

Request to Establish 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 establish a doctoral program in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis (CIP: 45.0701).

Program Description

The proposed Ph.D. in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis uses the metropolitan region and its interaction with social, political and economic dynamics at multiple spatial scales as a unifying framework for research, instruction and problem-solving.

Recognizing that cities are the drivers and results of complex interactions, which require rigorous theoretical, conceptual and empirical study, the proposed program integrates theoretical and empirical analysis of metropolitan areas at multiple scales.

This proposal outlines a Ph.D. program that interweaves theory and concepts with current methodological techniques in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis that focuses on two interconnected research emphases:

- I. Multiscalar Analysis
- II. Geographic Information Science (GIScience)

Common techniques courses cover several areas of geo-spatial analysis and technology, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), spatial modeling, spatial econometrics, spatial statistics, and advanced quantitative methods. These courses will engage students with methodologies and skill- building that will enable them to operationalize theory. By pairing technology and theory in the core curriculum, the program seeks to train doctoral graduates who are grounded in a theoretical understanding of metropolitan processes, have the capacity to build scientifically grounded research questions from empirical data, and can answer pressing place-specific societal questions. The proposed program is designed to “cross-train” graduates in theory and technology to better equip them to offer informed research judgments and to make them stronger candidates in seeking employment.

In this pursuit, the objectives of the program are to:

- Train doctoral-level geographers who are well-versed in the latest technologies of geographic analysis, thereby preparing them for employment in the academy, as well as research positions in the public and private sectors,
- Provide students with the opportunity to engage in research that informs local, regional and state public policy, and
- Provide strong theoretical grounding on which research, analysis and decision-making are based.

Societal need for programs emphasizing the application of urban-oriented geographic theory and analysis is increasing in North Carolina and elsewhere. All indications of the market for program graduates suggest that while the academic market for program graduates will be strong, the nonacademic market is expected to grow six-fold before the end of decade, a clear testament to the substantial and growing societal need to combine geospatial analysis to problems facing contemporary urban society.

The proposed Ph.D. in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis at UNC Charlotte builds upon the most successful components of a nationally recognized and highly successful Master of Arts in Geography that emphasizes urban and regional analysis, location analysis, and community and regional planning. Within those programmatic thrusts, the Department has a long-standing track record of integrating teaching, research and service missions that connect its curriculum with the broader community. The Department's performance in the delivery of its master's program and the structure of the proposed Ph.D. program are clearly consistent with the current Mission Statement of the University. Core elements of UNC Charlotte's Institutional Mission Statement are to provide "for the education, economic, social, and cultural development of the people of North Carolina through...continuing personal and professional education opportunities, research, and collaborative relationships with private, public and nonprofit institutions." UNC Charlotte has identified urban and regional development as one of the campus' seven broad areas of concern, seeing the University as playing a critical role in addressing these issues by, "offering intellectual and technical expertise in each of these areas" and "...solving contemporary problems of the region."

As a laboratory for teaching and research, the complexities of the Charlotte metropolitan region and other regions in the state offer ample opportunities for the application of geographical analysis to place-based questions for the betterment of North Carolina and its people. To that end, the proposed Ph.D. in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte can play an important role.

Program Review

The review process for requests to establish 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 and externally. The concerns from the reviewers were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

The reviewers have many supportive comments about the proposed program especially regarding the strength of the current master's program. But some concerns are expressed as well. The relationship between the new doctoral program and the current program in Public Policy is seen as potentially both positive and distracting. More attention might be given to the exact relation of the two programs and how each can maintain its identity and be mutually supportive without having a situation where they cannibalize one another as one reviewer puts it.

One reviewer was concerned about library support and reviews some specific journals

that the reviewer believe will be mandatory. Further description of how the library needs for this program will be address would be helpful.

It appears there needs to be more clarity about the focus on “metropolitan processes,” since one reviewer sees this focus as potentially restrictive.

One reviewer characterizes the faculty size as barely adequate for a program offering both masters and doctoral degrees. The planned additional faculty appear essential and it needs to be clear that there is a commitment to provide them. On the other hand, new hires by the program are praised and are accepted as indicators that the program can add high quality faculty. A definitive statement by the University regarding additional faculty for the proposed program would be very helpful.

The department calls attention to the growing success with external funding for Geography and the reviewer agrees with the direction for the distribution of the load for doctoral faculty who are doing successful research. He urges more faculty to shoot higher in the selection of journals for their research results.

Due to a reviewer being late in turning in his report, a second letter was sent:

I will just note some issues not raised by the first reviewer:

- *The balance of placements are likely to tip toward industry and government*
- *The question about the exact impact of multiscalar analysis on the curriculum*
- *Whether there are some additional courses that would strengthen the program such as ethical and legal aspects, urban GIS and data, and possibly an environmental course*
- *The need for additional faculty and some senior faculty in that mix.*

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, the proposal to establish the program, the summary letters to the Chancellor, two external reviews, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. Issues similar to those raised by the external reviewers were raised by the Graduate Council.

Response

The campus representatives made clear that there were major differences in the doctoral program in public policy and the proposed new program. The public policy program is an interdisciplinary applied program with training in policy analysis and design, while the geography program is a single discipline program focused on both theoretical and empirical work. The chancellor and provost have signed off on two new faculty positions for 2007 and a future additional faculty position. The campus library is doing a thorough review and the library will be enhanced to support this program. While a reviewer thought the metropolitan focus could be limiting, the representatives explained that the metropolitan theme permeates the focus at all levels.

Need for the Program

Reviewers and program proponents see good opportunities for graduates of the program in academic employment but especially in business, government, and industry.

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 the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to establish a doctoral program in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis.

Budgetary Issues

When at full capacity the total enrollment funding requirement for the program is estimated to be \$655,444. If the program is composed of 70% in-state students and 30% out-of-state students, the State funding required (after tuition is charged) is estimated to be \$503,094 at 2006-07 tuition rates.

Recommendation

The General Administration recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to establish a doctoral program in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis.

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

Interim Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Alan R. Mabe

May 2, 2006