As the results of the program review process indicate, the Department of Romance Languages is fundamentally sound, performing effectively in most areas, and making important contributions to the College of Arts & Sciences. The department is staffed by an energetic group of faculty members who have joined the department in the past decade, provide students high quality instruction, and are productive scholars. (That the program review committee was unable to assess the quality of faculty research reflects shortcomings of the external reviewers’ report and the review process itself, not the faculty’s record.) Efforts to focus the French and Spanish curricula on Francophone and Latin American literature and culture is innovative, sharply defines the mission of the French and Spanish sections, and provides majors with a coherent educational experience. The department’s study abroad programs offer students rich opportunities to experience cultures and hone their language skills, although the department might well redouble its efforts to involve more students in these experiences. In addition to the French and Spanish programs, the department supports study in Italian, Latin, and classics, further contributing to liberal education and the study of foreign language and culture.

As is appropriate, the PRC final report calls attention to challenges facing the department and several matters that warrant attention. While the committee recognizes that each of the several language sections in the department faces issues that can best be addressed within the section itself, it notes that many issues would profit from department-wide discussion and that periodic department meetings to address these would help create a sense of common purpose and intellectual community. The report also calls upon the department to address a variety of problems including placement of students in entry-level courses, pre-service teachers’ performance on the PRAXIS exam, information provided to prospective students in the Undergraduate Catalog and departmental materials, the relationship between the AYA experiences and on-campus offerings, and the diversity of course offerings for majors.

Dr. Henry Garrity has offered a thorough and thoughtful response to the report. He welcomes the committee’s call for regular meetings of the entire department, serious consideration of placement exams, assessment of French and Spanish majors’ performance on the PRAXIS exam, a modern language lab, and assessment of student learning during the academic year abroad. However, he cautions against hasty action in adopting a placement exam or assuming that the results of the 2001 PRAXIS exam reveal shortcomings in the department’s curriculum. And he raises serious questions about the PRC’s assessment of the department’s personnel needs, recommendations for revisiting the French curriculum, and suggestions about adding diversity to offerings.

I concur with the findings and recommendations of the Program Review Committee, subject to the following stipulations:
In his response, Dr. Garrity finds the PRC’s recommendations concerning additional tenure track lines (Recommendation #2) vague. Given the limited number of new positions anticipated in the College during the next three or four years, the committee was understandably cautious about recommending that the department be given additional lines. While student demand is a factor in allocation of new tenure track lines—as the PRC notes—it is only one of many factors that the College must consider. There is no simple formula for making decisions on personnel budgets. Therefore, while the College can make no guarantees, it will carefully consider position requests, especially those that are calculated to help us build enrollments and spark student interest in things international and help create synergies with other departments or interdisciplinary programs.

The College will work with the department to offer incoming students appropriate placement tests if they are warranted. Given the ambivalence about placement tests expressed in Dr. Garrity’s response to the PRC report, we should proceed cautiously. I will discuss the matter further with the Chair and section leaders to determine whether misplacement of students is, indeed, sufficiently common to warrant a test.

The department should undertake a thorough review of information about its programs contained in the Undergraduate Catalog, brochures, and its web site to ensure that it is up-to-date, clear, and informative. Because Undergraduate Catalog revisions are due in the fall of 2002, the department should complete revisions of these materials by the end of the spring semester 2002 and submit them to the College for its review.

In gathering information on how best to create a modern language laboratory, I will involve both language department chairs—to draw on their expertise and to avoid creating an unwieldy committee that will only slow progress toward deciding what the options are and which best matches our needs and resources. My goal is to have recommendations for replacing the language lab in my hands by December 1, 2001.

Information about French and Spanish majors’ performance on the PRAXIS exams is incomplete. Nevertheless, the department should be proactive in this area. It should work with colleagues in the College of Education and Human Development to review student performance, identify areas of concern (if any), and devise a strategy for making necessary changes in advising and the curriculum that will prepare BGSU students to succeed. By December 2001, the department should submit to the College a brief analysis of student performance on the 2001 PRAXIS exam and how we might improve it. After the results of the 2002 PRAXIS exams are published, the department should update its report and develop a plan to enhance performance if the results indicate shortcomings in student preparation.

Dr. Garrity’s response to the PRC’s recommendation that the department reassess its curriculum and consider bringing courses in classical French literature back into its repertoire is quite persuasive. With the support of the College, the department has carefully redesigned its curriculum, developing a focus that is Francophone and modern.
This new orientation has been supported by the appointment of faculty members with expertise in these areas. The French section has commendably resisted the temptation to attempt to cover all areas of French literature, used limited resources effectively, and developed a coherent, forward-looking curriculum that is far more inclusive than traditional French curricula. Moreover, it appears to serve students well. Given the care that has gone into designing the curriculum, I believe that the department can better direct its attention to other issues confronting it. Given the other, more pressing issues that the department must address, I will not ask members of the French section to reassess the curriculum at this time. Of course, I strongly encourage the French faculty to use the assessment process to regularly consider whether the curriculum as currently constituted meets student needs.

Faculty scholarship is vital to the intellectual life of the department as well as to inspired, intellectually challenging teaching. Ideally, therefore, all tenured and tenure track faculty should be active in research. All indications suggest that the department’s faculty are productive scholars. Nevertheless, the department should have a differential workload policy in place to ensure that faculty who fall short of expectations for scholarly productivity carry a greater share of its instructional responsibilities. Such a policy is not intended to increase the number of courses offered but, rather, to ensure appropriate, equitable workloads. If there is no policy currently in place, the department should develop one by December 2001 and begin to implement it during the spring semester of 2002. If a policy exists, the chair should forward a copy to the College Office with a brief statement describing the manner in which it is administered.

Like other foreign language departments across the nation, the Department of Romance Languages faces challenges. However, it does so with a strong faculty of committed teachers and productive scholars, a carefully considered, focused, innovative curriculum, and attractive AYA programs. By vigorously pursuing the PRC’s recommendations and collaborating with colleagues in other departments and programs to build greater interest in international study, the department will strengthen its programs and enhance its many contributions to BGSU.

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Donald G. Nieman, Dean

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John W. Folkins, Provost

Concurred:  

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John W. Folkins, Provost