inside our own institutions. As mentioned above, we compete at a more general level to attract students to geography in the face of competition from applied job-oriented programs. More specifically at SFU we compete to some extent for our physical geography students with the recently formed Earth Sciences department. While the Earth Sciences program has been designed to be complementary to Geography and students take some courses in both programs, it is nevertheless necessary to consider our relationship with Earth Sciences in certain decisions we make. We are also fairly closely allied in terms of subject area to some of the specializations in the School of Resource and Environmental Management (REM). REM only offers graduate degrees although it has introduced some undergraduate courses as part of the university's environmental initiative. Our main competition is for graduate students. Further competition for undergraduate students has been recently introduced in BC with the establishment of a new university (University of Northern British Columbia) and degree-granting status to five colleges that previously offered only 2 year university transfer courses (e.g. University College of the Fraser Valley, University College of the Cariboo, Kwantlan University College, Malaspina University College and Okanagan University College). New degree programs at these University Colleges are reviewed by the provincial government to avoid duplication and overlap. This is resulting in proposals for focussed degree programs such as Kwantlen University College's proposal for an Applied Geography degree specializing in GIS or Cariboo University College's focus on urban geography. Competition is healthy and such new programs are welcome, however, it does call for a reassessment of one's own program in light of these new additions. It seems that the discipline of geography has become so diverse that specializations are now a necessity. This in turn calls for greater institutional collaboration and cooperation and may in time carry elements of a "multi-versity" form of degree organization.

Conclusion

Universities are government funded and university administrator's are increasingly tasked with being accountable for their dispersal of resources across the university. It seems that Departments of Geography must clearly identify where their strengths lie and these must be positioned relative to other regional institutions and to programs within the university. In the eyes of administrators, governments

and the public, GIS (and all that surrounds it) is perhaps the most identifiable feature of Geography. The challenge here seems to be how to embed this strength into our programs so that the discipline as a whole is enhanced.

It may be that geography in universities may have to shift in ways in which we are uncomfortable. I believe we must protect our conceptual base or it will be lost to fragmented interests. The challenge is to be proactive rather than reactive to the realities that face us.

References: Evenden, L. (1988) Revising the undergraduate curriculum in Geography: The Simon Fraser University Experience, *The Operational Geographer* 6(3): 5-9.

Napton, D. E. (1998) *Everyone Likes a Winner: Geography Department Plan for Growth or Achieving Excellence in Undergraduate Recruitment.* Washington: Association of American Geographers.

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In order to prepare for this presentation, I consulted a number of my colleagues and friends and read over several state of the Art pieces, mainly Past Presidents' addresses to CAG and AAG meetings. Having acknowledged this assistance, I take full responsibility for my comments. As the saying goes, the views expressed here are of course my own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of my sources.

As a graduate student, I attended a CAG Ontario Division meeting hosted by the Geography Department at the University of Ottawa in the early 1980s. One of the sessions I took in dealt with the state of geography in Canada at that time. In other words, this is not the first time that the topic has been discussed at a meeting of the CAG. Indeed, I am certain that the issue has been the subject of many other special sessions before and since that particular meeting. Many of the issues discussed by that panel remain, for example, geography continues to suffer from a lack of name recognition in the labour market causing many of our graduates to peddle themselves as location analysts, or earth scientists, but there are also a number of new issues facing the discipline, which suggests to me that it is appropriate to revisit the topic.

In my opinion, one of the most significant issues facing geography is not that the general public does not really understand what it is we do, nor is it the seemingly constant philosophical, methodological and theoretical tensions that exist within the discipline generally and between some sub-fields in particular. Rather it is the insidious erosion of control over our teaching and research agendas currently being perpetrated by various government agencies, supported by many in the private sector and implemented by university administrators who feel they have little choice in the matter. This issue is of course not unique to Geography. But because of our particular position in the post-secondary system, I believe that we are especially vulnerable. By way of illustration, I will focus on two recent Alberta policy initiatives, one known as ACCESS, the other called the Key Performance Indicator system, a.k.a. KPI's.

