

TO: Jason Stajich, Chair
Riverside Division

FR: Richard M. Carpiano, Chair
Executive Committee, School of Public Policy

RE: [Campus Review] New Department Pre-Proposal: Department of Environment,
Sustainability, and Health Equity (ESHQ) in CHASS

Date: December 3, 2021

The Executive Committee of the School of Public Policy (SPP) reviewed and discussed “[Campus Review] New Department Pre-Proposal: Department of Environment, Sustainability, and Health Equity (ESHQ) in CHASS.” As faculty in an interdisciplinary school with research, teaching, community engagement, and professional training and internships focused on environment, sustainability, and health equity, our Committee recognizes the opportunities that interdisciplinary programs present for the campus. Nevertheless, for this specific proposed department, members raised a number of significant concerns with the proposal. In general, these concerns centered on how this proposal, in pragmatic terms:

- a. attempts to establish a new department through engaging in, what appear to be, unproductive institutional cannibalism and co-optation—building its own fiefdom via feeding off existing campus units and cross-campus initiatives and
- b. will generate student confusion due to the redundancies this department will have with already-existing majors and minors throughout campus with similar foci.

Specific issues are listed below in detail.

1. **“Health Equity” is inappropriate as the Department’s name.** The proposal outlines what is functionally a “Health, Medicine, Society and Culture” major/minor found at many other universities including Vanderbilt University and the University of British Columbia (for which one of our Committee members was its former chair). Yet, instead of using that or a similarly appropriate appellation, this proposal co-opts what is a well-established UCR campus theme and far-broader-than-this-proposal interdisciplinary field of scholarship, practice, and policy that has already been cultivated through many years of interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty located in all UCR colleges and schools, including SOM, SPP, CNAS, and CHASS. The UCR Center for Health Disparities Research is one prominent example of initiatives and collaborations that bring together the critical mass of faculty and students that our campus

offers in health equity research and practice. Hence, to now take the focus for such a broad interdisciplinary area of research, teaching, and practice and apply it to this very narrowly-focused CHASS Department and major/minor monopolizes a truly collaborative campus initiative for its own self-interested ends. While there are many CHASS faculty concerned about issues in health equity, they do not have the patent on it. Thus using it in their program/department title gives the wrong impression that concern for equity and social justice is only a humanities and social science concern and not something that faculty throughout campus focus on in their research, teaching, and service. Intellectually, this is akin to if Economics requested to start a major in “Applied Math,” completely ignoring that many other units on campus also actively engage in research, teaching, and training on the subject (e.g., Mathematics, Statistics, Engineering, Computer Science, Psychology, GSOE, BUS, SOM, and SPP).

2. **Faculty Resource Scarcity and Sustainability:** Several items were raised for this issue.
 - a. The proposal includes numerous courses taught by SPP faculty. However, SPP is unable to offer many of these courses every year—including PBPL 010, which is listed as part of the core curriculum and not as an elective.
 - b. Given the extent of PBPL courses included in the proposal, concern was raised about potential requests for cross-listing our courses with the new program. SPP’s current policy is to not support cross-listing PBPL courses due to high student demand among majors/minors.
 - c. If the creation of this department means that some units throughout CHASS will lose faculty, then it is difficult to see how the departments these faculty leave behind will be able to continue offering the same range of courses as they do now—many of which are listed as being necessary to comprise this major/minor. Sociology offers an instructive example. In the past two to three years, it has lost multiple faculty and is struggling to maintain its current teaching demands. If faculty leave SOC to join this new department, their current situation will only become more fraught, further undermining its ability to admit non-majors into many of its courses. The proposal does not indicate how an EHSQ department would be able to regulate outside course offerings to ensure their consistent availability so as to avoid a bottleneck for these majors/minors.
3. **Who Is Actually Involved in This New Department?** On page 2, the proposal includes a long list of faculty from various units all over campus, but uses vague language that obfuscates who actually is or is not planning to be involved with this potential department. This gives the impression of padding to make the potential department look more significant than it really

is—especially considering that Environment, Sustainability, and Health Equity are far more distinct than overlapping in many areas of their respective foci (especially Health Equity vis-à-vis the Environment and Sustainability) and in terms of what specific faculty have scholarly and teaching expertise in. For example, three of our SPP colleagues are included on the list. When we asked them what their involvement was to understand the proposal better, all three indicated they attended a meeting and offered to have a course they teach be part of this curriculum, but never agreed to be involved with the department or indicated wanting to relocate their appointment. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize that, while faculty members may develop a course and teach it regularly, the term-specific scheduling of course and which faculty member is assigned to teach it both fall outside faculty control.

