ITEM 185-2010-R1119

Request for authorization to consolidate and merge the Department of Cell Biology and Neuroscience and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at Montana State University

THAT

The Board of Regents of the Montana University System approves the administrative organizational change to merge Departments of Cell Biology and Neuroscience and Microbiology and Immunology to form a consolidated and unified Department of Microbiology and Immunology that will represent an interdisciplinary department in the College of Agriculture at Montana State University.

EXPLANATION

The academic programs and the research conducted by faculty in the discipline areas of microbiology, immunology, cell biology and neuroscience are valued contributors to the overall mission of MSU. Faculty members in these disciplines provide the foundation for undergraduate and graduate education in a variety of scientific subdisciplines in several areas of biology and biomedical sciences.

All departments and academic programs within the Montana University System are expected to strive for continuous improvement in the education they provide to students, in the outreach they provide to the public and in the research they conduct to further the bounds of knowledge. This is an expectation of the Montana Legislature, which appropriates funds to the university system, the Montana Board of Regents, which governs the university system, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, which administers the university system, and of the local administrations of each campus.

At the direction of the Board of Regents and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, MSU undertook a review of all its doctoral programs to evaluate their performance. This review resulted in the MSU Doctoral Prioritization Review Report, a document created by the 16-member MSU Doctoral Program Prioritization Committee. The report classified the Department of Cell Biology and Neuroscience as one of the lowest performing programs at the university and indicated it was not meeting the performance expectations required of all academic departments at Montana State University.

Aligning the eight tenured faculty members and two instructors in CBN with the 19 tenured and tenure-track faculty, plus over 10 research faculty and instructors in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology will provide a stronger foundation for sustainability and future growth of graduate and undergraduate academic programs and associated research opportunities for students.

The Department of Microbiology and Immunology has been administered by the College of Agriculture for many years. Accounting and bookkeeping changes have been made to align expenditures, which were entirely on the back of the College of Agriculture, with performance indicators that were split unevenly between the College of Agriculture and the College of Letters and Science. This split only added complexity to budgeting and resource allocation decisions. The combined department will now have clear and consistent management of budget account indices, research expenditures, personnel and data reporting of performance indicators in a single college, the College of Agriculture.
The merger of these departments did not change any of the terms and conditions of employment for the faculty members in either unit. The tenurable faculty still retain all rights of tenure. Their offices and laboratories have not moved. The merger has not resulted in any changes to the undergraduate programs that were delivered previously by each of the two units. The merger is budget neutral, no additional resources are necessary as a result of the re-alignment. Changes are already occurring in the graduate program as the faculty work together to develop new courses.

These changes are in alignment with several parts of MSU’s new strategic plan, Choosing Promise, specifically Goal 1.2: Expanding high-quality graduate education, as well as Goal 2.2: Expand interdisciplinary scholarship; Goal 2.3: Strengthen institutional reputation in scholarship; and Goal 2.4: Elevate expectations for scholarship.

ATTACHMENTS

Academic Proposal