

# MONTANA BOARD OF REGENTS

## LEVEL II REQUEST FORM

Item No.:	143-1601-R0509	Date of Meeting:	May 2009
Institution:	The University of Montana Western		
Program Title:	Alteration of Science Department Structure		

Level II proposals require approval by the Board of Regents.

**Level II action requested (check all that apply):** Level II proposals entail substantive additions to, alterations in, or termination of programs, structures, or administrative or academic entities typically characterized by the (a) addition, reassignment, or elimination of personnel, facilities, or courses of instruction; (b) rearrangement of budgets, cost centers, funding sources; and (c) changes which by implication could impact other campuses within the Montana University System and community colleges. Board policy 303.1 indicates the curricular proposals in this category:

- 1. Change names of degrees (e.g. from B.A. to B.F.A.)
- 2. Implement a new minor or certificate where there is no major or no option in a major;
- 3. Establish new degrees and add majors to existing degrees;
- 4. Expand/extend approved mission; and
- X 5. Any other changes in governance and organization as described in Board of Regents' Policy 218, such as formation, elimination or consolidation of a college, division, school, department, institute, bureau, center, station, laboratory, or similar unit.

### **Specify Request:**

Alter the existing department structure of our science faculty by dividing the current Environmental Sciences Department into a Biology Department and an Earth and Environmental Sciences Department.

### **Background:**

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 just 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, we feel that the significant expansion of the biomedical science program necessitates a change in departmental structure. Therefore, we are requesting permission to allow the formation of a separate biology department.

### **Rationale:**

There are many reasons why the formation of a Biology Department is necessary. For example, many of the biology faculty members 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 biology, but are unfamiliar with UMW, do not immediately realize that we have a biology program because it is housed 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.

The entire UMW science faculty agrees 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 (Please see attached letter). In fact, at a recent meeting, the UMW Faculty Senate voted unanimously in favor of this proposal, which demonstrates that there is campus wide support for this change.

***Budgeting and other considerations:***

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 the entire UMW administration, and it can be reevaluated at a later date if necessary. The distribution of lab fee budgets will remain unchanged, as they are currently separated by rubric. Since department chairs at UMW are not compensated the establishment of a Biology Department will not result in additional departmental overhead costs for the University. Any future costs that may become 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.

Finally, the science departments will maintain their current level of representation on campus-wide committees and faculty senate.