

DRAFT Strategic Plan for SBE Sciences Research at MSU
December 3, 2012

Mission: MSU's Social, Behavioral and Economic (SBE) sciences researchers pursue diverse lines of inquiry to build knowledge about the human world at multiple scales. We are scholar-teachers, delivering diverse undergraduate curricula and some graduate programs while engaging in basic and applied research.

Vision: We envision a future where SBE sciences at MSU will be mature and strong, driven by accomplished researchers who are respected in their disciplines and highly competitive for external funding. The SBE sciences will address important and emerging issues in our state and beyond, and use our discoveries to improve the lives of Montanans through public policy, education and training. The expansion of SBE sciences research will provide extensive opportunities for our students to integrate learning and discovery through robust research experiences. MSU's strength in the basic SBE sciences will fuel collaborative applied and interdisciplinary projects led by SBE scientists, making MSU a regional center of excellence in strategically chosen areas of (1) rural health and families and (2) dynamic human-environment interactions.

Values: Our work is oriented around our commitment to:

- The curiosity and on-going learning that drives discovery
- Stewardship of our natural environment and communities
- Student learning and engagement

Faculty: We start with a relatively small but solid base of **research-active SBE faculty** who are also committed teachers. This group, which spans numerous colleges and departments, must be retained and encouraged to continue creating new knowledge and engaging our students in discovery. As hiring opportunities arise, we must recruit and retain SBE sciences faculty with proven records, or potential for, strong scholarship and its integration with teaching and engagement. To accomplish this, we propose that MSU:

- (1) Prioritize contributions to our research mission in allocating new tenure-track faculty lines in the SBE sciences.
- (2) Hire advanced or senior faculty in the SBE sciences who can immediately lead large research projects and mentor other SBE faculty.
- (3) Increase collaboration among Department Heads, Deans and the Vice President for Research to expand start-up packages and other opportunities for SBE faculty, especially in the areas of focus described below.
- (4) Re-examine of Departmental, College and University Role & Scope documents to ensure a balance among teaching, research and service appropriate for faculty with high research expectations.

Focus: To strengthen SBE sciences at MSU and raise their profile within the state and beyond, we propose to focus our efforts in two areas where, building on MSU's current strengths, we have the potential to achieve research excellence: (1) rural health and families and (2) dynamic human-environment interactions.

A focus on **rural health and families** builds on our strengths in biomedical sciences, and current scholarship in the Departments of Health & Human Development, Psychology and Sociology & Anthropology, and the College of Nursing. We expect that researchers in other departments (e.g., Economics) will also be involved. To enhance research capacity in this area, we propose to:

- (1) Reinvigorate the Center on Rural Health Policy
- (2) Expand the Center to include research focused on both Health and Families
- (3) Apply for an NIH COBRE award to support the expansion of faculty and research in these areas
- (4) Establish faculty lines (e.g., a specialist in Native or rural health, a biostatistician) through a future INBRE award as well as processes for allocating lines within MSU
- (5) Explore the feasibility of developing a joint PhD program in Behavioral and Social Health drawing on graduate courses and training opportunities from the Departments

of Health & Human Development, Psychology and Sociology & Anthropology, and the College of Nursing.

- (6) Establish seed funding to support pilot projects and mentoring in this area.
- (7) Reach out to other faculty whose work might align with this area in ways they have not yet considered.

A focus on **dynamic human-environment interactions** leverages opportunities within the Institute on Ecosystems, and existing strengths in environmental policy and history within the Departments of History/Philosophy/Religious Studies, Political Science, Agricultural Economics/Economics and Sociology/Anthropology. To enhance research capacity in this area, we propose to:

- (1) Develop a working group within the Institute on Ecosystems focusing on dynamic human-environment interactions.
- (2) Recruit a cluster of three new tenure-track faculty across different disciplines, including senior faculty with established research programs, in the areas of science and environmental policy; for at least one of these lines, we expect to request bridge funding from EPSCoR.
- (3) Expand opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students in SBE sciences to engage in discovery by increasing collaborations among SBE researchers and with MSU's STEM researchers.
- (4) Given a cluster hire in this area, explore the feasibility of developing an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in public policy drawing on graduate courses and training opportunities from the Departments of Political Science, History, Economics/Agricultural Economics, and Sociology/Anthropology.

Infrastructure: It is vital that MSU develop infrastructure to support the development of SBE sciences as they move towards more interdisciplinary collaborations and a higher research profile. We propose the development of infrastructure in two areas: (1) research support and services specific to SBE sciences, and (2) the possible development of joint or interdisciplinary Ph.D. degree programs in the areas of focus identified above.

To enhance **research support and services**, we propose to:

- (1) Develop an SBE research lab to support faculty and student discovery (a preliminary plan for such a lab has emerged from the Department of Political Science).
- (2) Remove grants management tasks from department administrative assistants by assigning them to an SBE grants administrator (this is presently accomplished in an ad hoc fashion through arrangement with our Vice President for Research).

To provide opportunities for **graduate education and training**, we propose to:

- (1) Explore the feasibility of developing joint or interdisciplinary Ph.D. programs in the focal areas.
- (2) Identify commonalities and possible synergies between these programs.
- (3) Explore opportunities for SBE faculty to contribute to existing interdisciplinary graduate programs at MSU (e.g., the integrated Ecology and Environmental Sciences Ph.D. program)

This DRAFT plan emerges from MSU's SBE Research Initiative, and is a collaborative effort of faculty and academic leaders in MSU's Colleges of Letters & Science, Nursing, Agriculture and Business. Feedback and questions are welcome. Please email Sue Monahan (smonahan@montana.edu).