



Association of American Geographers

January 3, 2016

1710 Sixteenth Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20009-3198
Voice 202-234-1450
Fax 202-234-2744
gaia@aag.org
http://www.aag.org

AAG Councillors

President

Sarah Bednarz
Texas A&M University

Vice President

Glen MacDonald
University of California Los Angeles

Secretary

Thomas Mote
University of Georgia

Treasurer

Melissa R. Gilbert
Temple University

Past President

Mona Domosh
Dartmouth College

Stuart Aitken
San Diego State University

Julie Cidell
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux
University of Vermont

Melissa R. Gilbert
Temple University

J.M. Shawn Hutchinson
Kansas State University

Richard Kujawa
St. Michael's College

Patrick Lawrence
University of Toledo

Robert Mason
Temple University

Scott A. Mensing
University of Nevada Reno

Thomas Mote
University of Georgia

Gregory Pope
Montclair State University

Darren Purcell
University of Oklahoma

Susan M. Roberts
University of Kentucky

Susy S. Ziegler
Northern Michigan University

Jeremy Tasch
Towson University

Executive Director

Douglas Richardson

Dr. Maria Lane
Chair, Department of Geography & Environmental Studies
University of New Mexico

Dr. Christopher Brown
Chair, Department of Geography
New Mexico State University

Dear Drs Lane and Brown:

Thank you for the opportunity to write a letter of support for your proposal to create a joint doctoral program in geography. As president of the American Association of Geographers, I welcome all initiatives to expand and enhance our profession. More than that, I believe your cooperative program is a model for graduate education in geography. Let me expand on that idea.

Graduate education is a topic of great interest right now in higher education. It is clear that there is a need for careful reflection on the purposes of a Ph.D. both for the individual and for society. We need to understand that it is not sufficient to simply reproduce ourselves but to prepare highly skilled, knowledgeable, and flexible individuals able to move between academia, industry, and government and to contribute to all in a range of ways. As we re-think graduate education, we must consider how to bridge theory and practice, intellectual pursuits with the real needs of society.

As I read your proposal I see that you have grappled with these key ideas in a novel and innovative fashion. You have crafted a program focus that meets the needs of New Mexico and the Southwest, that capitalizes on the strengths of two geography departments, and uses a central practice of geography, spatial analysis through geospatial technologies, as a foundation and unifying theme. Further, you recognize that you are preparing geographers for varied purposes. As enrollments decline in colleges and universities but demands for the skills and practices of geographers grow elsewhere, your program is unique in exploring a new model of graduate education.

I commend you for the very thorough and careful work that has gone into the formulation of the proposal. You have a solid and exciting plan, well-supported by your two institutions which deserves to be approved. I look forward to hearing future reports of your successes and advise you to make public the plans and ongoing progress to success as the program evolves.

Best of luck and please let the Association know how we can support you in pursuing the goal of creating a new doctoral program

Sincerely,

Sarah Witham Bednarz
Professor of Geography, Texas A&M University
President, American Association of Geographers