3-6-2024

**Merger Proposal**

**Introduction**. We propose to merge the Department of Neurosciences (DON) and the Department of Psychiatry (DOP). These departments reside in the College of Medicine and Life Sciences at the University of Toledo (UT). Each department has significant strengths, which would be complemented and enhanced with such a merger. Notably, many departments of psychiatry have PhD scientists running wet laboratories, typically focused on translational and basic neurosciences (including Ohio State University and the University of Cincinnati, here in Ohio). Scientists and clinicians in these departments mutually benefit from this juxtaposition, as it drives innovation and “cross” translation of research ideas from the bench to the bedside, and from the bedside to the bench. This is in alignment with the proposed, new mission statement of the National Institutes of Health, the college’s major funding institution, which is to **“*To seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and to apply that knowledge to optimize health and prevent or reduce illness for all people.*”** We feel that here at UT these departments would benefit in a similar manner, enhancing research education and clinical care in the behavioral health and neuroscience domains.

**Opportunities**. This merger would streamline operations, enhance collaborations between our clinical and basic faculty, and optimize resources to create strategic growth in both research and clinical care within the institution and in Northwest Ohio. Notably, the merger would stand up a full spectrum of formal educational opportunities *in one department* from High School (DON: Bioinformatics and wet lab camps), Undergraduate (DON: Neurosciences Major), Undergraduate Medicine education for the MD degree (DOP), graduate student education (DOP and DON) and Post-Doctoral training (DOP: Psychiatry residency and Child Fellowship, DOP and DON: PhD Postdoctoral research fellows) levels.

**Leadership**. The DOP and DON are currently chaired by Robert Smith, MD, PhD. Dr. Smith is a board certified, practicing psychiatrist in the DOP who also runs a wet laboratory in the DON. His leadership and relevant experience span the scope of the missions of these two departments. We propose that Dr. Smith would lead the new, integrated department, continuing in his current roles at the COMLS.

**Faculty and Staff**. The merged department would have about 30 faculty total (10 from the DON and 20 from the DOP). Each department currently has a 0.5 FTE administrator, which are effort-shared with two other departments at the COMLS. We propose that the merged department would have one full time (1.0 FTE) lead administrator. During the budget cutting process from the last three FY budget cycles, staff have been reduced to minimum viable levels in each department. Notably, the DOP has a staffing shortfall, in need of a 0.5 FTE coordinator to maintain accreditation for the Child and Adolescent Fellowship program. The merger would permit reassignment of duties from current support staff to cover this shortfall. Otherwise, we propose to maintain support staff at the currently reduced (from 3 years of cuts) levels, supporting the maintenance of excellence and growth of the following DOP or DON programs. Notably, *enrollment is stable or increasing* in all of these programs across all levels of learners (High school through postgraduate).

* Undergraduate Major in Neurosciences (Shared with NSM- Biological Sciences)(DON)
* M3 Undergraduate Medicine Clerkship (DOP)
* MD/PhD Program (DON)
* Psychiatry Residency Program (DOP)
* Neurosciences PhD track (DON)
* Bioinformatics PhD track (DON)
* BSPM thread for Undergraduate Medical Basic Sciences years (DOP)
* UT COMLS Translation Journal (DON)
* Bioinformatics and Wet Laboratory Summer Camps (DON)
* Research – Autism and PTSD labs (DOP)
* Research- Translational Neuroscience laboratories (DON)
* Resiliency and Lifestyle Medicine program (DOP)

**Strategic vision for the Department of Neurosciences and Psychiatry (DONP)**. This past January, the two departments co-hosted an annual research day event. With more than 35 scientific posters spanning basic to clinical research topics and more than 100 attendees including learners and faculty at all levels, this combined event demonstrated the potential for synergy between these closely aligned domains. The brain is at the root of all clinical matters in psychiatry, while behavioral health modification is the ultimate outcome for translational neurosciences research programs. Such a merger would move UT further towards the standard of excellence in the field, with brain scientists and brain clinicians working together to potentiate strategic goals, furthering the health and wellness of those afflicted with brain diseases.