SPECIAL REPORT

OF THE

ACADEMIC MATTERS, ACADEMIC PRIORITIES, GRADUATE and PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCILS

concerning

REORGANIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOSCIENCES (#8857)

Presented at the 817th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate November 17, 2022

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL
Carolyn Bassett, Bryan Beck, William Brown, Allison Butler, Marcy Clark, Elizabeth Conner, Morgan Donovan-Hall, Sharon Dormier, Laura Francis, Janet Fink, Kate Green, Keisha Green, Farshid Hajir, Mark Liberatore, Linda Lowry, Andrea Malaguti, Anthony Paik, Raymond Rennerd, Jennifer Randall, Caleb Rounds, Sylvia Salas, Tigran Sedrakyn, Barry Spence, Patrick Sullivan, Laura Vandenberg, Jack Wileden

ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
The Academic Matters Council recommends approval of this proposal.

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES COUNCIL
Michelle Budig, Allison Butler, Ellen Correa, Farshid Hajir, Jason Hooper, Sangeeta Kamat, Anthony Paik, Sarah Poissant, Atul Sheel, Janine Solberg, Jaime Taylor, Christine Turner, Jack Wileden, Rebecca Woodland

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
The Academic Priorities Council recommends approval of this proposal

GRADUATE COUNCIL
Evelyn Ashley, Joseph Black, Ana Caicedo, Robert DeConto, Jennifer Friedman, Traci Hess, Alexandra Jesse, Neal Katz, Bernhard Leidner, Robert Maloy, Anthony Paik, Sarah Pfatteicher, Sarah Poissant, Darrel Ramsey-Musolf, Rebecca Reznik-Zellen, Memnun Seven, Patrick Sullivan, Corine Tachtiris, Jacqueline Urla, Tilman Wolf

GRADUATE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
The Graduate Council recommends approval of this proposal.
PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCIL
Zlatan Aksamija, Jeremiah Bentley, Kathleen Berry, William Brown, Elizabeth Chang, Rosemary Cowell, Sarah Goff, Deborah Gould, Moira Inghilleri, Yoon Ju Kang, Andrew Mangels, Lynn McKenna, Anthony Paik, Alexander Phillips, Anurag Sharma, Gregory Spiridopoulos, Gabriela Weaver, Lisa Wegiel

PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
The Program and Budget Council recommends approval of this proposal.

Please describe your proposal

The Department of Geosciences is seeking to changes its name to The Department of Earth, Geographic and Climate Sciences. See following attachment to support this change.

ATTACHMENT:
1. Geosciences Name Change Proposal

MOTION: That the Faculty Senate approve the Reorganization of the Department of Geosciences, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 23-024.
I. Proposal Development

A. Describe the Proposal.

The proposal is to change the name of the Department of Geosciences to the Department of Earth, Geographic and Climate Sciences.

B. Provide a brief overview of the process for developing the Proposal.

A name change has long been discussed in our department. A committee was formed to investigate a name change in January 2022, which included a graduate student representative. The committee began by collecting data on the names of other Geosciences/Earth Science and Geography Departments as well as on how name changes influenced the number of undergraduate majors (e.g., after switching from “Geology” or “Geosciences” to “Earth and Environmental Sciences” or “Earth and Climate Sciences”, many departments reported an increase in majors). The committee also gave a presentation to the entire department on 2/7/2022 about why a name change is needed, answered questions, and subsequently collected data from all members of the department (undergraduates, graduates, postdocs, staff, faculty and emeritus faculty) via a Google Form asking for keywords that best described who we are and what we do. In total, 71 people responded to the Google Form and a total of 300 words were suggested. Of the respondents, most were graduate students (39.4%) or faculty (35.2%) followed by undergraduates (14.1%). The top 5 words were: Earth (n=64), Climate (n=51), Environment/Environmental (n=40), Geography/Geographical (n=23) and Science/Sciences (n=22). The committee also closely examined academic literature on Geology/Geography names including a study by Stoler et al. (2021; What’s in a Name? Undergraduate Student Perceptions of Geography, Environment, and Sustainability Key Words and Program Names, Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 111:2, 317-342, DOI: 10.1080/24694452.2020.1766412) to understand which names/words best resonate with undergraduates. The committee then considered these lines of evidence, along with suggestions for a new name that were solicited from the faculty via an anonymous Google form, to vote on several new name options after having multiple discussions during faculty meetings. Ultimately, the faculty voted between “Department of Earth, Geographic and Climate Sciences”, “Department of Climate and Society”, and “Department of Earth, Environment and Geography” using ranked choice voting (an anonymous Google form to collect the votes and the R package “vote” (Raftery et al., 2021, The R journal) was used to tally the results). Department of Earth, Geographic and Climate Sciences was the winner of the ranked choice vote; this option was also the choice unanimously recommended by the committee.

II. Purpose and Goals

We have four main goals is seeking a department name change.

Goal # 1. To make it better known across campus what we do.

- Others across campus, particularly undergraduates (and some administrators), do not have any idea of what Geosciences is or what geoscientists do (e.g., it is not widely known that the department does research related to climate, the environment, sustainability, or geography).
As a discipline, geology is at a disadvantage in that many students will not have had a geology or earth science class in high school. Therefore, undergraduates arriving on campus typically have little knowledge of what geosciences is as a discipline or what geoscientists do. A well-selected new name could provide clarity.

