Cornell
Veterinary Medicine

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July 31, 2025

Kavita Bala, PhD
Provost
300 Day Hall
Cornell University

Dear Provost Bala,

I am writing to request approval to merge the Department of Biomedical Sciences (BMS) and the Department of Molecular Medicine (MM), creating a new department within the College of Veterinary Medicine: the Department of Biomedical and Translational Sciences (BTS). Below I will outline the rationale, the proposed membership of the new department, and the process we used to gain support from college faculty.

Rationale

The main rationale for the merger of BMS and MM is five-fold:

1. *Scientific overlap*: The research interests in MM and BMS are partially overlapping, particularly in the areas of developmental biology and cancer biology (and also to some extent neuroscience). A number of faculty members who have one of these areas as their main discipline could readily fit in either department. Having two separate departments creates an unhelpful and artificial boundary between the two communities. A merger would bring together shared scientific expertise and mission under one academic umbrella.
2. *Collaborative research synergy*: The historical focus in MM is in mechanistic cell, molecular & structural biology and the expertise in BMS is concentrated in animal models of disease and pathophysiology. The merger of these two departments will bring together fundamental mechanistic research with disease-focused translational research, which will facilitate effective collaboration. For example, thematic "synergy hubs" could be created that align with the goals of funding agencies such as the National Institutes of Health or various private foundations which prioritize the development of new therapeutic modalities for specific diseases.
3. *Streamlining teaching efforts*: BMS is responsible for teaching Foundation Course 1 (Anatomy) and Foundation Course 3 (Physiology) in the DVM curriculum. MM is responsible for teaching Foundation Course 2 (Cell, Molecular Biology & Genetics). Under a merged department, the first three foundation courses will fall under the purview of the same leadership, which will allow for more streamlined coordination among course leaders. This will allow re-assignments of faculty members to courses that better fit their areas of expertise, which will in turn improve the educational

experience for students. The merged department will also provide strength in numbers to provide high-quality instruction of new undergraduate courses being developed in the area of cancer biology.

4. *Operational efficiency*: Both BMS and MM have recently lost some administrative staff. Rather than re-filling all of these, particularly given some shared tasks across the two departments and also given the current budget situation and financial outlook at the college and university, there is a unique opportunity now to assess staff strengths and growth areas, align individuals to responsibilities based on expertise and career development opportunities, and re-work job descriptions to increase efficiency.
5. *Department size*: With recent and anticipated attrition (retirements, moves) in both BMS and MM, and with limited opportunity to re-fill these positions in the near term due to the financial outlook, merging the departments allow us to buffer against the losses and maintain strength in numbers. Considering tenure-track/tenured members only, the merged department would have 31 faculty, which closely matches several other life sciences departments across the university including but not limited to Biomedical Engineering (BME), Chemistry & Chemical Biology (CCB), Ecology & Evolutionary Biology (EEB), and Molecular Biology & Genetics (MBG).

Proposed department membership (only full-time RTE and TT faculty listed below)

Name	Title	Current Dept	Main discipline
Adam Boyko	Associate Professor	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Paula Cohen	Professor	BMS	Reproductive sciences
Charles Danko	Associate Professor	BMS/Baker	Genetics & genome function
Arunika Das	Assistant Professor	BMS	Reproductive sciences
Mandi de Mestre	Professor	BMS/Baker	Reproductive sciences
Keila Dhondt	Senior Lecturer	BMS/M&I	Histology teaching faculty
Anushka Dongre	Assistant Professor	BMS	Cancer biology
Gerald Duhamel	Professor	BMS	Comparative Anat & Phys
Jacquelyn Evans	Assistant Professor	BMS/Baker	Genetics & genome function
Marnie FitzMaurice	Senior Lecturer	BMS	Anatomy teaching faculty
Andrea Flesken-Nikitin	Asst. Res. Prof.	BMS	Cancer biology
Brandon Hedrick	Assistant Professor	BMS	Comparative Anat & Phys
Antonia Jameson Jordan	Senior Lecturer	BMS	Cell biology teaching faculty
Jongmin Kim	Assistant Professor	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Michael Kotlikoff	Professor	BMS	Molecular Physiology
David Lin	Associate Professor	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Kelly Lyboldt	Assoc. Prof. of Prac.	BMS	Physiology teaching faculty
Paul Maza	Assoc. Prof. of Prac.	BMS	Anatomy teaching faculty
Allison Miller	Senior Lecturer	BMS/DCS	Anatomy teaching faculty
Alexander Nikitin	Professor	BMS	Cancer biology
William Ryerson	Senior Lecturer	BMS	Anatomy teaching faculty

