



University of Connecticut
Geology and Geophysics Program

August 27, 2004

UConn Geology and Geophysics Alumni and Friends:

I am writing to bring you up-to-date on the status of the geosciences at UConn and let you know that development of exciting new programs, that go far beyond what we were able to offer before, are well underway. As you probably know, the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees voted to dissolve the Department of Geology and Geophysics as of July 1, 2004. We are now in a period of transition as undergraduate and graduate students finish up their degrees in the existing program, Geology and Geophysics faculty move to new departmental homes, and faculty from across the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) work with us to develop a new vehicle for delivering geosciences instruction and research at UConn. The purpose of this mailing is to briefly outline how this happened, present to you the **CALS Geosciences Planning Committee** proposal for establishment of a **Center for Integrative Geosciences**, and to solicit your input to help ensure that the programs of the new Center continue to meet the needs of our students, the people of Connecticut, and the geoscience profession. I believe that the Geosciences Planning Committee has done an excellent job at developing an ambitious and strategic vision for the geosciences at the University of Connecticut, and I look forward to working with them, as well as with many of you, in implementing this new vision. Note that both the documents and the response forms included in this mailing are also available at <http://www.geosciences.uconn.edu>, so that you can respond electronically, if you wish.

Like all UConn Departments, the Department of Geology and Geophysics conducted a self-assessment of its instructional, research and outreach programs, which was reviewed by an external Visiting Committee in April 2002. Both our assessment and the external review highlighted the need for substantial improvements in recruiting of majors, graduate program structure, external research funding, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The Visiting Committee concluded that the Geology and Geophysics Department must “make the difficult transition to a new era of earth science defined less by traditional disciplines of classical geology, and more by the interdisciplinary fields of earth system science and environmental geoscience.”

A draft response to the review and a plan for the revitalization of departmental programs was delivered to Dean Ross MacKinnon in early December, 2003. Our plan documented the substantial investment needed to transform our small department, its faculty trained in traditional geology and geophysics disciplines, into the state-of-the-art interdisciplinary geosciences program that would provide our graduates with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We struggled with that part of the plan that would have charted a path for departmental growth and evolution through new faculty hires in emerging interdisciplinary geoscience fields.

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Dean MacKinnon concluded that we could not achieve these goals on our own, given our small size, departmental history, and perceived lack of shared vision and faculty buy-in for the plan. Against the backdrop of the department's difficulty in formulating a strategic vision and response to the external review, Dean MacKinnon saw the need to establish a new administrative structure that would bring together the many UConn faculty doing geoscience research, focus university resources on the geosciences, and position UConn to take a leadership role in the geosciences.

Following his recommendation for closure of the Department, Dean MacKinnon appointed a **Geosciences Planning Committee** charged with: (1) identifying appropriate disciplines within the geosciences that would serve as a strong platform on which to build excellent research programs, (2) recommending new undergraduate and graduate curricula based on the research programs, (3) recommending an administrative structure to serve the new geosciences program, and (4) identifying essential linkages with the Schools of Agriculture and Engineering and other University programs. A copy of the **Geosciences Proposal Summary** for establishment of a **Center for Integrative Geosciences**, is enclosed for your review and comment, along with the full text of Dean MacKinnon's charge to the committee.

Proposed changes in geoscience programs at UConn reflect the quiet revolution in the geosciences in which the traditional geology disciplines are now integrated with the biological-, atmospheric-, and ocean-sciences through analysis of fluxes and feedbacks between the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of planet Earth. The academic programs in the Center will thus involve faculty from several CLAS departments including Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Molecular and Cell Biology, Geography, and Marine Sciences, as well as faculty formerly in the Geology and Geophysics Department. To build essential interdisciplinary linkages as well as to strengthen the geosciences foundation, the Geosciences Planning Committee also recommended the immediate hiring of three new faculty with expertise in the fields of *paleontology*, *stable isotope geochemistry* and *stratigraphy*. We are pleased that the paleontology position has been approved by the Dean and Provost and that the position will be shared with the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, which has also had paleontology as a high priority. The Committee also anticipates that the stable isotope geochemistry position will be approved this year and that the stratigraphy position will be approved and filled the following year. Other resource support is expected, including support for six graduate assistantships for the Center.

This summer, Dean MacKinnon approved, in principle, the Committee's recommendation to establish the **Center for Integrative Geosciences** and plans are developing to house the new program in renovated space in Beach Hall. We are moving ahead and, pending Board of Trustees approval, hope to implement the new undergraduate and graduate curricula next academic year.

As we make the transition to the new programs of the Center, the current catalog of "GEOL" courses are being taught so that the current group of undergraduate and graduate students can complete their degree requirements under the present program. Several of these courses will be included in the curricula of the new center. During the transition period, most faculty offices, teaching and research labs will remain in Beach Hall, geology and geophysics students will continue to gather in the Frueh Reading Room, and the Geology and Geophysics Program will be administered from President A.N. Jorgenson's former office, at the end of the hall.

Faculty members have been reassigned to new departments which each of us has selected to best match our individual interests and skills. Our new homes are as follows: Tim Byrne (Marine Science and Geography), Vern Cormier (Physics), Jean Crespi (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology), Ray Joesten (Chemistry and Marine Science), Lanbo Liu (Civil and Environmental Engineering), Gary Robbins (Natural Resource Management and Engineering), and Robert Thorson (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Anthropology). Norm Gray, Tony Philpotts, and Randy Steinen have retired. The range of departments to which the Geology and Geophysics faculty have moved reflects the diverse disciplines in which faculty with geoscience research interests already reside. Although we each have new academic homes, we each retain the title, Professor of Geology or Professor of Geophysics, as appropriate, and each of us continues to teach courses and advise students in the Geology and Geophysics Program.

Dean MacKinnon has made a very serious commitment to support development of a high quality interdisciplinary program in the geosciences and the faculty are dedicated to making it a success. I am excited about the opportunities the Center's programs will provide for our students to participate in a far broader range of geoscience disciplines and perspectives than we were able to offer as a Department. As we move forward in this new direction, it is however, crucial that we not lose sight of those parts of our programs that have been essential in preparing our graduates for productive geosciences careers.

We need the benefit of your professional experience and perspectives to recommend courses of study that should be included in our undergraduate and graduate curricula so they well prepare our graduates to meet the challenges of contemporary geoscience, whether in academe, industry, or government. Please review the enclosed Geosciences Proposal Summary and send us your comments and thoughts, by returning the enclosed green sheet in the envelope provided or by using the online questionnaire at <http://www.geosciences.uconn.edu> . To enable us to communicate with you quickly as details of our new programs emerge, it would be helpful were you to respond by email with your current address, and please complete the enclosed "Alumni Information Sheet".

With Best Regards,

Ray Joesten
Professor and Acting Director
Geology and Geophysics Program