



New Multidisciplinary Natural Science Minor Available to Students-- Astrobiology

Since late 2009, a new minor in astrobiology has been available. It is open to KU undergraduates, but will be especially appealing to students who are already majoring in one of the key core areas identified in the program: Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Geology, and Physics. We are the third university in the country to add this minor.

Astrobiology is conventionally taken to be concerned with the nature and detectability of life outside the Earth. It has grown considerably in the era of Mars rovers and the detection of planets orbiting other stars. Another aspect, and the one emphasized in the related research done at KU, concerns the effects of extraterrestrial events such as Solar flares on the Earth and its biota.

This subject is inherently multidisciplinary, and so the coursework for a minor reflects this. This makes it a good companion program for natural science majors who want to get a broad foundation in the other natural sciences, while picking up some upper-division work in one. Research in astrobiology is present as an option.

We have seen considerable student interest in this. However, the minor came on board without much fanfare, and its existence is not widely known; thus, this note.

The minor is certified in the Department of Physics and Astronomy, and is linked on our web page at

http://www.physics.ku.edu/~physics/undergraduate/ughandbook/UGhandbook_Minor.pdf

Requirements are:

Preparatory coursework should include calculus (MATH 121 or 116, with 121 the preferred path) and CHEM 184.

Additional credits in astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology or physics (ABCGP) are required as follows:

BIOL 150, Principles of Molecular and Cellular Biology (4)

GEOL 101, Intro. to Geology, GEOL 105, History of the Earth, or GEOL 121, Prehistoric Life (3)

ASTR 391, Physical Astronomy (3)

ASTR 394, Extraterrestrial Life (3) or 3 credits of undergraduate research in astrobiology.

6 credits of coursework in ABCGP at the 300-level or higher and not in the student's major field.