

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST FOR A DEPARTMENT NAME CHANGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA:
FROM DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY TO
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHICAL AND SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES**

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to change the name of the Department of Geography to the Department of Geographical and Sustainability Studies in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Executive Summary: The proposed name change will maintain a strong connection to the broader discipline of geography and provide a framework for strategic growth. It will also accomplish the goals of the Department review conducted in 2012. This request has been reviewed by the Board Office and the Council of Provosts and is recommended for approval. This request addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priority to pursue “educational excellence and impact” and Goal #8 – “Iowa’s public universities and special schools shall be increasingly efficient and effective.”

Background:

- ◆ **Description of department.** The Department of Geography’s focus is on understanding social and biophysical systems with a special emphasis on human-environment interactions as well as the science and technologies needed to analyze, model, and visualize geographic processes. The Department offers Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Master of Arts, and Ph.D. programs in Geography and a minor in Geographic Information Science. The undergraduate programs provide the knowledge needed to understand contemporary social and environmental problems and the skills needed to work on issues related to environmental monitoring and policy, climate change, ecosystem processes, sustainability, public health, international development, and geographic information systems. The graduate programs focus on the environmental consequences of human decisions at local, regional, and global scales and the application of geographic information science to the study of these consequences.

The Department also administers the interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science Programs in Environmental Policy and Planning on behalf of the College. This major will retain its interdisciplinary structure and its academic outcomes and title. The Department’s courses are important to the University’s undergraduate Sustainability Certificate and graduate Geoinformatics Certificate.

- ◆ **Reason for proposed name change.** Geography is a diverse discipline. For more than 10 years, the Department of Geography has maintained a strong focus on geographical education and its relation to the environment, with a specific focus on “the human-environment interactions informed by geographic information science.”

The review of the Department conducted in 2012 pointed out that this framework for strategic planning helped the Department attain a high quality and national visibility despite its small size. However, the review team recommended that the name of the department be changed to more clearly indicate its focus on quantitative analysis and computational techniques (e.g., geographical science) while also conveying its commitment to current programs in environmental and sustainability studies. The proposed department name change will accomplish these goals.

- ◇ Proposed name change consistent with College mission. The proposed name will convey the commitment of the department, College, and University to sustainability and to academic programs that focus on issues relevant to sustainability related to human-environment interactions and geography.
- ◇ Comparable name at other institutions. The titles “Sustainability Studies” and “Sustainability Science” are beginning to be used by departments and academic programs with that focus. For example, Arizona State University has a well-known School of Sustainability. The Sustainability Studies Program at Harvard University defines sustainability as an interdisciplinary science that seeks to advance the basic understanding of the human-environment system. The proposed department name change will maintain the department’s traditional focus on geography while expanding the focus to include additional definitions of the field.
- ◇ Consistency with accreditation requirements. Neither the department nor any of its programs are accredited.
- ◇ Effect on program configuration. The proposed department name change will not alter the configuration of any of its programs. The names of the current academic programs will not change as a result of the department name change.
- ◇ Effect on students. Current students will not be affected by the proposed department name change. The proposed name will communicate more clearly the focus and strengths of the department and will help to align student expectations with the mission of the department.
- ◇ Effect on resources. No new costs will be incurred as a result of the department name change. The College is in the process of updating the department’s website and the online General Catalog. If approved, the new name will be incorporated as the updates occur.
- ◇ Date of implementation. The proposed name change will become effective upon approval by the Board of Regents and will be included in the University’s General Catalog and other appropriate media.