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June 22, 2009

Dr. Don S. Rice, Interim provost
125 Anthony Hall Mailcode 4305

RE: Geoscience Doctoral Program

Dear Dr. Rice,

Attached please find the final proposal for the initiation of an Interdisciplinary Program in Geosciences which will be lead by faculty of the Geology department but also includes COS faculty in Chemistry, Microbiology, Physics and Plant Biology as well as potential cooperating faculty in Geography, and Civil and Environmental Engineering.


The proposal has undergone the requisite review process in potentially affected units on campus and the responses has generally been positive except from the Department of Geography and Environmental Resources and the associated Environmental Resources and Policy doctoral degree program. Dr. Esling and I have met with each of these groups to address their concerns (see attached correspondence) and we have responded with changes in the proposal and with invitations to interested faculty to be affiliated with the program. Dr. Esling has written a well considered and documented response to each of the concerns raised by these units.

My support for this initiative which I encouraged after strategic meetings with the Geology faculty and with new faculty hires is unwavering and I believe that the long-term success of the Geology as a graduate degree granting unit in COS depends on approval of this doctoral program. In considering the reservations of the geography and policy oriented faculty, please note that the proposed program is interdisciplinary in a very different context than that of the existing ER&P program, focusing upon connections with physical and biological sciences in contrast to the energy resources, policy and economics emphasized in the ER&P degree. The most telling and important point is that two-thirds of our geology faculty are effectively disenfranchised in the ER&P program, meaning that their research potential is limited by the lack of access to in-discipline degree candidates. Also critical in this regard is that we have recruited several faculty in recent years that are approaching or have reached their maximum career research productivity years. Lack of doctoral graduate students will severely stunt this potential.

With regard to the concerns of the ER&P program leaders and the Geography faculty, I can only speak from my experience of building interdisciplinary programs at major research universities over the course of the past 30 years. In every case, units that expressed concern over competition found that strengthening a partner unit with an expanded program of their own (in this case Geology) benefited all partners in original program. It is easy to envision expanded research programs in Geosciences (physical and biological) that will be enhanced by collaborations with Geography (particularly GIS, as well as social and policy).

I therefore recommend that this new Interdisciplinary Doctoral program receive your approval and support through the remaining steps of approval.

Sincerely,


Jay C. Means, Ph.D., DABT, Fellow ATS, Fellow ACT
Dean
CC: Dr. Esling