
Proposal to Change the Name of the UW-Madison Department of Zoology to the UW-Madison Department of Integrative Biology

The UW-Madison Department of Zoology requests to change its name to the “UW-Madison Department of Integrative Biology” as of July 1, 2017. Discussions about the potential name change began in 2013 when the Department of Zoology faculty requested a name change to the graduate program only. Further discussions led to a more encompassing approach and the department faculty voted unanimously for this name change for all programs at a meeting on April 27, 2016. On December 6, 2016, the L&S Academic Planning Council unanimously approved the proposed name change. The University Academic Planning Council discussed the name change on April 20, 2017, and unanimously approved it. The department has been referring to itself as “iBio.”

While the name “Zoology” connotes an exclusive concern with animal biology, current research and teaching in the department has long been motivated by a desire to understand biological processes, rather than particular taxonomic groups. The department’s 22 faculty members focus on broad topics such as molecular and cellular processes, development, behavior, evolution, neurobiology, nutrient cycling, plant community dynamics, and forest fire ecology.

Teaching in the department is similarly broad. As the Department of Integrative Biology, the work would remain unchanged (including the undergraduate majors in biology and zoology), but would be more readily visible to those who may be confused by the nineteenth-century term, “Zoology.” UW-Madison has the top-ranked department of Zoology in the U.S. yet there are only four such departments with this antiquated name (of 114) and none of the others are at major research universities. Graduate students especially, will find it easier to compare programs.

Although there is no perfect name that both captures the distinctiveness of the work of the department and avoids all overlap with existing names, the faculty and staff unanimously chose the name “Integrative Biology” as the best choice among options available. They are convinced it is likely to be flexible for future needs, and aligns the department with similar departments at peer universities. The word “integrative” signals that the scholarly work is focused on integration across biological systems and is not focused, say, on the cellular, developmental biological, neurobiological, or molecular emphases reflected in other department names when combined with the word “biology.” Although the words “biology” or “biological sciences” are used widely across campus, the combination of Integrative Biology is distinctive. There are many written testimonials from across campus in support of this name change, including from the Department of Botany, and from the dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALIS).