November 27, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Steering Committee of Academic Governance

FROM: Provost Kim A. Wilcox

RE: Name Change, Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation, and Resource Studies

I am requesting the advice of Academic Governance on the proposed name change of the Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation, and Resource Studies to the Department of Community Sustainability.

The proposed name change has been carefully considered by the Department and College, and is endorsed by Interim Dean Doug Buhler. There is strong support from the faculty of the department for this name and the message that it represents for the future of the unit. The name attempts to capture the essence of the goals of the department and creates a framework for its research and outreach programs of the future. In addition, it more clearly communicates to external constituents the dominant theme of the department. I am very pleased in the progress made to date, in re-thinking the Department’s core undergraduate curriculum around the community sustainability theme.

Your advice is appreciated as I make my recommendation to President Simon, who in turn will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees.
Proposal to Change Unit Name:

From
The Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

To
The Department of Community Sustainability
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

PART I – Introduction, Overview, Context, and Development

Introduction

Sustainability, as a concept and strategy, has been used within a number of colleges and departments at Michigan State University (MSU). This predominantly has involved individual faculty defining their scholarship, informal faculty groups defining a sphere of activity, or university operations. More recently, several programs have incorporated the term into undergraduate and graduate specializations. For MSU to develop preeminence within the burgeoning field of sustainability, it makes sense for MSU to welcome use of the term across a range of scholarly endeavors in various colleges, special programs and the university at large. Intending to neither usurp sole use of the term nor argue that it should be preserved for a single entity within the university, we propose creation of an integrated and connected Department of Community Sustainability with the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) as the lead college.

The faculty of CARRS began exploring a change in department name in 2008 after five years of working under an unrecognizable, lengthy, and obtuse name for our unit – a name that was originally imposed by then-Dean Armstrong. Over the three years between 2008 and 2010, the department undertook a lengthy analysis and exploration for a simplified and more targeted departmental identity; at that time it became clear that sustainability was a term that captured a high percentage of our scholarship and engagement activities - this has become more true subsequently. In spring 2009, the Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies (CARRS) requested assistance from then-Dean Armstrong with navigating the process of changing its name to the Department of Sustainability Studies. A formal letter of
request was submitted in May 2009 to the Dean. In that letter, the process by which the Department faculty arrived at the requested new name was described and its rationale explained. Subsequently, Dean Armstrong undertook a process to reorganize CANR, and the name change request was set aside in favor of the creation of a School of Sustainable Resource Development through the merger of CARRS and the School of Planning, Design and Construction (SPDC). CARRS faculty objected to the Dean’s proposal because the vision of sustainability work articulated by the Dean and by SPDC was not consistent with the scholarship of sustainability described by CARRS after months of exploration and deliberation. With Dean Armstrong’s permission, CARRS faculty began to explore further the creation of a unit around the scholarship of sustainability and engaged faculty from six additional departments and programs and from two other colleges in the discussion. Since that time, the CARRS community has continued to take significant steps in its scholarship as well as in revitalizing its undergraduate and graduate curricula around the core concepts of sustainability. Meetings have been held with Interim Dean Doug Buhler and his office as well as with key department chairs in CANR and others across campus. All have agreed that requesting a name change to the Department of Community Sustainability makes sense for our unit and that such a name change should be pursued. This document reflects the work of CARRS faculty and of the larger group to formalize a common vision of an academic unit at MSU that embraces and advances the theory and methods of sustainability.

Attention given to sustainability by the academic community reflects concerns about the urgent problems of the 21st century that threaten human and environmental well-being. Sustainability scholarship involves creating, integrating and harnessing new knowledge to protect and improve both social and natural systems. The creation of a new Department of Community Sustainability is a timely response to the demand for relevant academic programs that meet the pressing and ever-changing needs of people and communities in Michigan, in the United States, and in countries around the world. The Department of Community Sustainability is a productive response by MSU faculty to expanding external opportunities for MSU and CANR. These include opportunities to attract new cohorts of students to MSU and CANR; opportunities to attract new funding for scholarly activity and community engagement; and opportunities to impact the lives of Michiganders and citizens of the world for generations to come. MSU and its
proposed Department of Community Sustainability will place its scholar-practitioners, graduates, and outreach specialists at the forefront of scholarly and applied work in communities throughout Michigan, the country and the world. This document describes a vision for the department and strategies for realizing this range of opportunities.

