

LEVEL II BOARD OF REGENTS ITEMS

CURRICULUM PROPOSALS

1. Overview

This proposal would change the current B.A.: Environmental Interpretation Option with three (3) Related Areas to a B.S.: Environmental Interpretation extended Major with three Options: Geological Naturalist; Biological Naturalist; and Pre-Professional Conservation Officer

2. Description of proposed program

An existing B.A.: Environmental Interpretation will be renamed and course content slightly modified to a B.S.: Environmental Interpretation. Current Geological Naturalist, Biological Naturalist and Pre-Professional Conservation Officer Related Areas will be maintained as Options within the new degree structure.

3. Need

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

The current B.A. Option is more tightly structured in terms of scientific and other course content than a traditional B.A. Major, and it should more appropriately be designated a B.S. The proposed Major offering is necessary to support the specific course content requirements and rising need for experienced guides to provide informal science education in the National Park system, Forest Service, education centers, and museums. Interpretation is a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource (National Association for Interpretation (2000)). The B.S. Environmental Interpretation Major is designed to prepare students to pursue career opportunities as environmental interpreters, naturalists, informal science educators, and conservation enforcement officers.

b. How will students and any other affected constituencies be served by the proposed program?

This program focuses on providing students with a Bachelor of Science Environmental Interpretation Major from a 4-year accredited university. Several professional certifications will be offered through the interpretation classes. The University of Montana Western has an agreement with the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), a recognized leader in outdoor education, which allows students to seamlessly transfer earned credits between NOLS and UMW. UMW also holds institutional membership with the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) and offers students the opportunity to take part in the Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) curriculum and certification process. Given the stress placed on certifications within the field of interpretation, our students will have a head start to apply for jobs in the field. In addition, students wanting to obtain an M.S. in Interpretation will have the necessary academic coursework to apply for such programs. Finally, clarifying the real nature of the program they receive will serve the students and prospective employers or graduate schools. In addition, it will make the Montana Western program more understandable to prospective students and the campus Admissions staff.

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

There are currently about 20 students in the Environmental Interpretation Option that has been in existence for four years now. The program has experience growth since its initiation. A steady rise in demand for the Environmental Interpretation program is anticipated, given the uniqueness of the program within the University of Montana system and beyond. These projections are based mainly on current enrollment trends and communication with current, exiting, and recent program graduates.

4. Institutional and System Fit

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

Most content area classes required by the proposed Environmental Interpretation Major and its Options are already offered by faculty in the Environmental Sciences Department and the Biology Department. There is overlap between students and faculty within the science programs, creating cohesion between departments.

b. Will approval of the proposed program require changes to any existing programs at the institution? If so describe.

N/A

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

Through the Environmental Interpretation program students are firmly grounded in the application of scientific method and theories regarding the natural world. This portion of the proposed major is very similar to the Environmental Sciences program. However, interpretation students also acquire a unique ability to help informal audiences develop a meaningful connection with a cultural or environmental resource. To accomplish this, students learn to develop and present theme-based frontline interpretive talks and become well versed in the area of interpretive site and project planning. There are not enough courses in common between Environmental Sciences and Environmental Interpretation for a common core meeting BOR policy requirements to be developed.

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

These changes will allow the Environmental Sciences Department to best promote the goals of Montana Western's Strategic Plan, in particular: Goal #1 Improve undergraduate education, Goal #2 Increase enrollment through enhanced affordability, access, success and retention and increase graduation rates, and Goal #5 Strategically position the university for maximum efficiency and long-range success.

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 institutional. 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.

This program is a unique program offering within the University of Montana system as no other B.S. programs in Environmental Interpretation exist. The experiential nature of all program classes and the immersion learning characteristic of X1 also make the program unique in the nation.

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.

See attached UMW Curriculum Proposal and Catalog Course list.

b. Describe the planned implementation of the proposed program, including the estimates of numbers of students at each stage.

The transition will be virtually seamless. Students planning to graduate in 2010-11 will complete the current B.A. program. If approved for the 2011-12 catalog, some current B.A. students may elect to move to the B.S. since the curricula for the Core and Options is very similar to the existing program. Students aiming for

graduation in 2012 and beyond will be advised into the new B.S. degree beginning in Fall 2011, but any current students who choose to graduate with the B.A. degree will be able to do that, since the classes will still be offered. We expect the total number of majors in Environmental Interpretation to continue to expand slowly, while the distribution of those students within the options will have to be observed and documented in the first few years of implementation.

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 would not be needed to offer this revised program until there is a substantial increase in enrollment, which we do anticipate, but not immediately.

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.

The new program structure would not alter our need for additional resources. We have, for years, been acquiring the equipment and supplies needed to offer our science classes experientially, using whatever resources are available on campus, supplemented with outside grants. This need and our efforts will continue (see ENVS Experiential Learning Report for more details on those needs).

7. Assessment

How will success of the program be measured?

As with all programs at UMW, a seven-year review process will be used to assess the effectiveness of the BS: Environmental Interpretation degree. In addition, exit surveys will be used to provide the Department with useful feedback from students as they graduate with their degree. We will also monitor employment of our graduates and the frequency of admission and success of our former students in various graduate programs. These assessment plans will follow in the model of our current plan, which employs both primary (observed performance) and secondary (survey) assessment tools collected at both the benchmark and capstone levels.

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 has gone through and been approved by the extensive UMW curriculum proposal review process. This process includes review by faculty, students and administrators in a number of committees including Curriculum Committee and Faculty Senate. Students have representation at all levels of this process. After Faculty Senate recommended its approval, the proposal received campus approval from the Provost and Chancellor