The American Culture Studies Program is among Bowling Green State University’s most successful interdisciplinary programs. Drawing on the expertise of faculty in over a half dozen units, it supports a vital graduate program that has been successful in recruiting good students and placing its graduates in the face of a difficult job market. The ACS Program also offers an undergraduate major and a 200-level course that many undergraduates take to fulfill the University’s cultural diversity requirement.

The Program Review Committee’s Final Report praises the ACS program for its important contributions to interdisciplinary studies at BGSU and its history of innovation. It also notes the program’s national reputation. However, PRC also finds opportunities for improvement. These include developing a stronger collaborative relationship with the Department of Popular Culture, establishing sharper focus for the program, relying less heavily on masters students as instructors of record, and enhancing its assessment activities.

The document prepared by the ACS Executive and Policy Committees offers a critical yet constructive and cogent response to the PRC’s Final Report. Many of the points it makes—including the centrality of ethnicity and gender to American Culture Studies, the distinctiveness of the undergraduate ACS major, and the historic reasons for the recent decline in enrollment in the doctoral program—are important to have on the record and relevant to discussions of the Program’s future. Most importantly, the ACS response indicates a willingness to provide sharper focus for the Program and to collaborate more closely with faculty from the Department of Popular Culture in doing so.

I concur with the findings and recommendations of the Program Review Committee, subject to the following stipulations:

- I strongly endorse PRC’s recommendation for a reorganization of the ACS Program that will give it sharper focus. At the same time, I appreciate the concern, expressed in the ACS response, that the program must continue to reflect the breadth of the field. Therefore, while retaining the breadth necessary for a successful program, ACS should move in the direction of sharper focus.

- Faculty from the Department of Popular Culture must play a prominent role in reorganization of the doctoral program in American Culture Studies, as the PRC suggests. I understand that the PRC’s recommendation was not intended to exclude any participating departments from the interdisciplinary mix, but rather to make sure that Popular Culture was included. In like fashion, the ACS program feels it necessary that Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies are included. I agree that all three – and perhaps others – should participate in the reorganization.
As the PRC recommends, I shall appoint an ad hoc committee to make recommendations concerning reorganization of the ACS Program before the end of the current semester. However, I understand PRC’s recommendation of the number and nature of the tracks (two tracks, one in American Culture and a second in Popular Culture) to be illustrative rather than prescriptive. The ad hoc committee may wish to consider as many as three foci and should be free to define the nature of these in a manner that reflects the current state of the field (with the understanding that one area of focus will be popular culture).

Because conclusion of this cycle of program review has taken longer than anticipated, I shall set back the timetable for reorganization of the ACS program. While I plan to appoint an ad hoc committee before the end of the fall semester 2000, the committee will not begin its work until January 2001 and its report will be due in April 2001. Therefore, I will not consider suspending admissions to the ACS doctoral program for August 2001.

As PRC suggests, the College must attend to the delivery of courses fulfilling the University cultural diversity requirement. I have already begun discussions with the Director of the ACS Program to reduce reliance on masters students and increase the role of faculty in ACS 250: Cultural Pluralism in the United States, the Program’s cultural diversity course, beginning in the fall semester 2001. I shall also work with other units in the College to increase the range of courses fulfilling the cultural diversity requirement.

I agree with PRC that the College must develop a plan to enhance interdepartmental collaboration and promote faculty involvement with interdisciplinary programs without jeopardizing departmental programs. I have already begun discussions of these issues with Interdisciplinary Program Council and will continue to work with that body to develop a plan—which can then be discussed by chairs and directors in the College—rather than convene a special task force to address this issue.

While acknowledging that there is much work to be done, I congratulate ACS Program leadership and faculty for building an innovative interdisciplinary program and look forward to working with them to help it strengthen ACS and enhance its national visibility.

Donald G. Nieman, Dean

Concurred:

John W. Folkins, Provost