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From David DiBiase

To Alex Klippel, MGIS Program Chairperson

Subject Peer review of teaching for Susan Jones – GEOG 567: GIS in the Public Sector

It's been my pleasure to review evidence of Susan Jones' teaching in the Winter 2009 offering of GEOG 497i: GPS and GNSS for Geospatial Professionals. This is an elective course in the GIS Certificate and Masters degree programs offered through the World Campus. The Winter 2009 offering attracted four students.

Susan is an asset to Penn State's GIS Certificate and Masters degree programs. She is an authority on this subject. She is also a polished and appealing lecturer. Her course provides a valuable collection of educational resources that supplement the excellent text *GPS for Public Sector Decision Making* (3rd Ed.) she has published for ABC Press.

Primary among these resources is a series of slideshows that include text and illustrations drawn from the text and narrated by the author. The slideshows are linked to Web pages hosted outside of ANGEL and included in the Dutton Institute's Open Educational Resources initiative (<http://open.ems.psu.edu>). I viewed the first presentation (Lesson 1): GPS in the Public Sector.

The narrated slideshows are analogous to lectures in a face-to-face class. The recorded lectures have both advantages and disadvantages relative to the synchronous lectures Susan provided via Adobe Connect in earlier incarnations of the course. The main disadvantage is that the recordings do not permit direct interaction between students and instructor. I also miss seeing Susan in action (only a still portrait is shown). I've seen for myself in one of her workshops that her personal presence is an asset; she is a warm, confident yet modest speaker. On the other hand, an advantage of the Connect recording is that viewers can pause, rewind and replay the presentation. Also, the reliability and sound quality of the recorded presentations is superior.

The text (published by ABC Press) was required for the Winter 2009 offering of the course. The narrated slideshow thus served as a "vidcast" that supplemented the text. The slideshow – like the book – are high-quality productions. However, at least one student has complained about the cost of the required text in addition to the course tuition. I know the text well and believe it is one that every geospatial professional should have on his or her bookshelf. However, mindful that money is tight for many students, Susan might consider recommending the text as an option rather than as a requirement. Better still, **I strongly recommend that the MGIS program absorb the cost of the text and ship it at no additional cost to registered students.**

Supporting the narrated slideshows is a series of ANGEL Discussion forums that correspond to each Lesson. At the outset of each forum Susan provides a leading question to which students are expected to respond. For example, the Lesson 1 Discussion Forum begins with the question "There are both similarities and differences between a GPS carrier phase observation and a distance measurement by an EDM. Can you describe a few of each?" I see that all four students in the Winter 2009 class contributed posts in response to the question and that Susan responded promptly and individually to each post.

I also viewed the Discussion forum corresponding to Lesson 10. I found that only two of the four students contributed posts, and that Susan posted no responses. The class syllabus stated that 32% of the course grade is earned through participation in discussions. However, student

participation still seems to have dwindled somewhat by the end of the course. I also notice that optional forums (General Discussion, Technical Issues, Suggestion Box) attracted no posts.

The syllabus stated that another 32% of the course grade was to be earned through performance on quizzes. I found quizzes in the ANGEL folders associated with Lessons 3, 6 and 10. The Lesson 3 quiz contains questions, answers and feedbacks similar to those in Chapters 1-3 of the corresponding textbook.

The remaining 36% of the course grade is associated with two writing assignments. I sampled papers and feedback exchanged via the Dropbox in Lesson 2. The assignment (explained in the Lesson 2 Checklist in the course Drupal site) was to "Prepare a 2400 word paper on one topic covered in Lessons 1 and 2. Write on any topic that we have covered and relate it to the work you are doing now or the work you hope to do." Susan responded to each paper with scores and individualized comments that communicated reasonably high expectations as well as appreciation for students' efforts. The ANGEL dropbox interface doesn't provide evidence of the timeliness of Susan's feedback. However, I take it to be prompt based on one student's response to the end-of-course survey.

Finally, to gauge the extent to which Susan required an amount of student activity that is appropriate for a three-credit class, I viewed summaries of two students' activity logs (generated with the Reports console under ANGEL 7.3's Reports tab). Both logs exhibited reasonably login patterns of reasonable frequency and duration. Given that much student activity occurs outside of ANGEL (e.g., viewing narrated slideshows) it is impossible to quantify student activity precisely. However, the one student who responded to the end-of-course survey estimated that he or she devoted 4-8 hours of effort per week to his or her studies, and that this level of effort was "somewhat not enough work."

No conclusions can be drawn from a single student response. To better inform future improvements to the class **I recommend that Susan more strongly urge students to respond to the end-of-course survey** provided by the World Campus. **I also recommend that Susan offer one or two voluntary synchronous teleconferences during each term** which students can converse with Susan about the course and how it relates to their professional practice.