

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 3-20

**Recommendation: The School of Forest Resources and
Environmental Science requests to Transition to a College**



Michigan Technological University

School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science

Memo

Date: September 2, 2019

To: Jacqueline Huntoon, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

From: Andrew J. Storer, Dean of the School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science

Re: Transition to a College

The School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science requests to transition to a College. This transition is supported by the administration and the faculty in the School, and has been very positively received in discussions with alumni. The School requests to transition to the College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science. The Forestry program at Michigan Tech is ranked 4th in the country by College Factual, and has a history of high national rankings. Transitioning to a College will enhance the standing and rankings of all our programs through recognition of the value that the University places on the unit, and through the opportunities to broaden the unit to help meet the future needs of society and the environment. Broadening the unit will also help attract a greater diversity of students and faculty through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary programs, and an enhanced national reputation.

The History of the Current Academic Unit

The transition to a College is the logical next step in the in the history of the School as reflected by the development of the current School from a forestry department over the last 80+ years. Forestry at Michigan Tech began when a Forestry Department was formed in 1936. This was followed by the formation of the Institute of Wood Research (IWR) in 1947 and the Ford Forestry Center in 1954. The merger of these three entities to form the School of Forestry and Wood Products in 1967 coincided with the year that the first graduate degrees were offered in the School. In 2002, the name of the School was changed to Forest Resources and Environmental Science to better reflect the broadening areas of emphasis in the School. Since 1936, the School has offered a BS in Forestry, and this degree (along with the professional Masters of Forestry program that started in 2004) is accredited by the Society of American Foresters. The MS in Forestry degree was first offered in 1967, with the PhD in Forest Science added in 1987. A PhD degree in Forest Molecular Genetics and Biotechnology was added in 2001, and in 2004 Masters degrees in Forest Ecology and Management, Forest Molecular Genetics and Biotechnology, and Applied Ecology were spun off the MS in Forestry program. In 2013 a second professional master's degree, the Masters of Geographic Information Science was offered for the first time. The broadening of the undergraduate degree programs started in 1998 with the addition of the BS in Applied Ecology and Environmental Science, and this was followed by BS in Wildlife Ecology and Management in 2005 (renamed Wildlife Ecology and Conservation in 2019) and the BS in Natural Resources Management in 2015. The School also had a BS in Wood Science from 1975 until 2003, and is starting a related minor in Forest Biomaterials in Fall 2019. The breadth of current offerings, and the plans for future interdisciplinary offerings make it appropriate for the School to be relabeled as a College at Michigan Tech.

Future Growth and Organization



Michigan Technological University

School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science

SFRES intends to grow substantially in the coming years with increased numbers of undergraduate and graduate students, and increased research activity, consistent with University goals. The transition to a College will support this enrollment and research growth by elevating the stature of the unit. As a new College, the College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science does not intend to have traditional departments. To enhance shared governance, provide opportunities for mid-career faculty involvement in College administration, and enable the dean to increase the focus on research development and advancement activities, the new College will have roles of division or program coordinators. These roles will enable the unit to remain a cohesive structure while more efficiently managing growing programs. Currently the School recognizes programmatic areas in Forestry, Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, Applied Ecology and Environmental Science, Forest Molecular Genetics and Biotechnology, Geospatial Sciences, and Forest Biomaterials. These areas will form the basis of the areas for which program coordinators will have responsibility. Faculty will be able to work freely across program areas, as is currently the case. The College will also continue to administer the Ford Center and Forest as its field campus, and this will continue to be overseen by the Director of that facility. The organizational changes and short-term growth can be achieved within the constraints of the existing general fund budget. Any future requests for resources will be supported by the significant growth demonstrated by the College.

The College as an Integral and Essential Part of Michigan Tech

The transition to a College will send a clear signal to alumni, donors, employers, and funding agencies that the unit shares the same support and relevancy of the other units on campus. Currently, the School Business and Economics is also proposing a transition to the College of Business. Given the long-standing College of Engineering and the College of Science and Arts, and the establishment of the Pavlis Honors College and the newly created College of Computing, the need to transition to a College at this time is all the more important. This also benefits the entire campus in that governance, policies, and procedures will be simplified by having all these units as Colleges.

Faculty and Staff Input

The potential for the School to transition to a College has been discussed at faculty and staff meetings during the Spring 2019 semester. At that time, no opposition to the concept was identified, and faculty and staff were invited to communicate any reservations about this transition to the dean. Subsequent discussion at the faculty and staff retreat in summer 2019 also occurred, and a secret ballot of faculty through survey monkey was then conducted. Of the 28 respondents, 25 indicated support for the transition, and 3 abstained from the vote. Comments provided in the survey instrument were very positive about the transition and the timing of this change.

Achieving our Vision

The vision of SFRES is “To be a global leader in the development and communication of science and technology related to the understanding, stewardship, and conservation of natural systems, of which humans are an integral part”. To be a global leader in this area, the College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science is strongly positioned within a Technological University. The College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science will enhance the visibility of the University in the areas of environmental stewardship, conservation, and sustainability of natural resources. These issues will become increasingly critical as society looks to understand and manage the impacts of the 4th industrial revolution on natural systems and the environment. The new College will be an active participant in the current Tech Forward initiatives, as these emphasize development and communication of science and technology, as well as the importance of humans. Future programs that link natural resources and forests with computing, big data, and emerging technologies will position us to develop educational and research opportunities that



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expand our scope and address societal needs in the coming decades that are critical for humans and for the environment.