

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

PROPOSED DEPARTMENT NAME CHANGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to change the name of the Department of Biological Sciences in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to the Department of Biology.

Executive Summary: The proposed name most consistently and accurately represents the department's teaching and research. The proposed name is consistent with similar departments in peer institutions that offer a comprehensive basic science program in evolution, ecology, cell and developmental biology, genetics, and neurobiology. This request has been reviewed by the Board Office and the Council of Provosts and is recommended for approval. This report addresses the Board's Strategic Plan objective (1.1) to "offer high-quality programs through ongoing program improvement for undergraduate, graduate, professional, and non-degree students and special school students."

Background:

- ◇ Undergraduate and graduate programs currently offered by the department are all named "Biology"; undergraduate and graduate majors have been called "Biology" for more than 20 years.
- ◇ The name "biological sciences" came into existence in 1992 after the merger of biology and botany. However, undergraduate and graduate majors in botany were eliminated in 1997. Changing the department name to "Biology" will clarify its mission and program focus.
- ◇ Within the Big 10 and other peer institutions, departments have moved away from the name "department of biology" only when it has been split into more than one program or department, usually one in evolution and ecology and another in cell and developmental biology.
- ◇ The terms "life sciences, biological sciences, or biosciences" are currently used to include a wide range of scientific disciplines and departments at the University of Iowa and other institutions. In addition to the Department of Biological Sciences in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the biological sciences at the University are represented by several departments in the Carver College of Medicine, each with a distinct medical focus. The term "biological sciences" is most properly used to represent the entire range of life science disciplines rather than a single department or program. This is consistent with how the term "biological sciences" is used at peer institutions, some of which have established colleges or schools of biological sciences encompassing many departments.

- ◇ Changing the department name to “Biology” will also distinguish the unit from the Biosciences Program, a University-wide graduate recruitment effort. The Biosciences Program is not a degree-granting graduate program but a multidisciplinary entry portal for 14 Ph.D. programs. These include the Biology graduate program and the programs in Chemistry and Speech-Language Pathology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, as well as programs in the Carver College of Medicine that range from Pathology to Free Radical and Radiation Biology to Molecular Physiology and Biophysics. The Biosciences Program recruitment initiative also serves interdisciplinary Ph.D. programs not based in a single department but which are supported by the contributions of faculty in many life sciences departments, including the interdisciplinary programs in genetics and neuroscience.

- ◇ Changing the department name to “Biology” will help eliminate confusion and will make the department name consistent with the name of the degree programs. It will better denote the department’s teaching and research training mission to prospective students.