January 3, 2016

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