

**RECOMMENDATION TO CHANGE THE NAME OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY**

Background

The faculty of the Department of Rural Sociology believe that “rural sociology” does not convey an accurate sense of what they do and what they are about and seek to characterize themselves with a name that is broadly understood within and outside the academy. Nationally there is only one other university that still uses that name, and the discipline’s professional association, the Rural Sociological Society, has had public conversations about changing its name in order to represent better its members and attract new members. Although the term “rural” has a rich meaning for those who call themselves rural sociologists, for many others it is a specifically spatial term with a narrow range of associations. The term is often confusing and misleading for citizens and students and often elicits stereotypic associations with the idyllic/pastoral or backwater, which has the effect of turning undergraduate students away from engagement with the department and its courses. In that the term carries no theoretical, methodological or programmatic context with which many colleagues in academia are familiar, it is also confusing and misleading to them. Further, the term does not adequately encompass nor does it accurately indicate the range of places and issues with which the department’s faculty are engaged. The department has also recommended that its undergraduate major be called *Community and Environmental Sociology* in order to attract and serve better its students.

There is broad support across the university for this name change including the College of Letters and Science, the School of Human Ecology, and the Nelson Institute. The recommendation is also supported by the University Academic Planning Council. The recommendation is now presented to the Faculty Senate for discussion.