March 29, 2013

To: Martha Potvin, Provost
Fr: William Ruff, Chair
    University Graduate Council
Re: Proposed PhD in Materials Science

The proposed joint PhD program in Materials Science with Montana Tech and the University of Montana was discussed at some length at the March 18th meeting of the University Graduate Council. Ultimately the Council members voted to approve the program proposal, but the vote was not unanimous (one negative vote), and there were significant concerns expressed.

Because the Board of Regents has chosen to separate the decision on whether or not Montana Tech should have authority to award PhD degrees from the decision on the PhD in Materials Science, the comments that follow pertain only to the proposed joint PhD program in Materials Science.

Materials Science is a field in which a number of faculty members at Montana State University are already doing research. Having the opportunity to award a PhD in this area is seen as beneficial in recruiting qualified students with an interest in this field. A joint program might ultimately provide sufficient infrastructure to make researchers more competitive for research opportunities in this field. But there is a concern about the lack of researchers currently at the other institutions who can participate in the joint venture. Montana State University faculty members will necessarily shoulder the bulk of the load as the program is implemented.

There are also significant resource issues associated with building the capacity at all of the institutions, but especially at Montana Tech. Are State leaders prepared to provide the necessary resources? Will new resources be made available, or will reallocation of existing resources come at the expense of existing programs?

There are logistical issues associated with a joint program that are not addressed in the proposal. For example, when students are taking courses at other institutions, will the students have enough credits on any campus to meet the eligibility requirements for student health insurance (currently 7 credits)?

In conclusion, members of the University Graduate Council believe that a PhD in Materials Science should be available at Montana State University, but there are concerns about the proposed joint program with Montana Tech and the University of Montana.

cc: John Neumeier, Chair, Faculty Senate