The story begins just after the 1993 election, when the ruling Conservatives under the leadership of Ralph Klein adopted a policy of massive expenditure reduction. The post-secondary system faced a 21% across the board cut in provincial funding, spread out over three years. The cuts began in 1994/95 with an 11% reduction in the provincial grant, and continued with reductions of 7% and 3% in 1995/96 and 1996/97, respectively. Each institution in the province experienced the same percentage cut, irrespective of scale. Here at Lethbridge, as elsewhere in the province, the cuts were accommodated through a mix of strategies, including staff reductions, administrative restructuring and tuition hikes. With respect to the latter, the Province now allows post-secondary institutions to derive up to 30% of their operating revenue from tuition fees.

Not long after the cuts were implemented, the province realized that demand for post-secondary education in Alberta was on the increase. The participation rate in the post-secondary system was on the rise and the children of those people who moved to Alberta during the oil boom of the 1970s, the baby boom echo, were about to enter the post-secondary system. University enrolments in the province have also been bolstered over the recent past by strong in-migration figures to Alberta.

So, after three years of cuts the province decided it was time to reinvest in the system. But rather than simply restoring budgets to their previous levels, the province has taken the opportunity to exercise a greater degree of influence in curricular decisions than had been the case previously. A policy known as ACCESS was developed whereby institutions were asked to submit programme proposals to the government in the hopes of restoring some of the funds cut from base budgets.

In the initial ACCESS round, a government-appointed committee considered proposals from all manner of post-secondary institutions and made recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development for subsequent presentation to the Cabinet. The ACCESS Committee, which was dominated by private sector interests, was provided with a framework to employ in their deliberations. Most importantly, they were asked to identify those programmes that promised to graduate students whose skills and knowledge sets would position them well to find work.

I have not yet seen an evaluation of the decisions taken during the initial ACCESS round, but I think one could argue that political considerations played a non-trivial role in determining which programme proposals were funded. In this regard, it would appear that the ACCESS policy was implemented in a manner similar to Alberta's government office decentralization policy which was studied several years ago by a Master's student at the University of Calgary working with Wayne Davies. In that study, it was observed that government office relocation decisions appeared to have been made on the basis of political consideration, seemingly with no

reference to maximizing the local economic development impact of the relocations.

In the most recent set of deliberations, the ACCESS policy was modified as the government indicated that it will target resources in particular areas, especially science and technology, including information technology. According to officials in the Ministry of Advanced Education and Career Development, the emphasis is based on that ministry's ongoing efforts to track labour market trends and indicators. This emphasis has worked in our favour here at Lethbridge, as a proposed extension to our existing major offering students the opportunity to take a concentration of courses in Geographical Information Science was recently approved for implementation May 1, 2000.

Whether we wish to focus on the original ACCESS policy or its most recent incarnation, it is clear that at least some control over curricular development has shifted from the professorate and self-governing post-secondary institutions, to government officials. And while it can be argued that the shift in policy to emphasize particular areas of education, namely information technology, is supported by a variety of internal discussion papers and reports, a critique of the analytical rigour of those studies has yet to be undertaken.

I will now turn to the KPI policy. We have all seen a shift over the past twenty years or so toward an increasing reliance on non-traditional sources for research funding. NSERC, SSHRC and MRC have all adopted policies to encourage greater collaboration with the private sector, a development that in itself might be interpreted positively. After all, a key function of universities is to serve society through our research. However, when interest in industry-driven applied research becomes a pre-occupation and areas of basic research suffer, then the situation is worrisome. As observed in a article by Len Guelke published in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record in late October, 1998, the growing trend toward reliance on private sector commercial partnerships threatens the core values of universities: intellectual freedom and independence of inquiry.

Here in Alberta, as elsewhere perhaps, the provincial government has also become involved in research funding decisions in a significant way. Several years ago the Alberta government adopted a system known as Key Performance Indicators which they use to encourage universities to comply with government priorities. Each post-secondary institution in the province is required to submit annually a KPI report which is then used to distribute money on an annual one-time basis. The KPI system incorporates a variety of dimensions, including research output and employment rates of graduates. With respect to research funding, the system favours heavily those institutions that are able to match research funding from traditional sources with funds from the private and not-for-profit sectors as well as private foundations. As a consequence, basic research as well as many research areas in the humanities and the social sciences are at a clear disadvantage. It is noteworthy that the private sector has successfully encouraged governments to adopt a variety of business friendly policies, which has in turn created an unprecedented opportunity for business and industry to influence the type of research that is conducted.

