

June 30, 2004

MEMO TO: Tom Hixon, Associate Vice President and Dean, Graduate College
Tim Finan, Professor and Chair, Global Change

FROM: George H. Davis, Executive Vice President and Provost 

RE: Academic Program Review of the Graduate Interdisciplinary Program in
Global Change: Summary of Conclusions

I am writing to provide a record of the conclusions we reached regarding the academic program review of the Graduate Interdisciplinary Program in Global Change. As we discussed when we met some months ago, the Global Change GIDP is something of a hidden treasure at the UA. We have considerable strengths across many departments in this area of inquiry, and this relatively youthful Ph.D. minor program has made them more accessible to talented and motivated graduate students from several disciplines. The overall quality of the faculty and students is impressive, and the program's potential is substantial. But, like the review committee, I came away from the review concerned by apparent impediments to the program's further development.

To some degree, the impediments are those experienced by virtually all GIDPs: the need to rely on the energies and commitment of faculty who also bear departmental obligations; the inadequacies of funding and administrative support; and the lack of a physical locus of activity for students and faculty alike. But Global Change enjoys an advantage other GIDPs do not: an affiliation, albeit rather loose and informal, with the Institute for the Study of Planet Earth. ISPE has provided some limited administrative support to the program, and its director, Jonathan Overpeck, certainly shares an interest in the well being of the educational program in global change. It seemed to us that a first, important step toward the enhancement of the Global Change GIDP would be to resolve how its relationship to ISPE could be further strengthened.

At our meeting, I invited a proposal for investment in the Global Change GIDP. The proposal minimally would include:

- A description of what the Global Change GIDP would be and what impacts it would have
- An incentive plan for engaging social scientists in the program, particularly in the development and offering of a core course, as recommended by the review team
- Strategies for developing student leadership, who, in turn, could initiate programmatic improvements
- A solution to the need for what was called in our meeting a "master weaver," who would take on the task of program building
- A scheme for enhancing student recruitment and building program enrollment


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Since we met, the structural and program development challenges faced by the Global Change IDP have been further addressed by the report of the Focused Excellence Study Group on Earth Sciences and Environmental Programs (ESEP). The report vigorously advocates strengthening both undergraduate and graduate education in ESEP. Among its recommendations is the creation of an ESEP Institute which would, among other things, house the ESEP-related interdisciplinary programs, including Global Change. The study team's report noted, in particular, that "the overarching theme of global change is a major component of the ESEP Institute initiative, and this minor provides a venue through which it can be presented to graduate students."

I trust that conversations within the Global Change IDP have been ongoing since we met, and I look forward to learning how your thinking has advanced with regard to the program's development, especially in light of the ESEP Study Team's recommendations. I want to congratulate the Global Change faculty for preparing a frank, thorough, and thoughtful self-study for this academic program review. You helped set the stage not only for the visiting APR team, but also for the continuing conversation this academic year about the future of earth sciences and environmental programs at the UA. I believe we are poised to make important strides in this key area of research and teaching in the year ahead.

GHD/esa

xc: ✓Jolene Gruener
Peter Likins
Jonathan Overpeck