Overview of Proposed Department and Intellectual Foundation

As an institution, MSU can push the boundaries of sustainability scholarship by recognizing that sustainability is about more than the sum of its environmental (being green), economic (being viable) and social (being inclusive and just) parts. As the emerging research in the field shows, including that by members of our group, sustainability scholarship focuses on “understanding the complex dynamics that arise from interactions between human and environmental systems.”

Further, a move toward sustainability requires an understanding of how “institutions and practices intersect and connect with natural cycles” and how “sense of community identity is either reinforced or disrupted by those cycles and how.”\(^1\) That is, sustainability is about the intersections among, and spaces between, its environmental, economic and social parts. The Department of Community Sustainability will focus its engaged sustainability scholarship—research, teaching, and outreach—on precisely those intersections and spaces with particular emphasis on community, engagement and ethics.

This stands in contrast to the notion of sustainability used in common parlance and embodied in many higher education initiatives, and even in much of the scholarly work about sustainability, that emphasizes protecting and enhancing environmental quality or seeking economic development that is protective of natural systems. These emphases fail to capture adequately the complex human and natural systems in which decisions are made. By contrast, the shared vision of sustainability undergirding the proposed department explicitly recognizes that sustainability is about social choices made within specific environmental, economic and cultural contexts. Such a vision of sustainability is at the vanguard of the sustainability scholarship cited throughout this proposal. With its unique integration of the social sciences, humanities and natural sciences across its research, teaching and outreach missions, the Department of Community Sustainability

will significantly broaden and enrich sustainability scholarship at MSU and in relevant fields of study. We see tremendous opportunity to advance research, teaching, and outreach opportunities by explicitly connecting our scholarship to social, political, and community systems. Engaged sustainability scholarship "tied to a commitment to place social, political, and moral aims on the table as serious and legitimate concerns of scholarly work" will be the hallmark of the department. While the literature of the burgeoning sustainability field has been principally research-oriented, the Department of Community Sustainability will expand sustainability scholarship by formally integrating teaching and Extension/outreach programs into contributions to peer-reviewed journals and other scholarly outlets.

As will be seen in more detail below, this proposed department will simultaneously incorporate the need for efficient use of university resources while developing a suite of majors that are attractive, identifiable and useful to students; succeeding in a greatly expanded portfolio of external resources; and expanding our reach across the world.

Global and National Context of Sustainability Scholarship

The department will be well positioned to respond to global recognition that critical sustainability issues are those that arise from human-human and human-natural system interactions. At the 2008 G8 University Summit, presidents of 27 universities recognized the urgent need for rapid and joint evolution in the generation and application of new sustainability knowledge to address the world's most pressing social, environmental and economic problems.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) – the standard bearer for professional societies within the academy – has called for integration across scientific disciplines to create a new scientific field focused on sustainability. In February, 2010 AAAS held a forum with the sole purpose of developing a set of core competencies in sustainability for the training of future scientists. Further, The U.S. National Academies of Science recognized the importance

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4 Including, but not limited to, the Sustainability Science Section of *PNAS* (initiated in 2005) and the journals *Sustainability Science* (a Springer publication initiated in 2006) and *Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy* (an e-Journal initiated in 2005).
of sustainability science with the initiation of its Science and Technology for Sustainability program to create and strengthen "strategic connections between scientific research, technological development, and decision-making."^5

In direct relation to the increased interest in cutting edge sustainability scholarship, extramural funding for sustainability research is also increasing. President Obama’s proposed 2012 budget for the National Science Foundation requests $7.8 billion, an increase of 5% over its 2011 proposal; the proposed funding to be allocated to sustainability research and education is $998 million, a 29% increase from the 2011 proposal.

Many universities around the country are embracing sustainability as a guiding philosophy of new programs, departments, and colleges (e.g., Arizona State University, Portland State University, University of Washington); others are placing sustainability at the forefront of their institutional initiatives, not just as a principle adopted by university operations, but as the guiding philosophy of university programs as a whole (e.g., see President’s Council on Sustainability at The Ohio State University, University of New Hampshire’s CORE program). In addition, there are numerous centers, institutes, and multi-unit initiatives focusing on particular domains related to sustainability (e.g., the Earth Institute at Columbia University, the Corporate Sustainability Initiative at Duke University, the Agricultural Sustainability Initiative at University of California at Davis, the Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment at University of Wisconsin, the President’s Sustainability Advisory Committee at the University of Kentucky, and the multi-institution Resilience Alliance).