John Schimenti	Professor	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Rafael Senos	Senior Lecturer	BMS	Anatomy teaching faculty
Praveen Sethupathy	Professor	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Glenn Simmons	Assistant Professor	BMS	Cancer biology
Robert Weiss	Professor	BMS	Cancer biology
Andrew White	Associate Professor	BMS	Cancer biology
Andrew Yen	Professor	BMS	Cancer biology
Jessica Hayward	Senior Res. Assoc.	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Michael Shanahan	Senior Res. Assoc.	BMS	Comparative Anat & Phys
Bo Shui	Senior Res. Assoc.	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Kristin Murphy	Senior Res. Assoc.	BMS	Genetics & genome function
Golnaz Morad*	Assistant Professor	BMS	Cancer biology
Carolyn Adler	Associate Professor	MM	Developmental biology
Marc Antonyak	Asst. Res. Prof.	MM	Cancer biology
Richard Cerione	Professor	MM	Cancer biology
Ruth Collins	Associate Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
Gunther Hollopeter	Associate Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
Saki Ichikawa	Assistant Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
Toshi Kawate	Associate Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
Natasza Kurpios	Professor	MM	Developmental biology
Linda Nowak	Associate Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
Richa Sardana	Assistant Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
Carolyn Sevier	Associate Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
Gregory Weiland	Associate Professor	MM	Molecular & Struct. Biology
William Katt	Senior Res. Assoc.	MM	Cancer biology
Kristin Wilson	Senior Res. Assoc.	MM	Cancer biology

** Dr. Morad was recently successfully recruited to BMS, but will not officially join until April 1, 2026.*

All current adjunct faculty, emeritus faculty, and research associates who are currently part of BMS or MM will also automatically become a part of BTS.

Process

The Chairs of both departments (Praveen Sethupathy, Chair of BMS; Toshi Kawate, Interim Chair of MM) led a rigorous, multi-step process. Each Chair held conversations about the idea of a merger, outlining the rationale, presenting the potential benefits and concerns, and providing an open forum for discussion, at department faculty meetings throughout the Fall 2024 semester. The Chairs then prepared a presentation for the Dean, summarizing the discussions with their respective faculty, and reviewing together any major concerns. For example, one concern that arose was with respect to whether the new department will represent a true merger, or whether it feel more like an “absorption” of the smaller department (MM) into the larger one (BMS). Several strategies were proposed by the Chairs,

and discussed and agreed upon with the Dean, to address this and any other important questions that were raised by faculty.

A survey across both departments was then conducted in late 2024 in order to determine the level of support for the merger, and also to determine whether there were any additional concerns that should be addressed. Among the 40 survey respondents, the category “for the merger” received the plurality of votes (n=17). 14 others were “neutral” toward the merger and did not have apprehensions about moving forward. This amounted to 31/40 faculty members who were either explicitly supportive or had no concerns about the proposed merger. Only 9 were not in favor of the merger, and of these, more than half only slightly leaned against. Most of the concerns stemmed from uncertainty about whether the merged department could preserve the scientific identity and positive culture of both existing departments. However, these concerns have significantly diminished, thanks to the many constructive discussions initiated by the Chairs. Even those who were initially opposed to the merger have begun to show greater enthusiasm. As a result, the Chairs interpreted the vote—though not unanimous at the time—as a positive indication of support for the merger. The results were presented to the Dean in December 2024, who agreed with the Chairs’ interpretation. These results were also reported to faculty members in December 2024 department meetings, during when faculty members were provided the opportunity to bring up any *new* issues or concerns (though there weren’t any). Department staff were kept informed and updated throughout this process as well.

In early 2025, the Dean presented the rationale for the merger to the Dean’s Council members. No concerns were raised. Following this, faculty and staff in both departments were notified by the Chairs that the Dean had given the green light to move forward with the merger. Subsequently, in March 2025, the Chairs initiated a three-month process to identify a department name. Specifically, they: (1) conducted department surveys in March 2025, (2) held follow-up discussions in department faculty meetings in April/May 2025, and (3) had email correspondence and final voting in late May 2025. After steps #1 and #2, the list of possible department names was winnowed to three. Based on the voting results of step #3, it was clear that Biomedical and Translational Sciences was the most strongly preferred.

The definition of "Biomedical" we use is "*the study of mechanisms at the levels of molecules, cells, organs, and systems that underlie normal health and/or disease*". There was broad (nearly unanimous) agreement that this definition is wide enough to cover both foundational molecular & structural biology research and the anatomy & pharmacology & physiology teaching. The definition of "Translational" we use is "*application of scientific discoveries to the development of new treatment modalities and approaches*." There also was broad (though not unanimous) appeal for this term, reflecting a healthy proportion of the merged department's labs' current work and/or future aspirations. The use of the term “Translational” also differentiates this department from all other life sciences departments in the university as there are no other academic units that include this term. In June 2025, the Dean surveyed Dean’s Council members for final comments about the chosen department name and no significant concerns were recorded.

Concluding remarks

I am confident that the creation of a new Department of Biomedical and Translational Sciences will bring together faculty with shared and complementary expertise, create collaborative research synergy, streamline teaching efforts, increase administrative efficiency, and maintain our tradition of high-quality education and innovative, impactful research during an otherwise challenging time in the history of the college and university.

I look forward to your thoughts on this important and exciting development for our college.

Sincerely,

Lorin D. Warnick, DVM, PhD
Austin O. Hooey Dean of Veterinary Medicine