Goal #2. To increase the number of majors in the department and enrollment in our classes.

- The number of undergraduate Geology/Earth systems majors is declining while the Environmental Science major has grown. We need to increase the number of majors in the department and a well-selected new name could help.

Goal #3. To strengthen connections with the environmental science major.

- The 350 Environmental Science majors on campus are shared between Geosciences & the Dept of Environmental Conservation (ECO). Many majors do not see direct ties to our department. A new name could help make our direct role as one of the homes of the environmental science major more obvious both to students & administrators.

Goal #4. To stay relevant.

- The department has changed significantly since our last name change in 1995. Disciplines change and the faculty here have changed. In particular, the number of geography faculty in the department has grown in the last decade.
- The main types of research activities in the department are different from 27 years ago and focus of the different subdisciplines & funding agencies changes with time. Climate science is a major focus of the department’s research today.
- A new name could better reflect who we currently are and what we do.

The new name, Department of Earth, Geographic and Climate Sciences meets these goals. Traditionally, a common name of our discipline, as well as academic departments, is "Earth Sciences". The word "Earth" represents the entire range of research in the department and especially highlights the key research focus area in Earth Dynamics. Many of our peer departments include "Earth" in the department name. By adding “Geographic” and “Climate” to the department name, it is made clear that both geography and climate are a main focus of our research and teaching. Our department is unique in that is one of a few departments that grants PhDs in both Geology and Geography (there are only 2 other departments in the US that do this). We feel this is an advantage as an increasing number of funding calls in the geosciences are requiring collaborations between physical and social scientists. Furthermore, bringing greater visibility to the work that the geographers do in the department will help to recruit new majors, to attract more students into our courses, help the popular GIST undergraduate certificate and 1-year professional master's programs to continue to grow, and to improve funding opportunities. Likewise, the committee had many discussions considering the words "climate" and "environment" and ultimately decided that “climate” is the better word to include in the department name for several reasons. First, our department is recognized both nationally and internationally as being a leader in the field of climate and paleoclimate research. Second, the word “climate” is more popular than “environment” with undergraduates, graduates, and postdocs in the survey of keywords held within the department and our research into the available academic literature also suggests that “climate science” is popular among today’s students. Third, in recent years, climate change has become an issue that is being more widely discussed in politics and by the general public. Moving forward, we feel it would be advantageous to have our research strength in climate science more widely recognized, both on campus and beyond, by inclusion of "climate" in the department name.
Future Considerations

Re-naming the department degrees will have no direct effect on the undergraduate or graduate curricula nor will class contents be altered. In conjunction with the change in name, the department is actively considering changing our Spire course designations to reflect the new name. Course numbers will not change. We are also engaging in a parallel discussion of the names and structures of our five majors. These discussions, however, are independent of the department name.
To: Anthony Paik, Secretary of the Faculty Senate

From: Stephen Burns, Department Head, Geosciences

Re: Name change for the Department of Geosciences

I am writing with the full support of the faculty of the Department of Geosciences to request approval of a change in the department’s name to

**The Department of Earth, Geographic and Climate Sciences**

For some years our department has considered a name change away from Geosciences to a name that better reflects the diversity of our teaching and research and that would be seen in a more positive light by prospective students. With regard to the latter, total undergraduate enrollment in our majors has been gradually declining for several years, with total enrollment now about 90 across five majors. By contrast, the Environmental Science major has over 350 students enrolled. Although there are significant curricular differences between Environmental Science and the undergraduate degrees offered in our department, we do not feel these are great enough to account for the 4x greater enrollment in the former. After all, nearly everyone in our department studies earth’s environment. Geology and Geoscience are, unfortunately, often viewed negatively by college aged people and as associated with extractive industries such as mining and fossil fuels, areas with which our department is not involved. ‘Earth Science’ is not a term associated with the extractive industry and we feel will be more favorably seen by students.

In addition, the new name more accurately reflects the scope of teaching and research in the department. ‘Geographic Science’ emphasizes the important role geographers play in our department, particularly as we are one of the few departments in CNS with social scientists in it. The overlap of social and physical sciences is one of our strengths and the new name helps emphasize that fact. Also, our department has long been at the forefront of climate studies in earth science, with particularly strength in paleoclimatology and climate impacts of ancient societies. Yet this deep expertise is not widely recognized by incoming student, undergraduates, or indeed, across the campus. Including ‘Climate Science’ in our name highlights one of our department’s strengths and an area in which we expect future investment by the department.

The process of choosing a new name was well thought out by a Name Change Committee that represented all parts of the Department and solicited input from everyone from undergraduates through the faculty. After extensive discussion over several faculty meetings, we went through several rounds of ranked choice voting on different options. The name decided upon was unanimously recommended by the Committee and by far the most popular choice.
I should note that along with a change to the department’s name, we are actively engaged in discussing changes to the number and names of our majors and concentrations to terms better aligned to the new department name. We are also discussing changing our course designations in Spire to align with the new name. The first step, however, is to formally rename the department. In summary, we are very pleased and excited to have chosen a new name that better reflects who we are and what we do.

Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely yours,

Stephen J. Burns
Professor, Department Head