

Proposal for a 5-year Masters Program

We are proposing the creation of a 5-year joint BA/MS program in Biological Sciences, meant to attract (and limited to) the brightest students at Smith College. In essence, this program provides students interested in advanced work in the Life Sciences with a strong incentive- a one year reduction in the time normally required to get both a Bachelors and a Masters Degree. From the College's perspective, this program would likely supply an increased pool of applicants for the MS degree, and would guarantee an increase in the quality of those applicants. Finally, from the faculty perspective, this program means that students that have been recruited, nurtured and trained in a lab can be retained for an additional year, permitting longer-term research undertakings.

The proposal originates in the Biology Dept., but may eventually come to encompass not only the other programs (Neuro, Biochem, etc...) but other departments as well. Of particular promise, in my judgment, would be a BS/MS in Bioengineering, and a joint degree in Bioinformatics/Biomathematics (with Math and Comp Sci).

This program will also have salutary effects on the research opportunities for undergraduates- serving as an incentive for earlier and more intensive involvement, and also supplying a cadre of experienced peer-mentors for the incoming research students. We would expect this program to be highly competitive, and only students with demonstrated ability would be accepted into this "fast track". The number of outside students that would be accepted into the MS program would likely remain the same, although that will depend in part on the eventual target size of the program.

This initiative will require certain commitments from the faculty, particularly in the form of courses suitable for the MS students. Given the current structure of the bio offerings, many such courses are already in place. More important is the need to offer significantly higher stipends to the students in the 5-year program, in order to make competitive offers. Given that the stipends would only be offered for one year, however, the overall cost to the College will not likely be dramatic. We are mindful of the fact that we are "giving up" a year of potential revenue (relative to the 2-year MS option currently in place), but these opportunity costs may well be worth it in exchange for a higher quality crop of applicants.

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