

November 19-20, 2020

ITEM 191-1003-R1120

Request for Authorization to Confer the title of Professor Emeritus on Christopher Comer, University of Montana - Missoula

THAT

Upon the retirement of Christopher Comer from the faculty of the University of Montana, the faculty wishes to express its appreciation for his more than 11 years of service to the University and the State of Montana by recommending that the rank of Professor Emeritus be conferred upon him by the Board of Regents of the Montana University System.

EXPLANATION

Dr. Christopher Comer earned his Ph.D. in Biology in 1980 from the University of Chicago. Following postdoctoral research in neurobiology and behavior, he joined the Department of Biology at the University of Illinois at Chicago as an Assistant Professor in 1982. Dr. Comer advanced through the faculty ranks at UIC to become Professor in 2002 after which he assumed a series of administrative appointments that culminated in his being named Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences in 2004. Dr. Comer was recruited to the University of Montana in 2009, where he served with distinction as Dean of the College of Humanities & Sciences and Professor of Biology & Neuroscience. He retired from the position of Dean in 2018 to return to teaching and scholarship. Dr. Comer will retire from the University of Montana in 2020.

Professor Comer's contributions to the field of neuroscience have been significant and extensive, particularly as related to identifying how the activity of specific groups of neurons are integrated to produce motor behaviors. His work has spanned multiple areas of neurobiology, including: sensory function, behavior, neural evolution, signal encoding, systems neuroscience, and neural engineering. The impact of his scholarly contributions are reflected in his CV which lists more than 60 abstracts and 45 published works, including papers in high-impact journals such as *Nature* and *J. Neuroscience*. It is also notable that Professor Comer left academic neuroscience to serve as a Program Director of Behavioral Neuroscience at the National Science Foundation from 1993-1995. His scholarly productivity is equally matched by a consistent track record of strong grant funding from the National Science Foundation and other funding agencies. Professor Comer has given numerous invited lectures at venues that range from Great Falls, MT to Brisbane, Australia. Most recently he has been pursuing scholarship that lies at the interface of Neuroscience and the Humanities and will soon be publishing the book "Brain, Mind and the Narrative Imagination" through Bloomsbury Press, London.

While recruited to UM to serve as the Dean of the College of Humanities & Sciences, Professor Comer has remained committed to and invested in teaching, especially at the undergraduate level. He has made valued contributions to the Neuroscience program, teaching in the "Fundamentals of Neuroscience" course and the very innovative interdisciplinary class, "Literature & the Brain". Professor Comer has also regularly participated in UM's Study Abroad program, teaching the summer course "Brain, Mind, and the Artistic Imagination", at University Dublin College. Lastly, it should be noted that Professor Comer played a foundational role in the development of UM's new B.S. degree in Neuroscience, helping both to shape its curriculum and mentor the faculty participating in the program.

Professor Comer's service to the University of Montana has also been exceptional, with most of it manifested through his role as Dean of the College of Humanities & Sciences. In that capacity he oversaw more than 200 tenure track faculty and 60 staff, many of whom have recognized him as a valued and

caring leader and mentor. It is also notable that Professor Comer was an equally strong advocate of both the sciences and humanities, a commitment that was often tested and proved as he dealt with the College's significant budget challenges. Other service contributions that are particularly noteworthy include: leading strategic planning for the College, UM Strategic Budget Planning committee, chairing searches for UM's Provost, UM's VP for Research, Dean of the College of Forestry & Conservation, and Dean of Missoula College. Lastly, Professor Comer also needs to be recognized for his successful efforts in fund raising for the College (and UM) as highlighted by the Payne Family Native American Center and Eck Hall.

In summary, we recommend that Professor Christopher Comer be awarded an Emeritus appointment with the highest enthusiasm. He has made a lasting impact on the University of Montana as a dean, scholar and teacher. It is also readily apparent that Professor Comer will continue to contribute to and be a champion of this University and that he should do so as an Emeritus Professor of Neuroscience.

ATTACHMENTS

No attachments.