MSU OFFERS NEW DEGREE

Mississippi State University is the only institution in the State and one of three institutions in the southeastern portion of the United States to offer a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry. The degree program became effective July 1.

Biochemistry, according to Dr. Ben P. Barrentine, head of the department and professor of biochemistry at MSU, is a study of the chemistry of living matter, which attempts to decipher the chemical nature of all living things, including microorganisms, plants, and animals.

"We decided to offer a B.S. in Biochemistry because of student request and because a recent survey of industrial companies which hire biochemists indicated that there were as many openings for the B.S. degree as were available for M.S. or Ph.D. degrees," said Dr. Barrentine.

Dr. Barrentine stated that MSU currently has a large number of graduate students in other departments minoring in Biochemistry.

"Biochemistry is playing a strong-supportive role because people recognize 'biology plus chemistry' is a vital link in all science-related disciplines," he said.

Dr. Barrentine said that the first students that this program will attract will probably be pre-professional students.

"For those students contemplating a career in medicine, dentistry, or veterinary medicine, the new program embodies strong requirements in calculus, physics, and physical chemistry, as well as sophisticated offerings in the biological sciences," said Dr. Barrentine.

He stated that another advantage for students in this curriculum who are not accepted or decide not to enter professional school is that they will have an excellent preparation for other careers in the life sciences.

"Biochemists with a bachelor's degree are employed in a variety of industries concerned with human and animal nutrition, processing of foods, development of drugs and other medications, manufacture of chemicals for a wide range of uses, and also in the area of sales for these products," he said.

He added that they also participate in laboratory research universities and colleges, research institutes, hospitals, and governmental installations.

Dr. Barrentine explained many biochemists continue their education to the master's or doctoral levels.

"Advisory training makes available opportunities for teaching and independent research in colleges and universities," he said. "It also opens the way to research positions in industry and government laboratories."

According to Dr. Barrentine, the department, staffed with seven Ph.D. faculty members and associated with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station (MAPES), will give biochemistry majors an undergraduate degree enriched with research experience.

He said that all faculty members hold joint appointments with MAPES which is the principal funder of all Biochemical research.

"Biochemistry is in its infancy," said Dr. Barrentine. "We feel that the curriculum that MSU has instigated with a combined study-research approach, will open unlimited opportunities for our students."