



UNC CHARLOTTE

Office of Academic Affairs

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January 13, 2017

Dr. Lisa Walker
Faculty President
UNC Charlotte

Dear Lisa,

In accordance with the procedure concerning degree name changes, I am forwarding a request from the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences to change the name of the Ph.D. in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis to a Ph.D. in Geography.

The justification for the change is attached. In accordance with the procedure (<http://provost.uncc.edu/policies/degree-name-changes>) I ask that you consult with the Graduate Council, and following that consultation, that the name change be considered for faculty approval at the subsequent Faculty Executive Committee and Faculty Council meetings.

Sincerely,

Joan F. Lorden
Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Attachment

cc: Nancy Gutierrez, Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences



MEMORANDUM

To: Joan Lorden
Provost, UNC Charlotte

From: Craig Allan, Chair
Department of Geography and Earth Sciences

Date: January 1, 2017

RE: Request for Degree Name Change

The Department of Geography and Earth Sciences requests authorization for a degree name change for its PhD in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis Degree. Over the last several years the Department has made several hires to strengthen its environmental and geospatial science focus. Currently 18 (67%) of the Department's 27 Full Time Faculty have research or teaching interests related to the Earth and Environmental Sciences. In parallel, the Department has completed several undergraduate curriculum revisions including the establishment of the interdisciplinary Environmental Sciences minor in 2011 and the reshaping of its BA and BS Earth Sciences degrees to incorporate coursework in Urban Ecology, Landscape Ecology, Global Change and Resource Management amongst others. The Department applied for and received permission to change the name of its two Earth Sciences degrees to that of BS Earth and Environmental Sciences and BA Environmental Studies in 2014. These degrees have proved extremely popular with students as reflected by a 45% increase in student enrollment over the older degree options since 2014. Since then, the Department has held prolonged discussions about whether the existing PhD degree title "Geography and Urban Regional Analysis" reflects the changing research makeup of the faculty, restricts the participation of some faculty in the program and whether the Department might be better served with a more general or modified degree descriptor. The Department has also submitted a package of curriculum changes for its graduate programs including revised program descriptions for the PhD program which include a strong Human-Environment Interactions component. An examination of Geography related Degree and Department name changes within North American Universities since 1990 conducted by Frazier and Wikle (2016) revealed a wide range of reasons for rebranding Geography programs and Department names, with "Addressing changing faculty interests" as one of the foremost reasons given by respondents. In general the majority of programs were found to add words like environmental, GIS, urban, Earth, global, sustainability and or planning to Geography to their titles (55/89), while a significant number of programs dropped the word "Geography" entirely (27 of 89), a smaller number adopted the simple title of "Geography" (3 of 89). The Department considered

several alternative names for the PhD program but came to the following conclusions: The Department wanted to maintain a PhD program with a Geography focus but wanted to be more inclusive to the Department's growing Earth and Environmental Science focus. The Department concluded that a PhD in "Geography" with its traditional focus on earth-science, man-land, area/regional studies, and spatial traditions which span human social and physical Geography best matches the research interests of our faculty. Several of our faculty believe that the dropping of the "Urban Regional Analysis" component of the current PhD title would make the program more attractive to student's whose interests lie in the areas of environmental Earth Sciences and Biogeography, thereby potentially increasing recruiting success. The broadening of faculty participation within the PhD program will increase the availability of graduate student support through external funding; help to diversify the program while increasing enrollment numbers for the program.

Currently there are three in-state PhD programs with a Geography focus in NC, UNC Charlotte's PhD in Urban Regional Analysis and the PhD in Geography at UNC-CH and UNCG. UNC-CH's program is the broadest of the three programs with five focus areas: Earth and Environment; Geographic Information Sciences and Geovisualization; Culture, Society and Space; Globalization and International Development; and Nature and Society. UNCG's program has three main areas of research focus: Urban Planning, Transportation and Regional Economic Development; Earth Science and Natural Resource Management; and Geographic Information Science. The Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at UNC Charlotte focuses on three main areas of study currently packaged as: Urban/Regional Systems; Human-Environmental Interactions; and GIScience. Our curriculum proposal renames two of these three areas of research focus as Urban Regional Analysis; Human-Environmental Interactions and Geographic Information Science. It is our contention that the proposed degree name change will have minimal impact on the already existing PhD programs in the state as the research foci of our program will effectively remain the same. Rather, the proposed degree name change should broaden GES faculty participation in the program which should serve to grow the program and increase the external funding support for the program. At most the proposed name change would marginally increase the competition between the three programs for qualified PhD candidates interested in studying Environmental Earth Sciences. Our current PhD curriculum proposal does not add any new concentrations and contains minor curriculum changes and therefore the Department has the capacity to implement the changes with no new resources. We are now requesting authorization to change the name of the Geography and Urban Regional Analysis PhD degree to a PhD in Geography. The degree name change was proposed by the Department's Graduate Advisory Committee in Fall 2015 and voted on and passed by the Department's faculty during the Spring 2016 semester.

Frazier, A.E. and Wikle, T.A. 2016. Renaming and Rebranding within U.S. and Canadian Geography Departments, 1990–2014. *The Professional Geographer* 69(1) 12-21.
cc Nancy Gutierrez, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences