As the Program Review Committee’s (PRC) report makes clear, the Department of Geology has responded constructively to the recommendations that emerged from its last program review and is an effective unit that contributes to the University in a number of areas. While recruitment of majors is a challenge, the department offers its undergraduate majors and masters students a high quality program of study. The undergraduate program is enriched by a strong field component to which faculty are committed and good opportunities for independent research. The department has also fostered imaginative approaches to pedagogy and makes valuable contributions to BGeXperience and BG Perspective. In both teaching and research, the department has been open to new approaches, embracing GIS and remote sensing, pursuing collaboration with other units, and devoting greater attention to important environmental issues. Not only has research productivity increased, but the department stands poised to contribute significantly to the scholarship of engagement initiative.

The PRC’s report calls attention to several challenges facing the department. These include recruitment into the major, increasing research productivity, assuring that the department has appropriate instrumentation and the resources to maintain and replace it, and assuring that the masters program remains competitive. The report includes a number of recommendations designed to help the department address these matters. Given the department’s successes in recent years and the exciting opportunities for collaboration it is pursuing, I am confident that it will overcome these challenges and continue to grow in strength.

I accept the PRC’s recommendations with the following stipulations:

1. As the PRC was completing its report, the department was engaged in discussion of the advantages of joining with the Department of Geography and the Center for Environmental Programs to create a new school. Subsequently, all three departments voted to join the school. They are now completing work on a charter, and I expect the new school to become a reality in July 2006. The College strongly supports this organizational change and will continue to work with the units to make it successful.

2. The potential for collaboration opened by the new school has already led to new opportunities to increase the department’s research productivity and external funding opportunities. I will continue to work with the Department of Geology and other units in the new school to take advantage of these. I also agree with PRC that the department should create a differential teaching load policy and ask that it develop such a policy and submit it to the College by May 1, 2006.

3. I endorse the PRC’s recommendation that the department prepare a recruitment plan for its masters program in consultation with the Graduate College and the College of Arts & Sciences and submit it to both units by May 2006. However, I believe that the new school also creates new opportunities to create a graduate program or programs that will be especially attractive to prospective students. I will work with the leadership of the new school to pursue these.
4. While the department should continue its efforts to recruit students, I am concerned that an insular approach to recruitment will not yield results in proportion to the effort expended. Rather than developing a recruitment plan on its own, I encourage the department to work closely with other science chairs, the College, and the new committee appointed by the Provost and me and chaired by Gary Swegan to identify better ways to recruit science majors. I will also work closely with leadership in the new school to identify opportunities for attracting new majors and minors.

5. The College and the Vice Provost for research have already begun to address the department’s equipment needs, albeit in an incremental fashion. During fall 2006, I will convene a meeting with Dr. Onasch and Dr. Bulmahn to discuss planning for funding equipment acquisition, maintenance, and replacement. The department should then develop its plan—working in conjunction with other units in the school—and submit it to the College by May 2006.

6. I agree with PRC that the department should carefully assess the wisdom of proceeding with its proposed Plan II masters. In doing so, it should not only consider student and employer demand for graduates and the potential effects on faculty research, but also other, perhaps more promising, opportunities for new graduate programs developed through the new school. I encourage the department to combine its assessment of the wisdom of proceeding with the Plan II masters with the recruitment plan it submits in May 2006.

7. Like the PRC, I encourage the department to proceed with changes to existing general education courses and development of new courses that help students understand the relevance of the discipline to their everyday lives. I also agree that we must proceed cautiously with the new lab format. I encourage the department to develop a pilot that will allow it to assess the effects of the new format on student learning and department resources. The results should be included in the report on the department’s new directions in general education it will submit to the College in May 2007.

8. I agree that the department has done a fine job with assessment and encourage it to continue to use the results of assessment to improve its curriculum and enhance student learning.

I congratulate the department on its accomplishments, its commitment to strengthen its teaching and research programs, and openness to collaboration and new organizational arrangements. While it faces challenges, I believe that the department’s future is bright and look forward to working with Dr. Onasch and his colleagues to take advantage of the opportunities we currently have.

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Donald G. Nieman, Dean                  Date

Concurred:

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John W. Folkins, Provost                  Date