TROPICAL FORESTS factor strongly into the global climate debate, and scientists, activists, and others have promoted efforts to protect areas from deforestation. But is it possible that these efforts have unintended consequences, such as displacing local populations and exacerbating rural poverty? Does rainforest conservation hurt or benefit the poor?

These are the key questions that Christoph Nolte, a doctoral student from Freiburg, Germany, in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment (SNRE), will address as the inaugural Marshall Weinberg Population, Development, and Climate Change Fellow. The new fellowship program, administered jointly by SNRE and the Population Studies Center (PSC) in the Institute for Social Research, provides funding support for graduate students to conduct research at the intersection of climate change, demography, and development.

“After a decade of study and work on conservation policy, I have met many scientists who are concerned about the environment,” said Nolte, whose work will focus on the Brazilian Amazon. “I have met many who care about poverty and the local population. Yet, academia offers few incentives for both sides to talk to each other. As a result, few scholars try to walk the fine line between ecological and social issues without becoming fully absorbed by either side.”

The new program is one of three research fellowships supported by Marshall Weinberg (AB ’50) at PSC and joins the Marshall Weinberg Fellowship Program at SNRE. Collaborative effort is paramount to the New York–based businessman and philanthropist, who majored in philosophy and already supports an interdisciplinary program through the Marshall M. Weinberg Fund for Philosophy and the Cognitive Sciences in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA). Weinberg also supports Judaic Studies in LSA and recently endowed a named chair in the Department of Philosophy.

“Pushing Boundaries

New fellowship brings an interdisciplinary approach to questions of global climate and population

Inaugural Marshall Weinberg Population, Development, and Climate Change Fellow Christoph Nolte (second from right) met with Weinberg (second from left), Director of the Population Studies Center Pam Smock (far right), and Dean of the School of Natural Resources and the Environment Marie Lynn Miranda (far left) at a March 30 breakfast on campus.

“In setting up this fellowship, I started with the fundamental belief that interdisciplinary research and collaboration are necessary to the future of universities and to their ability to solve societal problems,” Weinberg said. “I believe that people don’t realize that the population is part of the environment. Furthermore, it is the character of the population, including its economics and location as well as its size, that is critical. These characteristics are as important as the flora and fauna.”

“The program is open to any U-M graduate student whose research has an international component.

“The Weinberg Fellows Program will provide graduate students from across campus with the resources to take their ideas and test them in different settings around the world and then bring them back to the intellectual community at the University of Michigan,” Weinberg said. “The great ideas that will solve societal problems are going to come from our best and brightest young thinkers—our graduate students.”

Weinberg supports graduate-student prizes at PSC and SNRE, as well as in LSA’s Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies and departments of philosophy and anthropology.