

THE INTEGRATION OF THE SCIENCES AT WESTERN MONTANA COLLEGE,
DILLON, MONTANA ^{MAS}

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Western Montana College is a small (1200 students) liberal-arts college located in southwestern Montana. Starting in the fall semester of 1996, the science departments joined forces to form an interdisciplinary department of environmental sciences. This move was motivated by a desire to create an undergraduate program that involves meaningful integration of the sciences. As a result, we eliminated the traditional departments (e.g., biology, chemistry, geology, and physics), and formed a single department focused on field-based, environment-specific education. In order to obtain sufficient background in a particular science discipline, each student will choose a track in biology, chemistry, or geology. However, to provide integration, students will also take several field courses that require them to work as part of an interdisciplinary research team. In addition, each student will do a senior project or professional internship that incorporates several science disciplines. This approach has been tested through several projects incorporating more than five classes. Studies have been started on the effects of past mining in the Birch Creek drainage in the Pioneer Mountain Range, and the effects of the Dillon community on the Beaverhead River. We have also had one student in an internship with the USFS in a study of riparian zones. Another student completed a semester of research at Argonne National Lab in Chicago, IL. That work was in an environmental sciences lab studying the soil as a possible carbon sink for global emissions.