

Formation and Implementation of a School of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Arizona

Issue: In the fall of 2008 the Provost at the University of Arizona (UA) initiated a university-wide “Transformation Process” in which each college was directed to seek possible departmental mergers, consolidations, or eliminations. The formation of a School of Earth and Environmental Sciences (SEES) was proposed by the Department Heads of units involved that would include the Soil, Water and Environmental Science (SWES) Department from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and four units from the College of Science (COS) including the Geoscience (GEOS), Atmospheric Science (ATMO), Hydrology and Water Resources (HWR) Departments; and the Laboratory of Tree Ring Research (LTRR). The formation of a School of Earth and Environmental Sciences (SEES) was seen as an opportunity to focus the UA’s already-formidable strengths directly related to research, teaching, and extension/outreach in atmospheric, climate, environmental, geological and hydrologic sciences. The disciplines associated with these departments address major scientific challenges and the UA’s Strategic Plan priority in “Climate, Environmental, Water, and Energy Sustainability.” It was also felt that potentially SEES would align our departments’ strengths with the University’s priorities.

What has been done: Each department voted in late November 2008 to join the formation of SEES. This went forward as a proposal to the Provost that required approval from the Deans of CALS and COS. The review process took place during the spring semester of 2009 and the SEES formation was approved in May 2009.

Impacts: This School has the capacity to: 1) produce new knowledge about earth and environmental processes and human-environment interactions at all geographic and temporal scales; 2) provide the scientific basis for environmental and climate policy; 3) train the next generation of earth and environmental scientists; and 4) disseminate knowledge and solutions for the benefit of students and society. The combination of observational/instrumental and computational/modeling approaches in the earth and environmental sciences within one unit has been recognized as a major strength of forming SEES.

Funding Sources, Cooperators, Partners, Mentors etc.: The proposed alignment was seen as natural but by having it formed across two colleges and operating as a “federation” of departments presented some political challenges. The SEES includes units from the two colleges respect the budgetary integrity of each individual unit while collaborating to increase the efficiency and productivity of our research, teaching and outreach/extension missions.

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