

February 5, 2009

## RECOMMENDATION

TO: Dr. Karl Ulrich, Provost, Dr. Richard Storey, Chancellor, Dr. George Dennison, President,  
and the Montana Board of Regents

FROM: Environmental Science Faculty, UMW

RE: Split the Environmental Sciences Department into a Biology Department and an Earth and Environmental Sciences Department

Over roughly the last decade, the sciences at the University of Montana Western have flourished and experienced significant increases in student enrollment. Students majoring in Environmental Science degrees are currently near all time highs with 62 declared majors this year. The increase in student numbers has been especially evident in biology, particularly biomedical science, where the number of majors has increased from five to 76 students in the last seven years. The explosion of biology majors has resulted in the University creating two new tenure-track positions for biomedical scientists over that time period.

Currently, the nine tenure-track UMW science faculty, which include five biologists, two geologists, one physicist and one chemist, are lumped into a single Environmental Sciences department, primarily due to the department's historical focus on environmental sciences. However, the significant expansion of the biological sciences program, including biomedical science, has necessitated a change in departmental structure. Therefore, we are requesting permission to allow the formation of a separate biology department.

There are many reasons why the formation of a Biology Department is necessary. For example, many of the five biology faculty are very active in pursuing research grants and providing UMW students with hands on research opportunities. In the last five years, over \$1 million in grant monies have been obtained from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support the development of infrastructure necessary for UMW to engage in active biomedical research and to increase the number of graduates pursuing biomedical careers and graduate degrees. Additionally, two new NIH proposals were just awarded to two UMW biologists generating an additional \$1 million in NIH funding for the next five years.

These research efforts have been of great benefit to many UMW biology students, who have completed impressive senior theses, presented their work at national conferences, co-published with UMW professors, and have gone on to professional schools and graduate programs.

The placement of a well funded biomedical program within an environmental sciences department generates many problems. When publishing manuscripts, writing grant proposals and attending conferences, the current departmental affiliation of the biomedical science faculty is viewed unfavorably. In addition, the successful completion of specific aims outlined in the research grants requires a significant number of high quality undergraduate students.

Unfortunately, potential students that are interested in biological fields and are unfamiliar with UMW, do not immediately realize that we have a biology program because it is within the

Environmental Sciences Department. This is especially a problem for those students interested in the biomedical sciences, since biomedicine does not logically fit within an environmental sciences umbrella. Finally, the formation of two separate departments will make curricular changes much simpler, and will allow for much more effective departmental planning.

All of the UMW science faculty agree that the formation of a Biology Department and an Earth and Environmental Sciences Department (a name change for the existing Environmental Sciences Department), is essential for the continued success of our programs and faculty. In fact, there is agreement with this change on campus as demonstrated by a unanimous Faculty Senate vote in favor of this proposed change.

Since department chairs at UMW are not compensated, and since there are no departmental overhead costs, the establishment of a Biology Department will not result in additional obligations for the University. If in the future costs are associated with departments, any costs associated with the Biology Department could be covered by discretionary funds that are currently associated with the biology program such as indirect monies from grants or our biology endowment.

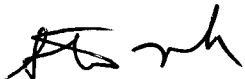
To keep budgets as simple as possible at this time, the chairs of the two departments will work together to manage a single science operating budget. This approach is supported by Vice-Chancellor Briggs, and it can be reevaluated at a later date if necessary. Lab fee budgets and their distribution will remain unchanged, as they are currently separated by rubric. Finally, the science departments will maintain the current level of representation on campus-wide committees and faculty senate.

We feel very confident that the new organization structure will significantly assist both departments in student recruitment, program development, professional development and efforts to obtain extramural funding. It will also help us operate much more smoothly and efficiently. Thank you very much for your consideration of this proposal. Feel free to contact us if there are any questions, or if you wish to discuss this proposal further.

Thank you,



Michael W. Morrow, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Biology



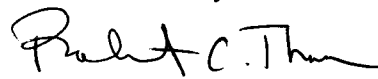
Steve Mock, Ph.D.  
Professor of Chemistry



Sheila Roberts, Ph.D.  
Professor of Geology/Chemistry



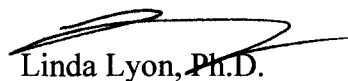
Craig Zaspel, Ph.D.  
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