

Date: Thu, 29 May 2003 18:09:52 -0400
To: office@unols.org
From: David Farmer <TheDean@gso.uri.edu>

cc to Mike Prince

Dr Tim Cowles:

Dear Tim,

This letter follows my earlier telephone discussion with you about the possibility of acquiring an Ocean Class ship.

The University of Rhode Island has recently entered into preliminary discussions with NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration on the possibility of acquiring a ship for both ocean exploration and academic research. This discussion came about due to Bob Ballard's recent arrival here, which has led to a major influx of exploration technology funded by various divisions of NOAA, including the Office of Exploration. NOAA is interested in having this instrumentation placed on a ship that is dedicated in part to exploration. Acquisition of such a ship is part of the Office of Exploration plan.

The ship under consideration is of the Navy T-AGOS class. The concept is that a ship of this class could be converted to function as an exploration platform, as required for NOAA's exploration program, while also fulfilling the requirements for an Ocean Class research vessel as defined in the UNOLS SMRs.

A cursory look at the T-AGOS class ship suggests that it is well suited for conversion. The ship is 224 ft. LOA, has twin screws, diesel electric drive, a bow thruster, adequate fuel capacity for range considerations, ample berthing areas and a general layout appropriate for oceanographic research. Shortfalls in available laboratory space, deck outfitting and configuration would have to be corrected.

We are in the very earliest stages of discussion as to how such a ship might be converted, managed and operated. It is the position of the University of Rhode Island that for this to be a viable option it must conform to the UNOLS SMRs for an Ocean Class ship, and be fully integrated into the UNOLS system including scheduling. Should such a plan turn out to be feasible, we would welcome the UNOLS Fleet Improvement Committee's participation in conversion planning and will work closely with them to ensure the best possible platform for the community. We also welcome any comments from the community at large.

At present we can do no more than indicate that this option might offer interesting possibilities. My purpose in sending this note is to ensure that the UNOLS committee is aware of these discussions. If, however, this moves beyond the discussion stage, I will immediately inform you and encourage UNOLS input and participation.

Sincerely,

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