October 3, 2005

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For the consideration of the ABOR:

The Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology currently offers two programs of study (majors) leading to the Bachelor of Science degree: 1) Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and 2) General Biology. The General Biology major is promoted as a biology major for students wishing to have an integrative approach to biology as opposed to focusing on one area or approach. We believe that many students are served by maintaining this sort of interdisciplinary and integrative approach to biology. Indeed, there are currently 531 students in the major, making it the second-largest major in the College of Science. In fact, one in every five students in the College is a General Biology major.

The use of the term “General Biology” is a relic of the reorganization of biology on campus some 25 years ago, and is unique among our peer institutions. Throughout the United States, the standard designation for the undergraduate degree in Biology is either “Biology” or “Biological Sciences”. Among our peers, 14 of 15 offer a generalized Biology program, with programs varying from highly prescribed to very individualized. Of these 14 programs, 13 use the term “Biology” or “Biological Sciences”. The term “General Biology” is never used.

In addition, the term “General Biology” lacks effectiveness for several reasons. First, adding a descriptive term (“General”) to “Biology”, while appropriate for those subdisciplines involving specific systems or approaches (e.g., “Molecular Biology”, “Evolutionary Biology”), is redundant, because Biology is in fact general, encompassing all levels of organization. As the major is currently designed, all levels or organization are studied by the student, ranging from genomics, organic chemistry and biochemistry at the smallest scale, to Evolution at the largest scale. Second, at a more practical level, our incoming undergraduates frequently are confused by the term “General Biology”, and graduates face the necessity of explaining to employers or other institutions what “General” Biology is. An explanation along the lines of “it’s the same as Biology” does the University of Arizona a disservice. Third, and most fundamentally, the term “General Biology” refers to no known area or field of knowledge. Students should not be asked to major in something that is not, in fact, a distinct area of study.
I presented the information contained in this letter to a meeting of the College of Science Department Heads on September 9, 2005, and all the DHs agreed that the name of the major should be changed to “Biology.”

For the above reasons, EEB wishes to discontinue using the term “General Biology” as soon as possible. Revising the name of the major will appropriately convey the non-specialized and integrative nature of the program while eliminating redundancy, reflecting the prevailing name choice at peer institutions, and increasing the clarity of the major for our most important stakeholders, our students, and their future employers.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Richard E. Michod
Professor and Department Head
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

[Signature]

The proposed name change was unanimously agreed to by the College of Science Department Heads and myself.

Joaquin Ruiz-Bean, College of Science

[Signature]

Oct 5, 05

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Per conversation on 11/2/05 w/ Bruce Welsh. Also change of geology/mineral.

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