

May 17-18, 2023

ITEM 206-1009-R0523

Request for Authorization to Confer the Title of Professor Emeritus of Cellular Biology & Biochemistry on Professor Stephen Sprang; University of Montana-Missoula

THAT

Upon the occasion of the retirement of Professor Stephen Sprang from the Division of Biological Sciences of the University of Montana, the faculty wishes to express its appreciation for his more than 15 years of dedicated and valued service to the University and the State of Montana by recommending that the rank of Professor Emeritus be conferred upon Dr. Sprang by the Board of Regents of the Montana University System.

EXPLANATION

Dr. Stephen Sprang earned his Ph.D. in Biochemistry in 1977 from the University of Wisconsin. Following postdoctoral fellowships in biochemistry and biophysics at the University of Alberta and U.C. San Francisco, he joined the Department of Biochemistry and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center as an Assistant Professor in 1986. Dr. Sprang advanced through the faculty ranks to become Professor in 1995. Dr. Sprang was recruited to the University of Montana in 2007, where he has served with distinction as a Professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and the Director of the NIH Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (CoBRE) within the Center for Biomolecular Structure and Dynamics (CBSD). He retired from the position of CBSD Director in 2020 to return to teaching and scholarship. Dr. Sprang will retire from the University of Montana in 2023.

Professor Sprang's contributions to the field of biochemistry and biophysics have been significant and extensive, particularly as related protein structure and X-ray crystallography. He is especially recognized for his seminal research on the structure of protein involved in the processes of signal transduction, as exemplified by his early work and publications on G-protein structure with Nobel laureate Alfred Gillman. The impact of his scholarly contribution is reflected in his CV which lists more than 130 published papers, including many in high-impact journals such as Science and Nature. His scholarly productivity is equally matched by a continuous and outstanding track record of grant funding from the National Institutes of Health and other funding agencies. Professor Sprang has given innumerable invited lectures at local, national, and international venues. In 2020, he was recognized with the University of Montana Distinguished Scholar Award.

While recruited primarily for his research expertise as the Director of the NIH CBSD CoBRE Center, Professor Sprang made significant instructional contributions at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Much of this teaching has been delivered through the College's Biochemistry program, a collaborative effort between the Departments of Chemistry & Biochemistry, Biological Sciences, Biomedical & Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Computer Sciences. As part of those efforts, Professor Sprang was especially impactful in teaching and mentoring students in the biochemical and biophysical approaches required to understand and study protein structure and function. For example, he oversaw the development of a very innovative fellowship program for graduate students that allows them to garner hands-on training in cutting edge technologies in a variety of UM research core facilities.

Dr. Sprang's commitment to graduate education also spilled over into his notable service contributions, where he served as both Director of the CBSD and UM Associate Provost of Graduate Education (2010-2012). Of the many advances he led in these roles, one that stands out was the creation of the "umbrella"

Molecular & Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program, which united the Ph.D. programs in Biochemistry & Biophysics, Cellular Molecular & Microbial Biology, Neuroscience, Pharmaceutical Sciences & Drug Design and Toxicology to more effectively recruit and train highly competitive graduate students. At the national level, Professor Sprang has been exceptionally active as a reviewer for numerous high-impact journals as well as serving as both a permanent and ad-hoc member of more than 20 scientific grant reviews panels for the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation.

In summary, we recommend that Professor Stephen Sprang be awarded an Emeritus appointment with the highest enthusiasm. He has made a lasting impact on the University of Montana in the areas of scholarship, teaching and service. When polled, responding majorities of faculty from the Division of Biological Sciences and the Departments of Chemistry & Biochemistry unanimously championed Dr. Sprang to be appointed Professor Emeritus of Cellular Biology & Biochemistry.

ATTACHMENTS

None