4. **The letters of support do little to justify specifics as to why this should be a new department or even new majors/minors.** The support letters listed in the proposal cherry-pick particular comments from the letter writers, but, beyond broad platitudes (some by people with little familiarity of the social sciences and humanities in general and/or with regard to the three areas of environment, sustainability, and health equity; and some from campus units with no involvement in teaching undergraduates or at very least teaching undergraduates from these majors/minors like the BCOE dean), do little to justify specifics as to why this should be a new department or even new majors/minors. Further concerning is how the SPP Associate Dean Kurt Schwabe is listed on page 11 under a section that includes all unit heads with affiliated courses who have approved this proposal. Associate Dean Schwabe's letter is listed as "Pending," which, by inclusion in this section, gives the impression that he approves of this proposal/initiative, but has just not submitted his letter. Knowing this background makes us question the extent and degree of campus support, particularly from other unit chairs and directors, as expressed in the proposal.
5. **Why is the Subject Code already approved?** It was brought to our attention that the subject code for ESHQ has already been approved (and now under review again for a modification to this subject code). Why was this request granted for a department that has not even been approved to exist?
6. **No Science Component:** As SPP faculty know well through their own involvement on policy panels and other advisement activities with decision-makers, many problems that we face in policy are based on ignorance of science. For issues related to environment, sustainability, and health inequity, it is crucial for students to have some grounding in the natural sciences via a science component to the curriculum. This curricular need provides UCR with a unique opportunity to create a truly campus-wide, interdisciplinary major/minor program that is co-led by a steering committee of faculty from multiple colleges and schools across campus and,

in doing so, ensures students receive a comprehensive interdisciplinary training experience in environment and sustainability or health equity.

7. **Low Unit Bearing Major:** The health equity major only requires 48 units, which, compared to other UCR majors is very low and leaves it up to students to figure out how to make up the remaining credit hours they need to graduate.
8. **Disparity in Training across the Three Data Analysis Course Options.** Choosing from one of the three options means that students will graduate with vastly different levels of data literacy required for engaging in discourse of environment, sustainability, and health equity. Statistics courses like STAT 010 provide a broad, essential foundation for interpreting and engaging in research while PBPL 010 and STAT 004 respectively cover highly specialized topics in Geographic Information Systems and Data Science, but do not provide students with foundational skills to interpret research and even be prepared for many jobs listed in the proposal's appendix as well as graduate training in the social sciences, public policy and administration, as well as public health and other health sciences.
9. **The Justification for a New Department is Insufficient.** Question 3 on page 129 offers weak rationales for needing to form a department. Notably, it conflates the activities of a research center with that of an academic department, the latter of which is a far broader administrative unit in terms of its activities. Realistically, no department or unit on campus (or elsewhere) has the extent of collaboration that is detailed in this section and, given the faculty who will likely be associated with the new department, it is unreasonable to conjecture that the new department will be anything different. One only has to look at SPP, a cohesive, supportive unit of teaching, research, and engagement with a robust, successful program of faculty research, yet only a few collaborations between existing faculty. Hence, speaking from experience, the authors' claim that "Consolidating our efforts into a department will enhance our ability to obtain competitive multidisciplinary research grants" is untrue and unrealistic.
10. **The Proposal needlessly tries to justify creating a New Department by conflating it with new major/minor programs.** Overall, it is difficult to read this proposal and not view it as the creation of new curricula to justify a new home for faculty who may, unfortunately, feel unhappy in their existing CHASS departments. There already exist ample teaching/mentoring, research, and community engagement opportunities throughout campus for faculty interested in these topics (e.g., CNAS, Global Studies, SPP, Center for Health Disparities Research). Notably, SPP offers many such opportunities as an existing program and is welcoming of petitions to serve as cooperating faculty. Given the extent to which the curricula are already based on existing courses offered throughout CHASS, there is no need to have a department to support these new majors.

Conclusion

Given the above issues, we arrive at the broader conclusion that there are aspects of these ESHQ major/minor programs that could be modified to make this a more unique, *truly interdisciplinary* initiative that is less co-opting and cannibalistic, more collaborative with existing campus units, and more beneficial to them and students seeking training in these areas. However, the need to create a brand new CHASS department (that monopolizes broad areas of campus research to name its own circumscribed focal areas) to offer a curriculum based on courses that are already extensively offered in existing UCR units in CHASS and beyond makes little practical sense in terms of student benefit and administrative burden. Lastly, given the enduring resource constraints on our campus, we find it difficult to support any initiative for a new department in the absence of new hires. In this case, CHASS would need to agree to replace the lines that will be depleted in existing departments if faculty move into this new department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard M. Carpiano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" and last name "Carpiano" being more prominent than the middle initial "M.".

Richard M. Carpiano, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Professor of Public Policy