

APPENDIX O

Request to Plan a Doctoral Program in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Introduction

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte requests approval to plan a doctoral program in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis (CIP: 45.0701).

Program Description

The Institution has provided the following description of the program:

The Proposed Ph.D. in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis builds philosophically upon the most successful components of the nationally recognized and highly successful Master of Arts in Geography offered by the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences. During the past 33 years, the Department has offered a unique applied geography master's degree focused on economic and urban related issues in the metropolitan context. In practice, the emphasis on applied geography has simultaneously trained hundreds of policy-oriented geographers who have worked as public and private sector professionals, while, at the same time, enabling the faculty and graduate students to be involved in a broad range of community-oriented research issues in the Charlotte metropolitan region. The thrust of the master's curriculum capitalized on the complex economic, spatial, and social characteristics of this region, using it as a laboratory that pedagogically linked teaching, research, and service. As a result, geography at UNC Charlotte is well positioned as an engaged partner in ongoing spatial analyses of the region.

Building upon the accomplishments and infrastructure that have developed around the applied master's program, the UNC Charlotte graduate geography faculty are prepared to extend the current level of graduate training to the doctoral level. The proposed instructional program draws upon the current research strengths of the faculty, research funding streams, and the technical and structural advances in the science of geography. The proposed Ph.D. in Geography will be positioned around the theoretical and applied analysis of metropolitan areas and their broader regional, national and global contexts. At the core of this program is the recognition that cities are engines and products of multi-scalar interactions, and that understanding these urban dynamics necessitates rigorous theoretical, conceptual and applied study. Within this framework, two thematic research clusters will be offered:

- i. Spatial Analytical Studies (SAS)
- ii. Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIS&T)

By focusing their topical attention on urban and regional issues, these two clusters complement and intersect one another in ways that ensure a clearly defined programmatic focus. The two clusters provide analytical, theoretical and pedagogic

framework to the research expertise and technical specialization for students trained in the program. Current geography faculty already have active research programs in these areas and the Ph.D. program would enable the faculty to expand the scope of current research and teaching agendas, as well as increase their external funding options. The proposed program represents an extension and strengthening of current research streams and graduate program strengths.

The proposed doctoral program in geography and urban regional analysis will bridge the theoretic and applied realms that are ascribed by modern geographic science. Over the past ten years, the discipline of geography has increasingly moved toward a paradigm that draws together strong theoretic tenets with geo-spatial technologies. Within this framework, the proposed Ph.D. program will focus on a subset of geographic research and graduate training to the extent that the program will examine human processes and interactions in a metropolitan context.

In narrowing the specialties of the program to spatial analytical studies and geography information science and technology, the faculty has chosen to build on the strength of the existing master's program, as well as extend their currently active research programs. The research clusters within the program, along with UNC Charlotte's setting in a dynamic metropolitan region, provide students with the opportunity to easily engage in research with theoretic rigor, while at the same time helping to inform local and state public policy. In this context, strong linkages between the geography faculty and public agencies and businesses in the Charlotte region will facilitate student access to resources and data. Past experience suggests that stipends and funded research opportunities are also available for doctoral students. The programming activities and resources warehoused in the Center for Applied Geographic Information Science, especially the regional databases, strengthen the opportunities for Charlotte-centered research programs.

The underlying mission for the proposed program is to train doctoral-level geographers for employment in the academy, as well as for research positions in the public and private sectors. The need for university-level faculty in the two research clusters has been extremely strong and sustained over the past several years. Beyond higher education, government and businesses are increasing their share of doctoral-trained geographers in the applied areas of spatial analysis and geographic information science and technology. UNC Charlotte's reputation for offering strong master's degree students in these areas will enhance doctoral student placement following completion of the degree.

Program Review

The review process for requests to plan is designed to determine if the proposal is developed to the stage appropriate for taking to the Graduate Council and if so, what are the issues that may need further attention. Proposals to plan doctoral programs are reviewed internally. The concerns from the reviewers were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

This program is being proposed following the recent establishment of the doctoral program in geography at UNCG, which would make it the third geography doctoral program in UNC. The program is to fit with a master's in geography and a doctorate in public policy. Since it has both policy and geography components this appears to be a good placement. The program will have a laboratory at its fingertips since Charlotte and the surrounding area present many features ripe for urban regional analysis. The evidence seems to indicate continuing demand for graduates of geography programs since they can seek both academic employment and business or governmental employment. Good placement prospects should serve to draw students.

Three issues emerge that need additional consideration. A more detailed analysis is needed of the relationship and potential overlap of the program with those at UNCG and UNC CH that perhaps invites the programs at those two schools to agree or disagree with the analysis. The other issue is whether this program and the public policy doctorate, which we understand geography participates in, will overlap in their draw of students. The proposal rightly calls attention to the great success the master's program in geography has had and the number of students it has trained. Since the proposal suggests current faculty members are capable of mounting a doctoral program, we need to understand where their time is being reassigned from. What will the impact be on the master's program if a doctoral program is added?

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, the proposal to plan the program, the summary letter to the Chancellor, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. In addition to the issues raised previously, the following concerns were expressed by Council members: experience with directing doctoral dissertations among the faculty, number of faculty that will be added, support of doctoral students, and whether there is likely to be a problem with students leaving the program to take a job prior to finishing the degree.

Response

The representatives indicated that while there would be some overlap with other doctoral programs in the state there would be a significantly different applied focus for this program. Representatives of other programs agreed and expressed the desire to engage in collaborative activities. Geography faculty participate in the Public Policy doctoral program at UNCC and several have had experience directing dissertations or serving on doctoral committees. There have been several faculty vacancies and all those will be filled with an eye to needs of the proposed program and the program will have some new faculty positions. There is significant support currently for graduate students in the department and some of that will be shifted as the master's program is reduced in size, and increased external funding that is likely with doctoral level research activity will add support for graduate students. The technical skills student gain from this program will make them very marketable for a range of lucrative positions well before they complete the program. The representatives understand that is a feature of this degree area and they plan to address the issue.

Need for the Program

The term frequently used is that this is a “hot” area. There is a consensus that there are more than enough people wishing to study in this field to support three doctoral programs in NC. Because employment opportunities range over academic, business, government, military, non-profits, and research organizations, graduates should have little problem finding positions.

Recommendation by the Graduate Council

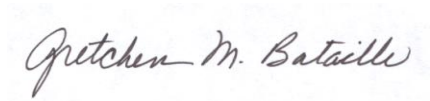
After consideration of the issues raised by previous reviewers and Council members, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval for UNCC to plan a doctoral program in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis.

Issues to Address in Planning

Some exploration with the other two public programs in NC might be undertaken to determine the degree of collaboration that would be possible. The number of faculty the campus expects to commit to this program should be clearly stated. The program might consult with other programs that provide similar skill sets and seek advice on how they have managed to keep their students in the program through the completion of the degree.

Recommendation

The Office of the President recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from UNCC to plan a doctoral program in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis.

Approved to be Recommended for Planning to the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs

Senior Vice President Gretchen M. Bataille

May 2, 2005