The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), of which MSU is a member, provides resources, professional development, and support to institutions of higher education working to model and advance sustainability in everything from governance and operations to education and research.^6 As one of its initiatives, AASHE maintains a list of academic programs in sustainability. The current list includes:

[^5]: http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/Sustainability/index.htm

[^6]: See www.aashe.org/about. Several of the faculty contributing to the Department of Community Sustainability proposal and their students have presented papers and participated in AASHE-sponsored meetings over the last several years.
• 39 institutions awarding bachelor’s degrees (e.g., BA/BS in Sustainability at Arizona State)
• 34 institutions awarding undergraduate minors (e.g., Sustainability at MSU, Sustainability Studies at University of Minnesota, University of Florida, University of North Carolina)
• 24 institutions awarding master’s degrees (e.g., MA in Global Sustainability at University of South Florida, MS in Sustainability Management at Columbia University)
• 8 institutions awarding PhDs (e.g., PhD in Sustainability at Arizona State).

AASHE maintains a growing list of programs that focus on sustainability-related domains or represent disciplinary emphases on sustainability (e.g., agriculture, business, economics, engineering, law).

Despite this programmatic growth, critics have raised serious reservations about the commitment of the academy to contribute to sustainability. Some suggest that the academy and its concomitant allegiance to the techno-scientific worldview contribute to, rather than alleviate, the crises that sustainability scholars are trying to address. Others worry that, over the past two decades, institutions of higher education have become increasingly disconnected from the pressing issues of civil society. This failure of universities now translates to the graduation of a citizenry without the requisite skills to live lives that can be sustained across multiple generations.

For these and other reasons, the vision of sustainability undergirding the proposed department involves a deep commitment to ethics, understood as the systematic effort to publicly debate and document the normative commitments and justifications that guide the application of science in pursuit of sustainability. The incorporation of ethics into the philosophy, practice, teaching, and scholarship of our proposed department explicitly recognizes that sustainability is about social

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choices made within specific environmental, economic and cultural contexts. Placing this commitment at the forefront provides both a necessary course correction to address the disconnect noted by critics and a focus that will distinguish an MSU approach to sustainability from those of other programs. Simultaneously this would provide resources to other sustainability programs across MSU as they evolve.

Scholars in Science and Technology Studies originated concepts such as postnormal science\(^8\), wicked problems\(^9\) and boundary objects and organizations\(^10\) in literature that explores the place of science in society, and these concepts have been incorporated into recent analyses of how to achieve transdisciplinary science for addressing sustainability.\(^11\) Additionally, the field of "development ethics" has emerged in sustainability scholarship partially in response to the "capability approach" developed by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.\(^12\) Embracing these contributions in the Department of Community Sustainability will involve new alliances in areas of the social sciences and humanities that have not traditionally been well integrated into colleges of agriculture or life sciences. This too will distinguish the MSU approach to sustainability scholarship.

## Development of the Department of Community Sustainability

### The Department’s Unique Niche in Relation to Other Sustainability Scholarship

Developments in the new field of sustainability are necessary but not sufficient. To address the problems cited by critics both within and outside the field, the proposed department will adopt and implement a transdisciplinary approach to sustainability that is grounded in the use-inspired basic research that leading scholars claim will be a necessary, distinguishing trait of

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sustainability scholarship. Additionally, we embrace the collaborative, deliberative, and self-directed, situated learning about sustainability that characterizes critically engaged sustainability scholarship. In short, we at Michigan State University have the capacity to occupy and grow a unique and productive niche in sustainability scholarship. We will do this by:

- focusing on sustainability engagement that embraces the human decisions inherent in a move to a more sustainable future;
- creating a dedicated faculty to work on sustainability-related issues broadly;
- incorporating a systems-thinking view of sustainability into curricula at the undergraduate level, graduate level, and lifelong learner level; and
- conducting sustainability scholarship that is international in scope while attending to regional and local contexts.

We believe that the Department of Community Sustainability will be a source of pride and accomplishment for MSU, CANR and affiliated colleges. However, creating such a department with CANR as the lead college does not imply that the sole location of sustainability scholarship or other manifestations of sustainability work at MSU would or should reside within this department. The study of sustainability is far too large an intellectual space and applied endeavor to be encompassed in any one entity. Rather, in our vision this department would be a cornerstone for a community-focused segment of sustainability scholarship at MSU. The department would provide an important touchstone for a wide array of stakeholders and a platform for continuing scholarly conversation and collaboration across departments, the University and our communities both in the United States and abroad. It would be a unit where human-human and human-environment interactions are a focus while linking with faculty in other units focused on biological and physical dimensions. In short, we do not aspire to own the term sustainability or to carve out exclusive turf; rather we desire to provide a welcoming platform for discussions and collaborations and give space to the advancement of theory and practice in sustainability.

