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University of Montana Paleontology Center

Summary of Center Review Report

The University of Montana Paleontology Center (UMPC), located in the Clapp Building, was established in 2005 and includes a Collections Room, Preparation Lab, and exhibit areas. UMPC supports research and education by providing access to their large collections to both scientists and students. In addition, UMPC also serves the general public through tours, outreach activities, and on-line access to UMPC resources.

UMPC is staffed by a part-time Director, a full-time Collections Manager, students, and volunteers. Exhibits are open during business hours, and tours can be scheduled. In addition, UMPC maintains an informative and interactive website, including the ability to remotely browse collections.

The Curator of Paleontology of University of Washington’s Burke Museum, Elizabeth Nesbitt, provided a detailed and supportive review of the UMPC. Dr. Nesbitt highlighted the importance of the Center’s work in bringing science to the community, and especially to youth; her discussion of the Center as a recruitment tool for STEM is noteworthy. Dr. Nesbitt encouraged the University to be strategic about the future of the Center, and especially in light of current budgetary concerns.

Purpose

UMPC identifies its purpose as “…to serve as a center for research, teaching, and public outreach while also helping preserve the fossil and geological heritage of Montana, the American West, and other regions of the world.”

The Center is engaged in various activities that broadly support the purpose, including traveling exhibits, online access for distant researchers and students, experiential learning and educational programs for youth.

Objectives

UMPC objectives are identified in the Center Review Report (October 2015) as the following:

* Serving scientists and researchers at University of Montana and those outside the University.
* Supporting the education of both undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Montana students.
* Public outreach, especially educational outreach to youth.

Review in terms of the University’s mission.

* Comments:

In the Five Year Report, UMPC identifies clearly how their work aligns with the University of Montana’s Strategic Plan, and particularly in the areas of **Partnering for Student Success, Education for the Global Century, Discovery and Creativity to Serve Montana and the World, and Dynamic Learning Environment**

* Does ECOS/Faculty Senate consider this center controversial? No.
* Is the relationship with academic units beneficial? Yes.
* Is the program revenue neutral or does it consume more resources than it generates? If so, is the use of University resources justified? The program is revenue neutral, with a record of external funding.
* Is the entity making progress toward objectives? Yes.

Recommendation: Continue. Further, UMPC would benefit from a strategic plan to support its continued service to researchers, scientists, students, and youth.

Justification: The University of Montana Paleontology Center is not only an important repository for thousands of specimens, but Center’s involvement in research, education, and outreach are impressive. The list of publications generated with the support of UMPC is lengthy, and serves to document the importance of the Center to researchers and scientists. University students benefit from the availability of the collection maintained by UMPC, and the public outreach efforts are fostering future generations of scientists. UMPC is an asset to the University of Montana, and supports the mission of the University. The external reviewer was identified UMPC as an important asset to the University and the region, and her encouragement to make plans for the future success of the Center at the Department and University levels are noteworthy.