

2019-2021 Biennium Internal Budget Proposal Narrative

Division: Huxley College of the Environment

Evaluation Criteria: Proposals will be evaluated on every aspect of this template. It is highly recommended that the narrative portion touch on each area. Proposals forwarded to UPRC by unit leaders will be discussed at UPRC and authors are encouraged to attend so that they may answer questions and provide clarification.

Title: Mountain Research Skills Certificate Salary Support

- This is a revised version of a previously submitted budget proposal.
If box is checked please briefly outline any significant changes and/or indicate why it is being resubmitted.

[Click here to enter text](#)

Statement of Purpose: *(What is the challenge or opportunity being addressed? How does the proposal address this challenge or opportunity? Limit response to 1 page – please link to any existing reports, data, supplemental materials, etc.)*

We propose creating a half time NTT instructorship that allows Mountain Environments Research Institute (MERI) courses to be taught within the banded tuition that students ordinarily pay rather than through Extended Education. The new Mountain Institute was created by faculty in four colleges and seven departments to provide students and faculty with increased opportunities for field education and research in remote environments. MERI faculty have both taught research and safety skills and linked research funding proposals with student engagement and learning through the Mountain Research Skills Certificate (MRSC) since 2016.

The MRSC creates pathways for jobs and internships with three basic constituencies – a) resource agencies such as the US Forest Service and Park service and Washington Department of Natural Resources, b) recreation groups including the USFS as well as the Northwest Avalanche Center, the Mountaineers, Patagonia, REI, etc, and c) resource companies including geology, land management, and environmental consulting. The MRSC is a professional certification developed in cooperation with these stakeholders that gives students a major advantage in the job market.

This certificate is unique in the United States and has been attracting student interest from within Western and from around the country. Currently the MRSC is offered through Extended Education because the instructor for the core courses (who is also the Director of MERI) is research faculty and not base-funded. Through EE, the certificate costs students approximately \$9500 and enrolls 14 students on average per quarter.

Many students express interest in the program but ultimately decline to enroll due to the high cost of tuition when offered as an Extended Education program. If the program was available as part of the normal tuition structure, based on documented student interest from alumni and transfer surveys as well as email inquiries, we would expect 40-50 students per year.

In addition to discouraging new applications, the current tuition structures hurts those students that do begin the program. They often drop out because of the tuition costs – over 50% of students who have taken two courses in the MRSC have failed to finish it before graduation,

always citing the tuition burden as the major reason. Funding this proposal will allow students of all economic means to gain the benefit of this professional certification and it will lead to an immediate increase in the number of students enrolled in the certificate courses.

Additionally, the success of the mountain institute is drawing donors who are willing to support student scholarships and research fellowships. The new Mountain Environments Research Institute has been very successful in recruiting and providing opportunities for students, creating WWU/private partnerships, and representing the university at the regional, national, and international levels. All of this activity requires that the MRSC is available to all students and this request will fund salary and benefit support to make that happen.

Anticipated Outcome(s):

- Students will be more competent in field skills and safety – which will lead to positive outcomes at Western during fieldtrips and then in various industry jobs and internships
- Increased student diversity in STEM when all students are able to access the MRSC without economic limitations
- Students will be more attractive for professional internships and jobs with resource agencies, recreation groups, and resource companies
- Enhanced interdisciplinary environmental student and faculty research grant submission
- Increased student experiential learning both regionally and internationally as students participate in field research
- Enhanced WWU public visibility and stature

Metrics: *(How will outcomes be measured? Please include current data points and goals. If this proposal will have any impact on the [Overall Metrics](#) included in the university's strategic plan, please indicate which specific ones here.)*

- Employment figures for MRSC graduates – currently 100% of students who have been involved in this program have immediately progressed to a graduate degree or gained employment or an internship after graduation, but the overall numbers are low
- Increase in the diversity of MRSC students as we are able to open the program up to a wider number of students from all backgrounds and economic situations
- Increase in student recruitment and increase in the number of field research students graduated – both the number of MRSC students as well as the overall impact on participation units including Environmental Science, Anthropology, Biology, Geology, Fairhaven College, etc
- Increase in the number of professional internships for WWU students created as our partners see the success of the program
- Increase in donations to the mountain institute with greater WWU public visibility and student success
- Increase in the number of student research fellowships received annually
- Social media metrics for the MERI internet locations

How does this proposal align with your departmental/divisional strategic priorities? *(Please reference specific items from the recently completed departmental/divisional strategic plan and attach a copy.)*

This program directly addresses Huxley Strategic Goal I Objective 1 (Improve regional and national recruitment of undergraduate students, with attention to the WWU mission statement and goals regarding changing student demographics and financial need) and Goal II Objective 1 (Continue to review, revise, and develop academic programs to ensure relevance and expand opportunities). This new interdisciplinary academic program is unique both at Western and nationally. It is relevant and targeted towards the professional goals of our students and expands their opportunities for employment, internships, and graduate degrees. By providing the Mountain Research Skills Certificate as part of the student's normal banded tuition, it will open the program up to all students regardless of financial situation and greatly improve regional and national recruitment. MERI has received emails from students around the country asking about the certificate and if the costs are part of the normal WWU tuition, recruitment will be greatly enhanced.