I'd like to finish my presentation by touching on three questions. First, what are the possible consequences of these developments for geography at the post-secondary level in Alberta? Second, should we be concerned about these consequences? And third, what can be done?

From a disciplinary perspective we are witnessing an emphasis on some areas of teaching and scholarship over others. In the current climate here in Alberta, the government has shown a clear preference for areas such as GIS, driven obviously be a preoccupation with information technology, at the expense of other areas such as human geography. There would appear to be some within the provincial bureaucracy who fail to appreciate the need to integrate education in geographic methods with material derived from other branches of the discipline. To paraphrase John Fraser Hart, I fear we are being encouraged to produce (and I use the industrial analogy purposely) technicians at the expense of educated people.

Some students too seem to have bought into the notion that computer-related areas represent the pinnacle of geography and that courses in other sub-fields that deal with other bodies of theory, other methodologies and ultimately other ways of knowing, are unnecessary. For example, I have been told by a disappointingly large number of students that they don't need to learn certain ideas and theories.

Before addressing the second question, I should qualify the statements just made. I do not think it is unreasonable for students to be keenly interested in emerging technologies. The issue for me is not so much the emphasis that is being placed on such areas, but rather that this emphasis can sometimes come at a price it terms of the resources that are not allocated to other areas.

Moving on to the second question, should we be concerned about this state of affairs? In my view we certainly should be, and the reason we should be concerned is really very simple. Governments in general and the Government of Alberta in particular are involving themselves in decision making at the institutional level in a manner that pales in comparison with any previous attempts of which I am aware. Decisions regarding education and research policy which directly affect our work, what we teach, how we teach, and what research questions we pursue, are being made by people with a relatively poor understanding of our discipline and, in many cases, little first hand-hand experience with the system beyond their student days. At the risk of overstating the case, it is difficult to imagine that an automobile design engineer would take much direction from someone who didn't have a driver's licence.

And finally, what can we do about this situation? Let me begin by saying that I don't agree with the argument that geography should organize itself around some unified, single core, say spatial analysis or human/environment interaction. Even if I thought this should happen, it simply won't, so consequently I subscribe to the more diffuse model of geographical scholarship and teaching. Nevertheless,

I think geographers have important contributions to make and that geography departments are the best setting in which these contributions can be played out.

I think that sessions such as this one are important. I know I started my presentation by commenting that I had attended a similar panel discussion as a graduate student, but I still think this sort of discussion is important. Secondly, we must embrace new opportunities presented by funding agencies and governments but not at the expense of traditional activities. For instance, here at Lethbridge we resisted the suggestion that we should mount a separate major in GIS, and instead developed an optional concentration in GIS, remote sensing, cartography and spatial modeling courses, to complement the existing major in geography. In devising the programme we were cognizant of the fact that while a previously implemented programme in environmental science bolstered enrolments in our courses, it may result in fewer geography majors overall. Third, at least here in Alberta, we should work more closely with secondary school teachers and curriculum specialists to ensure that up-to-date material is being presented. The Education Committee of the Western Division of the CAG has been quite active in British Columbia and represents a model worth studying.

These are clearly interesting times for geography in Alberta. The government's current emphasis on information technology presents us with an opportunity to grow, capturing more resources and attracting an increasing number of students. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that this growth could come at a cost. We must embrace these new opportunities, while at the same time not turning our backs on our intellectual heritage. As any Alberta cowboy will tell you: "Ya gotta dance with the one that brung ya".

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Comments by the Discussant:
Iain Wallace,
President of the CAG

During the time for comments and questions from the floor which followed the panel, the following themes emerged:

- The importance of better communication with teachers and students in secondary schools, including their need for better teaching resources that university departments might help meet,
- The need to recognise that the current generation of students is more attuned to visual learning than many faculty are,
- The significant support that departments can foster from their alumni (e.g., the role of the UBC Alumni Newsletter),
- The advisability of the CAG seeking to strengthen its links to geographers outside academia (the New Zealand example was cited).

Overall, there was a clear message about the importance of departments taking stock of their strengths and weaknesses, and of their standing within their own institutions, so that they might plan strategically to benefit from the time of significant change and faculty renewal that is coming to most universities over the next few years.