The work of the department will require that we engage with other scholars and practitioners with intellectual and methodological grounding in disparate fields from across MSU as well as from other universities around the world. It is important that our engagement and research efforts be both transdisciplinary and international in scope while attending to regional and local contexts. In this regard, the Department of Community Sustainability will be uniquely positioned to respond to the need for innovative and cross-cutting scholarship by building on the impressive history of applied international research conducted by many of the individuals involved in preparing this proposal, as well as that of other colleagues. By explicitly including global sustainability engagement in its portfolio, MSU’s Department of Community Sustainability will demonstrate to external funders MSU’s capacity for international sustainability research that is integrated across traditional disciplines.

Mission

The Department of Community Sustainability will support the mission of the University to advance knowledge and transform lives by preparing students “to contribute fully to society as globally engaged citizen leaders”; conducting research “to expand human understanding and make a positive difference, both locally and globally”; and advancing outreach activities that “lead to a better quality of life for individuals and communities, at home and around the world.” The Department of Community Sustainability will support the mission of CANR to enhance the quality of life for the people of Michigan and the world by advancing knowledge for the management of communities and agricultural, natural resource and food systems to meet diverse human needs in a sustainable manner. The Department of Community Sustainability will support the missions of other colleges and administrative units within the University. Within this broader context the department will engage with colleagues, students, stakeholders and communities to address social choices within specific environmental, economic and cultural contexts that advance or conflict with sustainability goals.

Themes

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16 This is not the only way the department might describe its work. Alternatives to the thematic approach might be: applications – an institutional approach (e.g. public sector, private sector, entrepreneurship, nonprofit, planning) or
Traditionally, academic units are built around disciplines. Then, within those disciplinary units, scholars focus their research, teaching and outreach within particular domains that are informed by their disciplines. A Department of Community Sustainability is similar, yet different, in critical ways. First, our department will reflect the growing view of sustainability as a new discipline. That is, sustainability as an area of scholarship emphasizes specific theory, methods and applications. Sustainability scholars also recognize that contributions from multiple traditional disciplines are necessary. However, sustainability is not a multi-disciplinary enterprise. It is transdisciplinary. Thus, second, our department will embrace and legitimize the transdisciplinary nature of work that will be required to address the urgent problems we face as a society. Third, transdisciplinary sustainability scholarship in our department will advance sustainability research and education in domains that reflect the disciplines, expertise and interests of its faculty.

The department’s research and education domains will emphasize the interactions among humans and between humans and natural systems in a wide array of areas. The areas (domains) currently being addressed by faculty included in discussions of the department to date include:

- Food and Agriculture
- Natural Resources
- Tourism
- International Development
- Conservation
- Engagement
- Ethics

Faculty currently publish in a number of journals with a primary focus or subtext on sustainability. These include such journals as *Sustainability, Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems, Journal of Agriculture and Human Values, Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition, Ecological Economics, Energy for Sustainable Development, Journal of Sustainability Education, Journal of Sustainable Tourism,* and *Society and Natural Resources.* Themes like ethics and engagement are not only areas of scholarship in their own right but also are core, cross-cutting values that can be applied to the scholarship of other domains such as agriculture, natural resources, or tourism. This list likely would be expanded or restructured to accommodate persistent problems — a problem-based approach (e.g. obesity, hunger, climate change, natural resource degradation, poverty, gridlock in government).
a broader range of domains representative of the scholarship of faculty selecting appointment in or affiliation with the department.

There are several advantages to this domain-based approach, including its familiarity to the university and to external stakeholder groups. The possibility that one may find others outside of the unit who also focus on the identified domains might be viewed by some as problematic. However, this too is familiar to the university, as many academic units house faculty whose disciplinary background is represented elsewhere (economics, education, history, philosophy, psychology and sociology are examples we know well). We believe that, in truth, this overlap with others across the university represents an opportunity to facilitate joint appointments between departments and colleges and collaborative scholarship with the work of the department focusing specifically on the application of sustainability theory and methods to the domain in question.