October 13, 2008

To: Dr. Meredith Hay, Executive Vice President and Provost
From: Stuart E. Marsh, Chair, Arid Lands Resource Sciences Graduate Interdisciplinary Program

Subject: Arid Lands Resource Sciences GIDP and the Transformation Process

On September 19, 2008 the ALRS Executive Committee* met to discuss the role of the ALRS Ph.D. program in the on-going transformation process. At that meeting multiple options were evaluated regarding the merging of our interdisciplinary program into one of the multiple ‘Schools of the Environment’ that are being discussed across campus. At the end of the meeting it was the unanimous decision that ALRS should remain a GIDP.

This decision was based upon our mission and success as a GIDP since it was established in 1968, the results of our most recent Academic Program Review, and the truly interdisciplinary nature of both our students and faculty.

The mission of the ALRS program is to provide an academic environment in which advanced students can examine the economic, ecological and social factors that determine the long-term sustainable use of arid and semiarid lands. There are 58 volunteer faculty affiliated with the program from across campus and we currently have 29 active Ph.D. students. As noted by Vice President Tolbert in an interview that appeared in the May 28th 2005 Arizona Daily Star:

“One of the things we do very well here (UA) is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work,” Tolbert said. "There are groups here, for instance in Arid Lands, that bring together people from all sorts of different backgrounds.”

The external review committee from our 2005 Academic Program Review noted that:

“The ALRS program is unique nationally and internationally.”

“For the last decade, the program has advanced research questions on human-environment interactions that are increasingly recognized as critical by the wider academic and policy communities as well as by decision makers in the area of resource management.”

“This is an educational program of the highest caliber that complements and does not compete with research units that conduct studies in arid lands.”

* Robert Bechtel (Psychology), Suzanne Fish (ASM/Anthropology), Lisa Graumlich (Director SNR), Leslie Gunatilaka (OALS), Chuck Hutchinson (Director OALS), Mitch McClaran (SNR), Stuart Marsh (OALS/Geography), and Paul Robbins (Head Geography and Regional Development), Steve Yool (Geography and Regional Development) and graduate student representative Jelena Vukomanovic (ALRS).
“The interdisciplinary nature of the program gives highly motivated students opportunities to pursue scholarly research and its application to real world problems in a manner that is not matched by any academic program elsewhere in the world.”

“The students are extremely impressive, competent and professional. Graduates from this GIDP are very competitive in the academic and professional marketplace. The strength and reputation of the students results from their ability and willingness to engage in a high level of communication between disciplines and approaches.”

Since 2000 we have graduated 25 Ph.D.s thus averaging over 3 graduates per year. Perhaps the most telling statistics that points to the truly interdisciplinary nature of our program comes from the graduate committees these 25 graduates formed for their research. A total of 72 different faculty from 9 different colleges and 20 different departments (Figure 1) served our students. Clearly, maintaining such interdisciplinarity is crucial to insuring the continued success and growth of our program and we believe the very best means of doing that is to remain a GIDP.

We would also note that graduate interdisciplinary programs such as ALRS have played and should continue to play a critical role in advancing the education and research goals of the UA. This has happened because we sit in the interspace between existing colleges and departments and future schools or other structures created by the transformation process. In this way we will be of value across multiple schools and structures and can continue to forge alliances across campus. We believe the University’s commitment to interdisciplinary programs coupled with our distinct geographic location in the arid Southwest borderland makes the ALRS GIDP an invaluable asset and resource for our University and the State of Arizona.

Note: Funding for the ALRS GIDP comes from the Office of the Vice President and the Dean of the Graduate College and we anticipate that will remain in place.

Arid Lands Resource Sciences - Distribution of Faculty Membership on Ph.D. Committees (2000-2008)