New Academic Program Proposal
Oregon State University – Master in Natural Resources

Oregon State University seeks Board approval to offer an instructional program leading to a Master in Natural Resources.

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY – MASTER IN NATURAL RESOURCES

1. Describe the purpose and relationship of the proposed program to the institution’s mission and strategic plan.

The Master in Natural Resources (MNR) degree program aligns with Oregon State University’s (OSU) land grant mission to educate the citizens and workforce of Oregon, focuses on professional programs and its strategic plan. The MNR program advances one of OSU’s signature areas, the Science of Sustainable Earth Ecosystems. The program promotes interdisciplinary education on most pressing regional, national, and global issues in natural resources. Graduates from these programs are an identifiable need for the State of Oregon that fits within OSU’s objective to “help attract and invest the public and private resources necessary to build academic programs and infrastructure that address the emerging economic and social needs of the people of Oregon.” The program also contributes in developing a global competitive workforce and an informed capable citizenry.

Managing natural resources is a complex problem involving production, ecological, social, economic, and ethical systems, each of which affect and, in turn, are affected by the others. The proposed online MNR degree is designed to engage university scientists and world-wide natural resource professionals in a process that integrates diverse perspectives to address natural resource challenges at the state, regional, national, and international levels. The MNR degree will assist agency, industry, tribes, and Non-governmental Organization (NGO) personnel in meeting their self-improvement and career-advancement goals without having to leave their jobs. It will be helpful to anyone looking for an advanced degree in natural resource management, especially people with at least two years of experience in natural resource disciplines, who have place-based jobs and are unable to relocate to Corvallis.

2. What evidence of need does the institution have for the program?

OSU based the need for the MNR degree on correspondence from natural resource agency personnel and from students inquiring about availability of an online MNR degree. Many students in current natural resources graduate certificate programs at OSU have expressed interest in earning a master’s degree in natural resources. At this time, there is no degree at OSU that satisfies this request and only four online MNR programs exist in the entire country; thus, the intent of this proposal is to assist OSU in filling this instructional gap. OSU also conducted a preliminary needs assessment through consultation with employee education and training representatives of numerous state and federal natural resource
management agencies, and with other natural resource educational institutions, who all affirmed the need for this program.

3. Are there similar programs in the state? If so, how does the proposed program supplement, complement, or collaborate with those programs?

None of the programs offered by the Oregon University System provide for a graduate level curriculum in natural resources. Most programs that address issues and questions of natural resources are at minimum two-year degrees that require a thesis. The intensity, breadth, and integrative components of the proposed MNR make this a unique effort to OSU within the Oregon University System. The MNR degree will be offered as a non-thesis option only, similar to a Master of Business Administration, Master of Agriculture, or Master of Forestry.

4. What new resources will be needed initially and on a recurring basis to implement the program? How will the institution provide these resources? What efficiencies or revenue enhancements are achieved with this program, including consolidation or elimination of programs over time, if any?

OSU Ecampus will provide funding for program administration for the first three years and for the development or modification of courses for online delivery. This degree will be funding neutral or profitable for all colleges and departments in the program. OSU proposes a .25 FTE Director and one .20 FTE program assistant. Beyond this, the proposed program employs currently available resources at OSU. The MNR is expected to be self-sustaining from tuition within two to three years after its initiation.

All appropriate University committees, the OUS Provosts’ Council, and an External Review team from Arizona, Idaho, and Washington have positively reviewed the proposed program.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE COMMITTEE

The OUS Provosts’ Council recommends that the Board’s Academic Strategies Committee authorize Oregon State University to establish an instructional program leading to a Master in Natural Resources, effective Fall 2010. With Committee approval, a five-year follow-up review of this program will be conducted in 2015-16.

(Committee action required.)