



BOARD OF REGENTS

SUMMARY OF ITEM FOR ACTION, INFORMATION OR DISCUSSION

TOPIC: Authorization for UMCES to Seek Accreditation for Joint Degrees

COMMITTEE: Education Policy

DATE OF COMMITTEE MEETING: June 6, 2012

SUMMARY: The attached document constitutes a request from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science for Board of Regents' authorization to seek accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for the joint award with other USM institutions of graduate degrees in Marine-Estuarine-Environmental Sciences (MEES). The document outlines the scope, background and benefits of a joint-degree arrangement. Dr. Don Boesch, president of UMCES, will be at the meeting to present the request and respond to questions.

ALTERNATIVE(S): The Regents may recommend that UMCES retain its status as a non-degree-granting institution.

FISCAL IMPACT:

CHANCELLOR'S RECOMMENDATION: That the Committee on Education Policy recommend that the Board approve the request from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science to seek accreditation for joint degrees.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

DATE:

BOARD ACTION:

DATE:

SUBMITTED BY: Irwin L. Goldstein

301-445-1992

irv@usmd.edu

Authorization of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science to seek accreditation for jointly awarding graduate degrees in Marine-Estuarine- Environmental Sciences

Request: The required governing board authorization to seek accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for the award of graduate degrees.

- This will enable UMCES to begin the first phase (Exploration) of the four phase accreditation process.
- The Exploration phase involves consultation with the Middle States Commission to decide whether to apply and to make any necessary institutional changes. UMCES will report to the Board of Regents before taking the next step, Application.
- Application is the most intensive phase, entailing a formal Accreditation Readiness Report and site visits.
- The whole process through final Accreditation may take two years.

Scope: Accreditation will be sought for the award of M.S. and Ph.D. degrees jointly with the University of Maryland, College Park, and, by mutual agreement, with other University System institutions authorized to award graduate degrees in Marine-Estuarine-Environmental Sciences (UMB, UMBC and UMES).

- UMCES and the University of Maryland, College Park have completed a memorandum of understanding for the joint award of M.S. and Ph.D. degrees once UMCES is accredited.
- The joint degrees will be awarded to students who complete their training in UMCES, but may also take courses at UMCP or other participating USM institutions.
- UMCES will not award these degrees on its own, but may directly award course credits and certificates to support non-degree professional development.

Background: Since its inception 33 years ago, UMCES has been a key participant in the System-wide Graduate Program in Marine-Estuarine-Environmental Sciences (MEES) Program, the System's oldest, largest and arguably most successful multi-campus graduate program.

- In recent years, over half of the students receiving M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in this program have been directed by UMCES professors and housed in UMCES laboratories. In addition, the UMCES faculty has taught over two-thirds of the MEES courses.
- UMCES faculty members are granted graduate faculty status at UMCP and the degrees for these have been awarded by UMCP and, occasionally, other System institutions.
- The MEES Program has been subject to an external review and several internal reviews that have identified a number of needed curricular and administrative improvements that await implementation.

Benefits: Accreditation would offer several benefits to graduate and professional education in environmental sciences and to the University System.

- Commensurate with its already substantial role in the MEES Program, UMCES would assume greater responsibility for improving the rigor of the MEES Program by more formal

commitments to curriculum delivery and recruitment of outstanding students. This would help the evolution of a very good program to a truly great graduate program.

- Diplomas would clearly recognize the association with UMCES, an internationally recognized research institution.
- UMCES would qualify for major grants for training and interdisciplinary research centers that require that the institution is an accredited degree-granting institution. This would enhance the System's competitiveness in attracting external support.
- UMCES would have the authority and flexibility to respond to the substantial demand for professional development courses that provide learning from some of the region's prominent marine and environmental scientists. Governmental and private employers generally require the formal award of credits in order to cover the costs of professional development courses. This would be an important new contribution to workforce development within Maryland by the System and would generate revenues for the educational enterprise.