



February 21, 2024

Dr. Xiaoxia Newton
Faculty President
UNC Charlotte

Dear Xiaoxia:

In accordance with the procedure concerning the change of departmental names, I am forwarding a request from the College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences to change the name of the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences to the Department of Earth, Environmental, and Geographical Sciences.

The justification for the name change is attached. I ask that it be considered for faculty approval at the next Faculty Executive Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Troyer', written in a cursive style.

Jennifer Troyer
Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

cc: John Smail, Interim Dean, College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences

TO: Jennifer Troyer, Provost

FROM: John Smail, Interim Dean, College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences

DATE: February 20, 2024

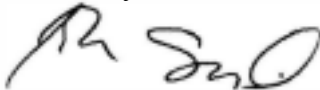
SUBJECT: Name Change for Department of Geography and Earth Sciences

I fully support the proposed name change for the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences to be renamed the “Department of Earth, Environmental, and Geographical Sciences”.

The name change for this department will represent their areas of study more accurately while advertising to potential students the programs offered. The department feels this will aid in the recruitment of more faculty and students and increase enrollment rates within the department. To be clear, the unit is requesting a change in the name of the department; it is not requesting a “School” status.

We appreciate the opportunity to share this with you and your willingness to consider this request. Please reach out if you have any questions, or need additional information.

Sincerely,



John Smail, Interim Dean



To: Dr. John Smail, Interim Dean, College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences
From: Dr. Sara Gagné, Chair, Department of Geography and Earth Sciences
Date: 2/14/2024
Re: Proposal to change department name

My colleagues and I propose to change the name of the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences to the **Department of Earth, Environmental, and Geographical Sciences**, effective fall 2024.

The Department began formally investigating a possible name change in fall 2023 following discussions in prior years, and reflected in our 2022 self-study and its external reviewer report.

From the self-study (rationale for creating a School of Earth, Environment and Society is relevant to changing the department name to better reflect our current research, teaching, and service):

As an aspirational goal, evolving the structure of the Department into a School of Earth, Environment and Society would leverage and build on GES strengths, increasing the visibility of programs, research themes, and centers as a resource of relevance to the Charlotte Region and beyond. Many universities have a school or college that in some way emphasizes environmental issues, most commonly focusing on natural resources (like at most land grant institutions). Given UNC Charlotte's distinction as an Urban Research University that is striving to R1 status, having a school that elevates environmental issues in the urban regional context is an exceptional opportunity and offers a distinct positioning to address some of the most pressing environmental issues facing society today, including climate change and resilience, smart and connected cities, and environmental health ... elevating the R1 Areas of Excellence.

From the self-study reviewer report:

The department's combination of physical and social sciences to address critical environmental issues is one of its great strengths. The department might consider a change in name to "Earth, Environment and Society" to emphasize and bring greater awareness to students of the multidisciplinary nature of the department.

In sum, the proposed name change is in response to a disciplinary need, i.e., to have a name that is more inclusive of the diverse and interdisciplinary research and teaching fields evident in the department and that we feel will help promote the recruitment of students and faculty. Our



current faculty-defined department research and teaching themes are Human-Environmental Interactions & Sustainability; Global Change and Adaptation; Environmental Hazards and Health; Atmospheric and Earth Surface Geosciences; Urban Regions and Communities; and GIScience and Geospatial Analytics. The addition of the broad term “Environmental” to our department’s name more readily encompasses these diverse themes. Further, it was noted by several faculty that “Geographical Sciences” is more inclusive of GIS and urban planning than “Geography”. Similarly, “Environmental Sciences” is more inclusive of a broader range of physical sciences that our Department comprises (atmospheric, hydrologic, ecologic) than “Earth Sciences” alone. The proposed name change will also enable a larger number of faculty to better attract the students they need to fill graduate and undergraduate programs and achieve their individual objectives. In particular, our undergraduate programs of Earth and Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies have experienced significant demand, with enrollments rapidly increasing over the past decade.

Internal process that arrived at the proposed new name

In fall 2023, I charged the departmental Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) with suggesting possible new department names that better represent the department’s work. The FAC is composed of four tenure-track faculty, two from the natural sciences and two from the social sciences, and one assistant teaching professor. The FAC reviewed the names of similar departments across the US and Canada and surveyed the faculty of the department about their preference for a variety of alternatives and to solicit suggestions. The results of the survey, completed by 19 of 30 eligible faculty, indicated that there was very little support for keeping the current department name and that three possible new names had merit: Earth, Environment(al), and Geographical Sciences; Earth, Environment(al), and Urban Sciences; and Earth and Geographical Sciences. These alternatives were discussed at a faculty meeting on January 19, 2024.

Faculty were then invited to vote on their preferred new name and whether they wanted to change the department’s name. In the first vote, 87% of faculty voted for Earth, Environment(al), and Geographical Sciences rather than the two alternatives, with all eligible faculty casting a vote. The second vote resulted in 58% of faculty selecting ‘Environmental’ rather than ‘Environment’ in the preferred name (26 of 30 eligible faculty voting). Finally, in the third vote, 86% of faculty selected Earth, Environmental, and Geographical Sciences rather than the department’s current name (with 28 of 30 eligible faculty voting).



The FAC, as well as the Associate Chair, were given the opportunity to review this proposal before submission.

