TOPIC: PROPOSAL TO OFFER A MASTERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL

MANAGEMENT AT WESTERN STATE COLORADO

UNIVERSITY

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FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

I. <u>SUMMARY</u>

This consent item recommends approval for Western State Colorado University (WSCU) to offer a Masters of Environmental Management (MEM).

II. <u>BACKGROUND</u>

The following is summarized from WSCU's proposal:

A MEM is a professional terminal degree, specifically focused on the content understanding and methods necessary to managing the development of sustainable solutions in communities, environmental organizations, and public lands agencies. Utilizing the ecological diversity, natural resource wealth, and emerging sustainable community movements of the Colorado Rockies as its central classroom, Western's MEM offers interdisciplinary training for building environmental and community resilience. At its core, the program emphasizes entrepreneurial and systems-thinking approaches to environmental issues associated with increasing climate disturbances, natural resource Emphasis tracks include demands, and socio-economic insecurity. Sustainable and Resilient Communities (SRC) and Integrative Land Management (ILM). Western's MEM prepares students for environmental careers including: nonprofit development, sustainability coordinating for municipalities and universities, green business consulting, water and land conservation, and public lands management.

[The proposed degree] takes advantage of Western's nationally-known asset—the learning laboratories of the Gunnison Basin. From the sustainable community laboratories that our campus operations provide, to the diverse eco-regions surrounding campus, to the significant public lands agencies and environmental problem solvers working throughout the southern Rockies, this program will embody Western's mission of utilizing "its unique environments in the mountains of western Colorado" to elevate its "high standards of scholarship."

ROLE AND MISSION SUPPORT

This degree supports WSCU's statutory role and mission, which states, in part:

Western state Colorado university shall be a general baccalaureate institution with moderately selective admission standards. Western state Colorado university shall offer undergraduate liberal arts and sciences, teacher preparation, and business degree programs and a limited number of graduate programs. Western state Colorado university shall also serve as a regional education provider. §23-56-101, C.R.S.

EVIDENCE OF NEED AND DUPLICATION

Although this program is intended for a national student base, in the summer of 2012 [WSCU] surveyed alumni to measure the extent to which this program might benefit its graduates. Ultimately, 150 graduates answered the survey. Forty-five survey respondents identified themselves as "likely" or "very likely" to apply to the MEM program. Interviews with professionals in environmental fields revealed an urgent need for graduates who are able to use interdisciplinary approaches to create new solutions to complex problems. These agencies and professionals indicated their financial support of employees in pursuit of a graduate degree from WSCU. From this professional base, ten to fifteen student commitments and multiple MOUs are in development.

Similar, but not duplicate, programs at Colorado public institutions of higher education include University of Colorado Boulder's Masters of Environmental Studies, University of Colorado Denver's Masters of Environmental Sciences, and Colorado State University's Masters of Natural Resources Stewardship.

III. STAFF ANALYSIS

Pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes 23-5-129(6)(b), department staff finds that WSCU's proposed Masters of Environmental Management degree is consistent with the institution's statutory role and mission.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission approve Western State Colorado University's proposal to offer a Master's of Environmental Management (MEM).

V. <u>SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION</u>

Copies of all relevant materials are on file in the Academic Affairs Division and are available upon request.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

C.R.S. §23-5-129

- (6) While operating pursuant to a performance contract negotiated pursuant to this section, the governing board of a state institution of higher education:
- (b) Need not consult with nor obtain approval from the Colorado commission on higher education to create modify, or eliminate academic and vocational programs offered by the institution, so long as such creations, modifications, and eliminations are consistent with the institution's statutory role and mission. Institutions shall submit information to the department demonstrating that the creation or modification of an academic or career and technical education program is consistent with the institution's statutory role and mission. The Colorado commission on higher education shall have the authority to override the creation or modification of an academic or vocational program if the change made by the governing board is inconsistent with the institution's statutory role and mission.