The Department of Mathematics & Statistics plays a critical role in the College and the University. It offers a wide range of service courses that are critical to students in every college, supports several undergraduate degrees and specializations, has a central role in preparing future mathematics teachers and sustaining COSMOS and other highly successful initiatives in mathematics and science education, sustains large and successful masters and doctoral programs, and boasts a research-active faculty that contributes to the intellectual life of the University. Faculty research productivity has grown since the last program review as have the number of external grant proposals submitted and funded. While sustaining high quality research and graduate study, the department leadership and faculty have taken seriously the need to reassess the service courses offered by the department. They have devoted considerable attention to this matter and have made changes in curriculum and pedagogy that have contributed to student success in these courses. Not surprisingly, the Program Review Committee’s report gives the department high marks for the quality of its contributions to student learning and research.

Even as the department has enjoyed considerable success, it has faced significant challenges in recent years. It has experienced significant growth in the number of full-time instructors who have been hired to teach service courses, while the number of tenured and tenure-track faculty has actually declined. This shift in hiring has stretched the Ph.D. faculty too thin, creating challenges in appropriately staffing courses for majors and graduate students. Indeed, the mix of tenure-line faculty and instructors is perhaps the most significant challenge facing the department. Given current budget constraints, this matter also poses a challenge for the College.

In his response to the PRC’s report, Dr. Neal Carothers, the department chair, concurs with the PRC’s recommendations. With respect to several of the recommendations—notably creating professional development programs for non-tenure-line faculty and improving assessment—Dr. Carothers indicates that the PRC’s timeline may be too ambitious given the shortage of tenure-line faculty available to take on these responsibilities. While I understand Dr. Carothers’ concern, I believe that these are important issues and that they cannot be deferred. The College will work with the department to assure that it begins to address these issues in a serious manner even though full implementation of plans developed may take additional time.

I accept the recommendations of the PRC’s report, with the following stipulations:

1. While recognizing the important contributions instructors make to the department’s teaching mission, I am concerned about the proportion of non-tenure-line faculty in the department and the range of courses they are called upon to teach. Addressing this matter in the current fiscal climate will, however, be challenging. I ask the department chair—working closely with Associate Dean Roger Thibault and me—to develop a personnel plan to address the mix of faculty in the department. This plan should (a) include hiring priorities for tenure track faculty; (b) goals for hiring post-docs and visiting faculty to
augment the Ph.D. faculty of the department and staff courses for majors and graduate students; and (c) goals for creating several lecturer positions for outstanding non-tenure-line faculty. The plan should cover the next four years. In September, I will convene a meeting with Dr. Thibault, Dr. Carothers, Dr. Gordon Wade, the assistant chair, and Dr. Craig Zirbel, the chair of the department’s undergraduate committee, to begin discussions and provide guidance for the process of developing the plan, which should be submitted to the College by March 1, 2007.

2. I will work with Dr. Carothers to assure revision of the department’s governance documents to assure appropriate evaluation, workload, and merit policies for non-tenure-line faculty. Indeed, these matters should be addressed in the revision of promotion, tenure, and merit guidelines that the department must complete early this fall.

3. In the wake of the College’s inability to recruit a tenure-line faculty member to direct the service math program, the department and the College are currently developing a plan to provide leadership for assuring that the service math courses are well-designed and well taught. The plan will include provisions for training instructors, providing useful feedback to improve their effectiveness, and offering professional development opportunities. This plan should be developed by December 2006.

4. I will ask Associate Dean Simon Morgan-Russell to work with Dr. Carothers and Dr. Zirbel to develop a more robust assessment plan for the major. Dr. Morgan-Russell will work through Dr. Deanne Snavely, Associate Dean of the Graduate College, to assist the department in developing an assessment plan for its graduate programs.

5. The department has been heavily invested in reviewing its service courses, changing the curriculum, and assessing the results, as noted by the PRC. As part of the new plan the department is developing for assuring that service math courses are well designed and effectively taught, it will continue to review and assess its service courses.

6. A redefined Statistical Consulting Center holds great potential to serve the external community, produce productive research collaborations, and generate external support. I ask that the Provost appoint a committee including the principal stakeholders to develop a plan to transform the Center into a unit that pursues consulting and engagement opportunities and promotes research collaborations among faculty and with external organizations.

While the department faces significant challenges, its successes in recent years affords reason for optimism that they can be overcome. I pledge to work closely with the department to develop creative solutions and assure that it continues to enjoy success in teaching and research.

__________________________________
Donald G. Nieman, Dean

Date

Concurred:
John W. Folkins, Provost

Date