



HERODOT
Network for Geography
in higher education

FIELDWORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION GEOGRAPHY: A BENCHMARK STATEMENT

Fieldwork and Geography in Higher Education

Geography provides students with the ability to learn about the world, its features and processes. In order to do this, geographers need to engage actively in fieldwork activities, using critical thinking and skills acquisition.

Geographical fieldwork is the culture of looking at the landscape to see the real world. Fieldwork provides knowledge, understanding and skills to answer geographical questions, investigate real-world problems and tackle concrete environmental and social issues.

Fieldwork does not normally consist of one single activity but it can include:

- pre-fieldwork preparation or planning,
- field activities including data collection,
- analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings,
- evaluation and discussion.

Fieldwork in Geography can be implemented in different ways, integrated into curriculum subjects as well as through specific courses. Fieldwork can be carried out in different forms, from group activities to individually planned and executed student research.

Fieldwork in an undergraduate programme prepares graduates who are:

- responsible, spatially aware citizens,
- able to make meaning of the world around them
- able to use geographical methods and tools,
- more employable and with diverse job prospects, especially due to the transferable professional, personal and social skills they acquire, like teamwork, leadership, organisation, adaptability to different situations and environments, decision making, taking responsibility for the processes and results of the fieldwork, and
- able to pursue further place related studies.



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Fieldwork in Geography:

- Encourages students to identify issues and to develop approaches to understanding them.
- allows theoretical, technical and scientific methods to be applied in field environments,
- Develops analytical skills
- Develops a sense of place, awareness of difference, and tolerance for others.
- Breaks down barriers, promoting transferable skills

The following aspects should be taken into account in carrying out fieldwork: students with special needs, health and safety issues, financial considerations, ethical aspects and the accessibility of places and respect for the communities under investigation.

In some cases, virtual field activities, such as the use of e-learning, geoinformation tools and resources can be used to complement actual fieldwork.

LEVEL DESCRIPTOR

Undergraduate level Geography qualification should prepare students in the fundamental aspects of group and independent research including fieldwork activities.

Students should display the ability to:

- critically use basic fieldwork methods and skills.
- analyse and interpret the results of their fieldwork.
- present the outcomes of their fieldwork to colleagues, other researchers, decision-makers, clients and the general public.

The basic knowledge and competences acquired should allow students to further their studies at post-graduate (specialised) levels.



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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students completing undergraduate Geography study programmes should be able to:

- design and develop fieldwork activities to support their studies
- use fieldwork methods and tools to acquire, represent, interpret spatial data at a basic level;
- act individually and as a competent member of a team studying geographical processes and issues in the landscape through fieldwork;
- use their fieldwork outcomes to understand and present geographic relationships, changes, patterns and processes; and
- apply geographic knowledge and understanding from fieldwork to deal with real world problems at a basic level.

This draft benchmark statement has been produced as a result of the HERODOT thematic network for Geography in higher education meeting in Dublin, Ireland in March 2009.