Approved by the Board of Trustees

January 26, 2023

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Board Meeting

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# RENAME THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY, COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES, URBANA

**Action:** Rename the Department of Geology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

**Funding:** There is no anticipated impact on faculty resources, size, teaching loads, course enrollments, technical resources, or facilities.

The Chancellor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Vice President, University of Illinois System with the advice of the Urbana-Champaign Senate recommends approval of a proposal from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to rename the Department of Geology, changing the name to the Department of Earth Science and Environmental Change.

In response to changes in the field, peer departments at other institutions in the Big Ten and around the country have been dropping the name “Geology” starting more than twenty years ago. In fact, since 2012, no other Big Ten department has used this name, resulting in the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s continued use having the adverse consequence of signaling a lag in the incorporation of the vision and direction of the discipline. The name “Geology” also has increasingly limited meaning with undergraduate students. Because high schools in the state of Illinois do not offer Geology courses, many students do not know what it is. A more up-to-date name that is in keeping with the current work in the discipline, closer to what peers use, and more widely recognized by prospective students, graduate programs, and employers is needed, and indeed, this change was suggested in a Fall 2019 external review of the department.

The proposed name, Department of Earth Science and Environmental Change, invokes the study of earth’s history, a fundamental focus in the department, and the future of impacts on dynamic processes, both anthropogenic and natural. “Earth Science” is more closely aligned with the department’s mission and better encompasses the breadth of that mission. Some high school students have had Earth Science or Environmental Science courses but do not connect these to Geology. Moreover, many high schools do not have the resources to offer Earth Science or Environmental Science courses; thus, disadvantaged students are even less likely to know what Geology is.

“Environment” is an important part of the proposed name because it encompasses a large portion of the department’s work and is readily identifiable as a relevant topic by students. Currently, the largest area of employment for the department’s graduates is environmental geoscience, and the department is poised to play an important role in environmental geoscience in the years to come, with faculty contributing strongly to environmental research topics ranging from global climate change to groundwater contamination.

Finally, as impacts of environmental transformation on society become increasingly apparent, use of the word “Change” in the department’s name emphasizes the dynamic nature of the discipline.

The Board action recommended in this item complies in all material respects with applicable State and federal laws, University of Illinois *Statutes, The General Rules Concerning University Organization and Procedure*, and Board of Trustees policies and directives.

The Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs concurs with this recommendation. The University Senates Conference has indicated that no further Senate jurisdiction is involved.

The President of the University of Illinois System recommends approval. This action is subject to further review by the Illinois Board of Higher Education.