

## **MOTION**

### **Separation of the Department of Biology and Chemistry into Two Departments**

**Referred by: Executive Council**

#### **Motion**

The Faculty Senate recommends the separation of the Department of Chemistry and Biology into a Department of Biology and a Department of Chemistry (see attached document).

#### **Rationale**

On September 24, 2009, the Faculty Senate voted in a favor of a motion to initiate the separation of the Department of Chemistry and Biology into a Department of Biology and a Department of Chemistry. Since that time, the proposal has been approved by the Department's two Curriculum Committees (Biology and Chemistry), the Department Chair, the College Curriculum Committee, and the College Dean.

The rationale in favor of the proposal is described in the document that follows.

## **Motion to separate the Department of Biology and Chemistry into two departments, the Department of Chemistry and the Department of Biology.**

### **Summary:**

The Department of Biology and Chemistry curriculum committees unanimously support the separation of the Department of Chemistry and Biology into a Department of Biology and a Department of Chemistry. This is in full agreement with both the faculty of the Department of Biology and Chemistry who unanimously agreed upon such a resolution August 27<sup>th</sup> and then by the Faculty Senate who also unanimously agreed upon such a resolution on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

### **Description:**

To separate the Department of Chemistry and Biology into two distinct departments, a Department of Biology with jurisdiction over Biology programs and a Department of Chemistry with jurisdiction over Chemistry programs. Delete the Department of Biology and Chemistry from the catalog. Add a Department of Biology with information on Biology faculty and programs and a Department of Chemistry with information on Chemistry faculty and programs.

### **Rationale:**

Currently, the two departments are already functionally autonomous, with separate Curriculum Committees, Personnel Committees, and Promotion Committees. There is a Chemistry Coordinator responsible for the Chemistry program's budget and class schedule, while the chair of the Department is responsible for those tasks within Biology. There would be no difference in classes or day-to-day operations and in essence this would make official the autonomy that already exists between both programs.

Autonomous Chemistry and Biology departments would reflect the strengths of these disciplines and the sciences at Radford University; and aid in the overall goal shared by the Chemistry Program, the College of Science and Technology, and the 7-17 Strategic Plan which is to gain accreditation by the American Chemical Society. Such a configuration of Departments will also aid in the recruitment and retention of qualified chemistry and biology students and faculty.

The current configuration of the Department of Biology and Chemistry is very unusual, and exists in none of our peer institutions. Only two schools in Virginia currently have this department structure, Christopher Newport University, which is a small (less than 5000 students), liberal arts institution with a Department of Biology, Chemistry and Environmental Sciences, and Liberty University in

Lynchburg, a private, religious college. Most telling is that in an exhaustive review of 649 universities with Chemistry Departments accredited by the American Chemistry Society, none were found to have this specific configuration. Seventy percent of these programs exist as Departments of Chemistry, 19% as Departments Chemistry and Biochemistry, and 5% as Departments of Chemistry and Physics. Only 6% of accredited programs were combined into natural sciences departments with several other disciplines, including Biology, and usually these were found at smaller institutions. It is important to note that Departments of Chemistry and Biochemistry usually changed their name from Departments of Chemistry to better reflect the nature of faculty research and that these Departments are completely independent of Biology Departments.

Typically, the combination of these two programs signals that both are weak and cannot be sustained on their own. Maintaining this system could result in:

- Difficulty recruiting and maintaining high quality students for both programs.
- Difficulty in obtaining extra-mural funding by researchers in both programs.
- Diminishment in status of the degrees earned by our students in either program and lower credibility for letters of recommendation which we write for our students.
- Additional difficulties in obtaining accreditation for the Chemistry program (all of our peer institutions have American Chemical Society accredited chemistry programs).
- Difficulty attracting and maintaining highly qualified colleagues.

In the opinion of the faculty of both departments, the joint department does not in any way help to “position us for the future”. It is interesting to note, that among our peer institutions that offer biochemistry programs, six of them have Chemistry and Biochemistry Departments that are completely independent of the Biology Departments. Smaller schools with biochemistry programs often configure them as interdisciplinary programs jointly managed by otherwise separate departments of biology and chemistry.

There is support for this proposal beyond just the Department of Biology and Chemistry as the Faculty Senate on September 24th unanimously passed the following resolution: “*Resolved*, The Faculty Senate of Radford University hereby supports the separation of the Department of Biology and Chemistry into separate departments and recommends to the administration and the Board of Visitors that both the Biology and Chemistry programs receive departmental status.”

### **Impact on Affected Programs and Constituencies:**

There will be no changes in course offerings or day-to-day operations and as such there will be no impact on other programs, students, or constituencies.

Current curricular and research collaborations between the programs and between individual faculty members will continue. Autonomous Department status presents no barriers to such collaborations and has not done so in the past.

**Budgetary Impacts:**

This change will be budget-neutral. Currently, the merged department has a chair who is a biologist, and a coordinator for the chemistry program, who manages course scheduling and the budget for the chemistry program. Neither of these two people is being compensated for the additional duties and responsibilities that they assumed with the merger. There is one shared department secretary. Biology and Chemistry faculty currently maintain separate committee structures (e.g., personnel, curriculum, awards, etc.). We are formally re-establishing our separate department identities while continuing to share administrative costs until such time as the financial crisis is over. Shared administrative costs would include a common chair (with a joint appointment in both departments) and shared secretarial services.