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August 2, 2016

Professor Carol Campbell  
Department Head

Dear Professor Campbell:

As you know, the Geography departments of New Mexico State University and University of New Mexico are proposing to establish a joint doctoral program (JDP) in Geography, and I would like to provide my support for this initiative. Since I have a fair amount of experience with our own JDP (co-founder and 14 years as program's student adviser) and familiarity with the New Mexico initiative (e.g. participated in a retreat of the two faculties 18 months ago), and therefore quite a bit to contribute, I will attempt to do so in a fairly abbreviated, bulleted outline fashion.

First let me outline my personal experience with our JDP, which provides some basis for the strengths and weaknesses of such programs, and context for your own proposal.

- The Geography departments of San Diego State University (SDSU) and University of California (UCSB) agreed to partner in a JDP in the late 1980s and the program started in 1991; as a SDSU professor, I was intimately involved in the establishment of the program, partly because my Geography degrees were all from UCSB Geography.
- Unlike the New Mexico situation, UCSB already had a successful PhD program, and SDSU was and has been the primary beneficiary and supporting institution (financially and administratively) in the partnership.
- Almost immediately after establishment, SDSU Geography benefited from participating in the JDP through higher levels of grants and contracts funding, attracting high quality junior- and senior-level faculty, retaining faculty, retaining some of our best master's students, and raising the quality of their academic preparation through interactions with doctoral students.
- In the establishment of the JDP, SDSU Geography faculty decided to put financial resources associated with the program into doctoral student support (stipends, health benefits and fee coverage) rather than hiring more faculty to help handle the added workload; this workload change was mostly offset by utilizing funded doctoral students as teaching and research assistants.
- Research productivity and outcomes increased markedly for SDSU faculty and many of the UCSB faculty participants, through research projects (mostly associated with dissertations), where doctoral students served as catalysts for collaboration.

- The SDSU-UCSB JDP in Geography has been very successful in meeting demands for Geography PhDs in academic and non-academic positions (about 65%/35% respectively).
- The primary benefits to students participating in the JDP are the access to the strong faculties, excellent research facilities, and course offerings of two universities, the ability to conduct Geography doctoral studies in San Diego (particularly for place-bound, or place-preferential applicants).
- The major disadvantages are associated with the minimum one-year residency requirements for both universities and associated moving and lodging inconveniences, and dealing with the bureaucracies of two universities.

I will now highlight some of the potential benefits to NMSU (and UNM) and the state of New Mexico.

- Given the fairly small faculty sizes of both departments, a joint doctoral program enables a critical mass of participating faculty to be formed, while minimizing or sharing associated costs for developing and maintaining such a program.
- Most, if not all of the benefits associated with faculty hiring and retention gained by SDSU that were mentioned above, would be realized by both NMSU and UNM Geography departments.
- In addition to both departments being able to retain some of its stronger master's degree students, a NM JDP would be the only one in Geography in the state; this would help to retain some of brightest and best students, many of which who would stay and conduct research and associated work in New Mexico.
- Related to the above, public and private sector employers will realize the benefit of hiring PhD geographers to conduct research and meet the workforce needs in New Mexico.
- The geographers that the program seeks to train will have applied interests and technical skills, and will solve applied problems of interest to New Mexico and the arid Southwestern US.
- Research to be conducted in the program can make a meaningful contribution to the State of New Mexico in meeting the serious challenges faced by the state in the areas of water resource management, wildland-urban interface, economic development, and policies by which solutions to these problems can be advanced.
- According to the JDP proposal, the program will support several key performance indicators in NMSU's Living the Vision and therefore advances its long term strategic plan (e.g., in Academics & Graduation, Research/Creative Activity, and Economic Development and Community Engagement).
- Likely the most beneficial outcome for the participating departments made possible by a NM JDP in Geography will be the facilitation of research and teaching collaborations between the two departments, that share many common interests and areas of expertise

There are several reasons for why the NMSU-UNM JDP in Geography is likely to be successful.

- Many of the NMSU and UNM faculty have extensive experience in the development and administration of joint and interdisciplinary programs (including three who are graduates of the SDSU-UCSB JDP in Geography), and thus are knowledgeable in dealing with associated administrative processes and matters.

- Despite the fairly small sizes of the individual faculties, the combined faculties cover a reasonably broad spectrum of geographic specialties, while sharing core strengths in applied geography, environmental policy and management, and geo-spatial techniques.
- The proposed program is very innovative and being advanced by two well respected master's degree programs, and will certainly yield synergistic outcomes.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions about my letter or other items pertinent to the JDP proposal not addressed in it – (619) 594-5498 or [stow@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:stow@mail.sdsu.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas A. Stow". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Douglas A. Stow  
Distinguished Professor of Geography