The certificate also addresses Huxley's top three Opportunities from our SCOT analysis.

1. Public/professional interest in environment issues: The entire rationale for this certificate program is to develop student abilities to safely and effectively research the environment under field conditions. The certificate will create work ready graduates and pathways for public involvement in environmental research and conservation.
2. Location: The certificate was created at WWU because our proximity to the Olympic and Cascade mountains offers an unique teaching and research landscape for our students. The certificate has the potential to draw students from across the country because of our unique location. And the certificate prepares students to work in and protect this environment.
3. Societal need for environmental leadership and problem solving: The coursework for the certificate includes Conservation of Biological Diversity, Outdoor Program Development, and Introduction to Ecosystem Management. This curriculum was developed in conjunction with our industry and agency partners to address this gap and each course emphasizes problem solving both in group projects and in individual student work. This is the fundamental challenge of the 21st Century and the MRSC coursework is specifically addresses this need.

How does this proposal support the University Mission and Strategic Objectives? *(Please refer to the [2018-2025 Strategic Plan](#) and indicate which core theme(s) this proposal will help achieve.)*

Goal #1 – This certificate fosters an active dynamic learning environment in the real world. This practical approach leads to enhanced outcomes for internships and community engagement and allows students to follow their intellectual curiosity no matter where on the planet it leads. It ensures high quality education beyond the classroom and creates the intellectual and logistical framework for research and scholarship.

Goal #2 – The certificate provides the skills to work safely in any environment, but is focused on the specific mountain environments that make Western so unique. The Olympics and Cascades are classrooms that provide skills useful around the world and the mountain institute puts students directly in these environments and encourages them to learn and grow. The institute's primary foci are Science, Societies, and Skills and this insistence on the entire socio-ecological system provides a unique understanding of the environment in which we live – an environment shaped by traditional uses as well as modern resource extraction and recreation. The mountain

institute is explicitly linked to the greater community of mountain stakeholders through all of its endeavors.

Goal #3 – A primary goal of the mountain institute and the MRSC is encouraging international exchanges because of the value it gives both to WWU students who travel abroad and to international students who come to Western. In 2019, the mountain institute brought ten Peruvian students to Western with the help of US State Department funding and these students were active participants in the Mountain Research Skills coursework. Diversity must include internationalization because our world is an increasingly connected one and only by working with citizens of other countries can students best understand both the world and our society. The institute also encourages students to venture out into the world and hike and be physically active as they do research and participate in conservation activities.

Goal #4 – The mountain institute empowers all students to follow their intellectual curiosity. It provides international exchange opportunities as a way of expanding student perspectives of what is possible. It provides student research grants to help offset financial burdens for students. It encourages collaborations with local community partners and provides safety trainings that help students build confidence in themselves in both field research expeditions and everyday life.

What are the consequences of not funding this proposal?

Currently, there are a huge number of opportunities opening up as the Mountain Institute and the MRSC certificate are being developed. However, because many students cannot afford the Extended Education tuition, the total number who remain in the program is low. There is a great deal of student and professional interest in this certificate, but it cannot succeed over the long term without making it part of the normal student banded tuition. Many potential industry and other stakeholder collaborations, internships, donations, and grants will be lost and our relationships with our partners damaged if we cannot find a way to fund the salary of the instructor for these courses. Low income, international, and minority students will be the primary beneficiaries if this proposal is funded.

What alternatives were explored?

Along with using Extended Education to create and begin this certificate, grant funding and philanthropic donations have all been sought as alternatives. US State Department funds are supporting the program during Winter, 2019 for example. However, this is only for one academic quarter and each of these other possibilities has intermittent funding delivery. Other funding sources cannot ensure the delivery of these courses and provide the certainty that students will be able to complete the certificate in a timely manner without a substantial financial burden.

Which units (departments, colleges, etc.) will be involved?

Huxley College is the home of the institute and of the director. However, MERI faculty are from four colleges – Fairhaven, Humanities and Social Services, Huxley, Science and Engineering - and seven departments around the university – Anthropology, Biology, Environmental Science, Environmental Studies, Fairhaven, Geology, Recreation.

Equipment needed:

None

For major (>\$25k) purchases, please provide the following information.

Item:

None

Purpose:

Click here to enter text

Cost:

Click here to enter text

Anticipated Useful Life:

Click here to enter text

Replacement Cost if any:

Click here to enter text

Human Resources *(Complete the table below adding additional rows if necessary):*

<i>Position Title</i>	<i>Total Headcount</i>	<i>Total FTE</i>	<i>Salary and Benefits per FTE</i>	<i>Total Cost</i>
<i>NTT Senior Instructor</i>	1	.5	\$59,274	\$59,274

Table above should match data on budget spreadsheets submitted with this proposal. Complete the spreadsheet to get salary, benefit, and total cost amounts. Contact your division budget officer with questions.

Operating & Maintenance Costs (include service contracts, installation costs, etc.):

None

Space Requirements:

What type of space is needed for this proposal? (e.g., private office, lab space, group work/study space, etc.)

No new space

What features must this space have? (e.g., fume hoods, plumbing, 3-phase power, etc.)

None

What needs can be accommodated within your existing space?

Everything require for this proposal

How much new space will be required?

None