WASHINGTON HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

July 2010

DRAFT - Master of Science and Ph.D. in Molecular Biosciences
Moderate Degree Change Proposal
Washington State University

Introduction

Washington State University (WSU) has submitted a Moderate Degree Change proposal to consolidate six existing bioscience-related graduate degrees into a Master of Science and Ph.D. in Molecular Biosciences degree with three tracks beginning Summer 2010. The pre-consolidation degrees are: Master of Science and Ph.D. in Biochemistry, Master of Science and Ph.D. in Genetics and Cell Biology, and Master of Science and Ph.D. in Microbiology.

Like the existing degrees, the proposed degree would be housed within WSU's School of Molecular Biosciences (SMB). In their current form, the degrees average about 65 FTE students, with 16 graduates per year. Program planners expect these numbers to increase after the degrees are consolidated.

Proposed Change Description

In 1999, three departments – Biochemistry, Genetics and Cell Biology, and Microbiology – merged to become the School of Molecular Biosciences (SMB). Since then, the unit has created a seamless graduate curriculum, with only one discipline-specific core course in each of its graduate degrees. Many students take two or even all three of the discipline-specific core courses.

After consolidating its curriculum, the School received institutional approval[1] to consolidate its graduate degrees to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of its curriculum. Under the proposed plan, the M.S. and Ph.D. in Biochemistry, M.S. and Ph.D. in Genetics and Cell Biology, and M.S. and Ph.D. in Microbiology would become tracks under the degree titles of M.S. and Ph.D. in Molecular Biosciences. Program planners believe this unification would position the SMB graduate program to keep pace with a national trend toward interdisciplinary degrees while improving WSU's ability to recruit students and obtain federal grants.

[1] The proposed consolidation has been approved by the Molecular Biosciences Graduate Student Association, the SMB faculty, the College of Sciences, the WSU faculty senate, the Graduate Studies Committee, and the Provost.

Although the Molecular Biosciences Graduate Student Association is enthusiastic about the new degree titles, WSU would not discontinue existing titles until all current students have an opportunity to graduate under their choice of old or new titles. It is thought that most current students would prefer the new interdisciplinary degree title over the old titles. Students interviewed have indicated an interdisciplinary degree would be more versatile, bridging multiple disciplines.

Staff Analysis

The proposed consolidation meets the eligibility criteria for a Moderate Degree Change because it does not represent a significant departure from existing programs with established track records. It does not involve significant costs or alterations of student audience, program requirements, learning objectives, location, delivery mode, scheduling, faculty, or facility use.

Students and employers would benefit from the proposed consolidation because the post-change degree titles more accurately reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the course of study. The new titles would clearly communicate the nature of the program and help WSU recruit high-caliber students. By enhancing WSU's ability to recruit graduate students in a STEM field, the proposed consolidation would also support the *2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*.

Staff Recommendation

After careful review of the proposal and supporting materials, staff recommends approval of the Master of Science and Ph.D. in Molecular Biosciences at Washington State University. The Higher Education Coordinating Board's Education Committee discussed the proposal during its June 23, 2010 meeting and recommended approval by the full Board.

RESOLUTION 10-16

WHEREAS, Washington State University proposes to offer a Master of Science and Ph.D. in Molecular Biosciences; and

WHEREAS, The degrees would result from a consolidation of existing Master of Science and Ph.D. in Biochemistry, Master of Science and Ph.D. in Genetics and Cell Biology, and Master of Science and Ph.D. in Microbiology degrees; and

WHEREAS, The consolidation meets the eligibility criteria for a Moderate Degree Change without significant costs or alterations of student audience, program requirements, learning objectives, location, delivery mode, scheduling, faculty, or facility use; and

WHEREAS, The consolidation would benefit students and employers by ensuring that the degree titles accurately portray the interdisciplinary nature of the course of study; and

WHEREAS, The consolidation would benefit the community and support the *2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* by improving Washington State University's ability to attract students in a STEM field;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the Master of Science and Ph.D. in Molecular Biosciences effective July 15, 2010.

Adopted:

July 15, 2010

Attest:

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Jesus Hernandez, Chair

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Roberta Greene, Secretary