Montana Board of Regents
LEVEL I REQUEST FORM

Item Number: XXX-XXXX+XXXXX Meeting Date: ____________________________

Institution: Montana State University-Bozeman CIP Code: ____________________________

Program Title: Merger of the Departments of Microbiology and Immunology & Infectious Diseases

Level I proposals are those that may be approved by the Commissioner of Higher Education or the Commissioner’s designee. The approval of such proposals will be conveyed to the Board of Regents at the next regular meeting of the Board. The institution must file the request with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education by means of a memo to the Deputy Commissioner for Academic and Student Affairs, by no later than five weeks prior to the final posting date for the next scheduled meeting of the Board. The Deputy Commissioner will review the proposal and respond to the proposing campus with any questions or concerns within one week, allowing the proposing campus one week to respond before the Item is posted for the BOR scheduled meeting.

X A. Level I (place an X for all that apply):

Level I proposals include campus initiatives typically characterized by (a) minimal costs; (b) clear adherence to approved campus mission; and (c) the absence of significant programmatic impact on other institutions within the Montana University System and Community Colleges. For Level I actions on degree programs or certificates, the process must begin when the proposing campus posts its intent on the MUS academic planning web site.

1. Re-titling existing majors, minors, options and certificates

2. Adding new minors or certificates where there is a major (Submit with completed Curriculum Proposals Form)

3. Adding new minors or certificates where there is an option in a major (Submit with completed Curriculum Proposals Form)

4. Departmental mergers and name changes

5. Program revisions (Submit with completed Curriculum Proposals Form)

6. Distance or online delivery of previously authorized degree or certificate programs

7. Placement of program into moratorium (No Program Termination Checklist at this time – document steps taken to notify students, faculty, and other constituents and include this information on checklist at time of termination if not reinstated)

8. Filing Notice of Intent to Terminate/Withdraw existing majors, minors, options, and certificates (No Program Termination Checklist at this time)

9. Terminate/withdraw existing majors, minors, options, and certificates (Submit with completed Program Termination Checklist)
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B. Level I with Level II documentation:

With Level II documentation circulated to all campus chief academic officers in advance, the Deputy Commissioner or designee may propose additional items for inclusion in the Level I process. For these items to move forward, the Deputy Commissioner or designee must reach consensus with the chief academic officers. When consensus is not achieved, the Deputy Commissioner or designee will move the item to the Level II review process.

1. Options within an existing major or degree (Submit with completed Curriculum Proposals Form);

2. Eliminating organizational units within larger institutions such as departments, divisions and colleges or schools with the exception of the Colleges of Technology where changes require Board action (Submit with completed Curriculum Proposals Form)

3. Consolidating existing programs and/or degrees (Submit with completed Curriculum Proposals Form)

C. Temporary Certificate or A.A.S. degree programs

Certificate or Associate of Applied Science Degree Programs may be submitted as Level I proposals, with memo and backup documentation, when they are offered in cooperation with and/or at the request of private or public sector partners and the decision point to offer the program is not consistent with the regular Board of Regents program approval process. Level I approval for programs under this provision will be limited to two years. Continuation of a program beyond the two years will require the normal program approval process as Level II Proposals.

All other Level I Certificate or Associate Degree programs may be placed on submission at any Board of Regents meeting. They will be placed on action agendas at subsequent meetings. All campuses agree to insure that all other campuses receive program information well in advance of submission.

D. Campus Certificates

Although certificate programs of 29 credits or fewer may be implemented by the individual campuses without approval by the board of regents, those certificates do need to be reported to the office of the commissioner of higher education and listed on the Montana University System’s official degree and program inventory. These Level I proposals will be listed as information items at the next regular meeting of the board.

Specify Request:

MSU-Bozeman is requesting Level I approval to merge the Departments of Microbiology and Immunology & Infectious Diseases into one department.
ITEM XXX-XXXX-XXXXX

Merger of the Departments of Microbiology and Immunology & Infectious Diseases

THAT
The Board of Regents of Higher Education authorizes Montana State University-Bozeman to merge Departments of Microbiology and Immunology & Infectious Diseases to form a consolidated and unified Department of Microbiology and Immunology that will represent an interdisciplinary department shared between the Colleges of Letters & Science and Agriculture.

EXPLANATION
The Departments of Microbiology and Immunology & Infectious Diseases are key contributors to the overall mission of MSU. Faculty members in each department via internationally recognized research and teaching programs provide the foundation for undergraduate and graduate education in all fields of microbiology and many areas of biomedical sciences. However, undergraduate and graduate programs in biomedical and environmental microbiology currently are not attaining their full potential. Among the main reasons for this shortfall is that faculty are dispersed across campus, leaving little opportunity for meaningful interactions and centralized leadership to build research and academic programs. There is an inherent and obvious integral relationship between environmental microbiology and biomedical microbiology, including medical laboratory science. Thus, MSU has the unique opportunity to build an extremely strong, balanced, and diverse academic program in microbiology by consolidating the two departments into one that will offer students the best and most in-depth education possible. In addition, increased interactions between faculty provides an environment conducive for development of interdisciplinary research programs that will be nationally competitive both individually and collectively.

ATTACHMENTS
Level I request form
Level II documentation
1. Overview

MSU - Bozeman is requesting Level I approval to merge the Departments of Microbiology and Immunology & Infectious Diseases (ImID) into one department. The Departments of Microbiology and ImID are key contributors to the overall mission of MSU. Faculty members in each department provide the foundation for undergraduate and graduate education in all fields of microbiology via internationally recognized research and teaching programs. **However, undergraduate and graduate programs in biomedical and environmental microbiology currently are not attaining their full potential even though the university has an obligation to maintain a balanced microbiology curriculum that meets the needs of the students.** There are a number of reasons for this, not least of which is that faculty are dispersed across campus, leaving little opportunity for meaningful interactions and centralized leadership to build research and academic programs. There is an inherent and obvious integral relationship between environmental microbiology and biomedical microbiology, including medical laboratory science. Thus, these should not be considered separate disciplines, but instead sub-disciplines of a larger field of science. Centralized teaching and research curricula that embrace the diversity and importance of all aspects of microbiology will foster enriched environments for both undergraduate and graduate students – from biologists and geologists, to engineers and medical doctors.

MSU now has the opportunity to build a strong, balanced and diverse academic program in microbiology by consolidating the two departments into one that will offer students the best and most in-depth education possible. In addition, the resulting increased interactions between faculty will provide an environment conducive for development of interdisciplinary research programs that will be nationally competitive, both individually and collectively, for institution-wide student training grants and other federal funding initiatives. By strengthening through consolidation, MSU will be able to recruit and retain high-achieving students and faculty, maintain high academic standards, and promote development of thriving research programs, thus aligning with the MSU Strategic Plan for the future.

2. Provide a one paragraph description of the proposed program. Be specific about what degree, major, minor or option is sought.

The proposal requests authorization to merge Departments of Microbiology and Immunology & Infectious Diseases at Montana State University into a consolidated and unified Department of Microbiology and Immunology that will be an interdisciplinary department shared between the Colleges of Letters & Science and Agriculture. Specific degrees, majors, minors or options different from those currently in place are not sought at this time.

3. Need

A. To what specific need is the institution responding in developing the proposed program?

As summarized above, MSU has a unique opportunity to build a strong program in Microbiology by consolidating two departments with complementary and overlapping academic and research areas. In alignment with the MSU Strategic Plan for the future, merging these two units offers an environment that will enhance and accelerate development of interdisciplinary efforts in teaching and research. Such an environment rich in integrated and collaborative programs provides advantages for recruitment and retention of nationally and internationally competitive faculty. It follows then, that MSU also will be able to recruit and retain high-achieving students, maintain high academic standards, and promote development of thriving research programs.
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B. How will students and any other affected constituencies be served by the proposed program?

We are currently not requesting changes in degrees offered. However, both undergraduate and graduate academic programs will be augmented by consolidation under centralized leadership. For example, broad instructional efforts will be enhanced by increased student FTE, program quality and rigor, and breadth of degrees offered. Course redundancy would be minimized. Merging currently separate, but closely related academic programs will result in a stronger, more diversified curriculum with multiple options for all students interested in biomedical or environmental microbiology, including students with pre-medical and pre-veterinary interests. The large number of students enrolled in the Medical Laboratory Science program also will benefit from expanded course options. In addition, opportunities for undergraduate students to gain University R credits will be increased, and a larger pool of faculty mentors will allow selection of advisors with expertise in curricula appropriate for biomedical and environmental microbiology, pre-medical and pre-veterinary students.

A unified department with expanded expertise will promote recruitment of more high quality graduate students. Faculty expertise in biomedical and environmental microbiology that already is nationally and internationally recognized will offer multiple opportunities for graduate students, including important education and training in interdisciplinary research. This in turn will increase student competitiveness at the next levels of a career in research and education, both in academic and professional settings. The increased number of applicants, as a result of extensive and diverse faculty research programs, will promote selection of the highest quality students and consequently, increase the number of PhD students to a level that will help MSU maintain its current Carnegie status.

Expansion of faculty with diverse, yet complementary expertise offers significant opportunity for new course offerings, graduate teaching, and mentoring. A large pool of successful faculty members will result in an academic unit that will be nationally competitive for federally funded training grants from multiple agencies (undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral).

C. What is the anticipated demand for the program? How was this determined?

Currently, there are approximately 160 undergraduate students and 40 graduate students in the combined Microbiology and ImID programs. While it is difficult to predict future demand, a consolidated department with the advantages to undergraduate and graduate programs is likely to increase the number of students seeking enrollment.

4. Institutional and System Fit

A. What is the connection between the proposed program and existing programs at the institution?

Microbiology is part of many programs on campus, with >60 faculty on campus being identified as working in the area of microbiology. As such, the combined curriculum serves not only the Microbiology program, but other programs in Colleges of Agriculture, Nursing, Engineering, and Letters & Science, as well. Consolidating faculty working in the diverse areas of microbiology into one department under centralized leadership will facilitate more productive interactions. In addition, the Microbiology curriculum serves as another route of preparation for pre-medical and pre-veterinary students.
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B. Will approval of the proposed program require changes to any existing programs at the institution? If so, please describe.

This will be a merger between two existing programs. There are no changes required for other existing programs on campus.

C. Describe what differentiates this program from other, closely related programs at the institution (if appropriate).

There are no other closely related programs on campus.

D. How does the proposed program serve to advance the strategic goals of the institution?

As outlined above, this program is consistent with and will support the goals of the MSU Strategic Plan with enhanced interdisciplinary efforts in teaching and research, enhanced graduate student recruitment and training, enriched undergraduate and graduate curricula, and enhanced recruitment of nationally and internationally competitive faculty. In addition, many of the faculty teach in WWAMI and will be integral to the new Veterinary Medicine program, two important strategic areas of the university.

E. Describe the relationship between the proposed program and any similar programs within the Montana University System. In cases of substantial duplication, explain the need for the proposed program at an additional institution. Describe any efforts that were made to collaborate with these similar programs; and if no efforts were made, explain why. If articulation or transfer agreements have been developed for the substantially duplicated programs, please include the agreement(s) as part of the documentation.

Microbiology already exists and is a strong program at MSU. MSU now has a unique opportunity to build an even stronger Microbiology program by consolidating departments with complementary and overlapping academic and research areas. We are not creating a new program, just merging two existing programs into one. Note, however, that there are no other Microbiology departments in the MUS that offer a full range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

5. Program Details

A. Provide a detailed description of the proposed curriculum. Where possible, present the information in the form intended to appear in the catalog or other publications. NOTE: In the case of two-year degree programs and certificates of applied science, the curriculum should include enough detail to determine if the characteristics set out in Regents’ Policy 301.12 have been met.

At this time, no changes are requested for the curricula of the two departments since they do not overlap significantly. We propose to continue to offer M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Microbiology and in Immunology & Infectious Diseases. Undergraduate degrees in Microbiology (with the various options, including the Medical Laboratory Sciences Program) and Biotechnology (Microbial and Animal Systems Options) will continue. Once the departments have been merged and are fully integrated, all degree programs will be evaluated for any needed changes in curricula in the context of providing the highest quality academic and research experience for students at all levels.
B. Describe the planned implementation of the proposed program, including estimates of numbers of students at each stage.

Curricula are already implemented, they simply will be administered by a single merged department.

6. Resources

A. Will additional faculty resources be required to implement this program? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.

Additional faculty resources are not required; however, retention of all current, open faculty FTEs from both ImID and Microbiology, as well as planned and future retirements, are critical to retain.

B. Are other, additional resources required to ensure the success of the proposed program? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.

None

7. Assessment

How will the success of the program be measured?

Success of the program will be measured by increased undergraduate student enrollment, increased PhD students made possible by increasing the number of faculty mentors, placement of students in industry and professional schools, progression from graduate degrees to post-graduate degrees and acquisition of faculty positions, and further recruitment of nationally competitive faculty.

8. Process Leading to Submission

Describe the process of developing and approving the proposed program. Indicate, where appropriate, involvement by faculty, students, community members, potential employers, accrediting agencies, etc.

This proposal originated from a recommendation by an external review of the departments some years ago that suggested a merger be considered. Subsequently, a committee of faculty members representative of the two departments, not including the Department Heads, met weekly through the Summer of 2012 to discuss such a merger. These efforts led to the development of a document outlining the advantages of consolidation to both departments and to MSU. The document included feedback from all faculty members from both departments. Two joint faculty meetings were held to discuss a possible merger, providing an opportunity for all to voice their opinions. Department Heads again were not involved in any of the meetings and discussions. Thus, this is truly a faculty led effort. The outcome was a near unanimous faculty opinion from both departments that a merger should occur. This opinion was presented to the Deans, Provost, and President in different venues and is now requested to proceed through to fruition through the Regent’s approval process.