

September 25, 2019

To: Members of the College of Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee  
From: Dr. Jim Phillips, Chair, Department of Chemistry  
Re: Chemistry Department Name Change

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Colleagues;

On September 11, 2019, faculty in the Department of Chemistry voted unanimously (14-0-0) to change the name of the Department from “Chemistry” to “Chemistry and Biochemistry” for the next possible catalog. This memo serves to formally seek administrative approval for this change.

The primary rationale for this change is identity. We have four faculty members who fully regard themselves as “biochemists”, and 2 additional faculty specializing in interdisciplinary fields involving biochemistry. Also, we note that while the American Chemical Society is placing an increasing emphasis on biochemistry, the field has at-the-same-time, become distinct; most practitioners regard it as more than a mere sub-field of chemistry.

In addition, we offer six courses in the subject, including two with overlapping topics (“bioinorganic” and “biophysical” chemistry), and these courses serve not only Chemistry and Biochemistry/Molecular Biology (BMB) majors, but also Nursing and Kinesiology. Regardless, we are the only department on campus that offers courses in which “biochemistry” appears in the title, and we would like this contribution to be more visible.

One additional issue is our advising categorization within ARCC. To most of us, “chemistry” is a physical science, yet we have been classified with the “life and health sciences”. Adding “biochemistry” to our title seems to convey better overlap and consistency with the other departments and programs in the cluster.

We did not arrive at this decision independently, it was a specific recommendation from our most recent external reviewer, and it is reflective of an on-going trend among “chemistry” departments to make this same change. In discussions related to our *Student Success Plan*, we noted that two primary competitors in the region in terms of both overall mission and student recruiting (UM-Duluth and UW-Lacrosse) have departments entitled “Chemistry and Biochemistry”. This shift is a trend that we simply need to keep pace with.

The primary perceived benefit of this change will be messaging in regard to student recruitment. Biochemistry is an increasingly popular degree option, and we expect the name change to further highlight biochemistry degree options and attract more students to UWEC. At present, “biochemistry” is currently invisible to any student who navigates the website in search of a major through academic departments. In addition, the number of incoming students seeking our ACS chemistry/biochemistry emphasis major is near zero, and it was slated to be deleted in the recent program array streamlining process. Nonetheless, this program is a valuable complement to Biochemistry/Molecular Biology (BMB), because of the enhanced math and physics requirements that offer a more rigorous preparation track for a student interested in biochemistry graduate school. Ultimately however, we believe this name change will bolster visibility for both ACS/Biochemistry and BMB.

It is worth noting that we do not plan to seek any corollary administrative actions as a result of this proposed update; no plans for a new, distinct biochemistry course prefix, no shifts in primary budget allocations, and no changes in the shared oversight (with biology) of the BMB program. In fact, we think the name change affirms our continued support for BMB, by integrating our department’s contribution into our identity. All our faculty value BMB, not just those who identify as “biochemists”, and we are committed to its continued success.

We have consulted with the Department of Biology, and they did raise some initial concerns. These included perceptions of how BMB would be administered, and what department students might regard as the home for “BMB”. We have agreed to be mindful if these issues going forward, especially in our messaging to students.

We thank you kindly for your time and consideration.