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# NCSU wants to add climate change master's

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## What's next?

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Like all proposals for new master's degree programs, N.C. State University's new Masters in Climate Change and Society will be considered by a panel of faculty members from across the 16-campus system. The General Administration will take the panel's findings into account and decide on a recommendation, which it will present to a Board of Governors committee.

It's unclear when it could reach the board, but there may not be enough time for the proposal to work its way through the system for the next meeting, on April 8, said UNC system spokeswoman Joni Worthington.

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**RALEIGH --** N.C. State University is seeking permission to start a new graduate program in the rapidly emerging field of planning for the effects of climate change.

If NCSU gets UNC-system approval for the new Masters in Climate Change and Society, it will enroll students this fall.

It's not clear what the multidisciplinary program's chances are, given that universities across the UNC system have been cutting a host of degree programs to deal with repeated state budget cuts. University leaders also are trying to build relationships with the new Republican majorities in the legislature, which include a number of climate change skeptics.

It should help, though, that the one-year program is expected to pay its own way via tuition of about \$13,500 and that there's a growing demand for the expertise it would teach.

The idea is to prepare students for roles in handling the

effects from changes such as rising sea levels and shifts in growing areas for crops, said John Fountain, head of NCSU's Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences Department.

Because climate change has the potential to affect virtually every aspect of society, demand is growing for people who can anticipate the effects, develop policies to counter them and effectively communicate such policies to the public, Fountain said.

The proposed program is aimed at students and professionals not from science fields and will help them become, in a sense, liaisons between the public and climate scientists.

Fountain said government, businesses and nonprofits need more workers with expertise in climate change. In particular, recent guidelines by the Securities and Exchange Commission mean publicly held companies will need more experts to keep stockholders informed about the effects of climate change on their business plans.

## **A broad range**

The proposed program includes courses in a broad range of subjects, such as environmental communications,

economics, climate risk analysis, agriculture health and trade and hydrology.

Students will get a good grounding in the basic science of climate change, and lessons won't shy from its most controversial aspect - the scientific evidence that it's caused by human activity, Fountain said. However, he added, the focus will be on practical solutions to deal with the effects.

"It isn't really very important to these policymakers if the sea is rising because of CO  $\{-2\}$  generated by humans or from natural causes," he said. "They need to be able to understand the probable effects and what to do about them."

What's thought to be the first such program in the nation started in 2004 at Columbia University in New York. Its graduates mainly have gotten jobs in government, nonprofits or international organizations concerned with climate change, said Arezou Paksima, assistant director of the program. Columbia expects demand from businesses to grow.

Those who enroll, she said, are often idealistic and do so because they think that the federal government isn't properly addressing climate change.

## **Why add now?**

Across the UNC system, budget-starved administrators have been dropping degree programs. Among graduate programs alone, NCSU has eliminated 10 degrees in the past four years.

But Duane Larick, dean of the graduate school, said it is also important to add programs in emerging fields when there is a clear value to the state and to employers.

In addition to the climate-change program, NCSU wants to add another graduate program in the hot field of nanoengineering. Via distance learning, that program will be available to students across the nation.

"In tough budget times, it's obviously important for us to be willing to create the programs that will produce the kind of students that employers need," Larick said.

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