Dean’s Response to the Program Review Committee’s Final Report
Center for Materials Science
January 16, 2001

I have read the Programs Review Committee’s (PRC) Final Report and the response by the Director of the Center for Materials Science. In addition, I have met with the Materials Science faculty and discussed the future of the Center with various stakeholders and the Vice Provost for Research.

After careful consideration, I accept Option A of the PRC’s Final Report, thereby discontinuing the Center for Materials Science, effective June 30, 2001. I am mindful of the bad fortune that prevented the Center from realizing the hopes that its founders envisioned and the importance of materials research. Given the limited resources we have to invest in our research infrastructure and investment decisions that have been made during the past year, however, the University does not have the wherewithal to rebuild the Center in a fashion that will make it competitive for significant extramural funding.

I have carefully considered Options B and C outlined in the PRC’s Final Report, but do not find them attractive. The Vice Provost for Research believes that securing financial support for the Center from OBOR is highly unlikely, and, given pressing needs and existing commitments in other areas, the College personnel budget is not likely to accommodate new lines to restore the Center’s core faculty, thus making Option B unattractive. I find Option C unacceptable because it requires the Center to reorganize and generate significant external funding within three years—something that appears unlikely. I will not ask faculty to spend their time attempting to accomplish the impossible, nor do I wish to invest the Center’s existing resources in a plan that does not have a good chance for success.

While we do not have sufficient resources to support an independent research program in materials science, we cannot afford to abandon materials research altogether, given its importance in scientific research and the opportunities that exist for funding. After discussions with the Vice Provost for Research, therefore, we plan to enhance the Center for Photochemical Science’s presence in materials research, especially in the area of nanotechnology. Contingent on availability of resources, the College of Arts & Sciences intends to designate two new positions in materials science (one at the assistant professor level and the other at the level of associate professor) during the next five years. These positions will be filled by faculty whose departmental homes will be in Chemistry and/or Physics, but whose expertise will enhance the Center for Photochemical Science’s research presence in the area of nanotechnology. Depending on availability of resources, the Vice Provost for Research will provide additional doctoral stipends to support materials research by the Center.

The decision to concentrate our materials science research under the umbrella of the Center for Photochemical Science will allow us to increase investment in a program that has enjoyed significant long-term success, thereby enhancing its ability to compete...
for external funding. Because one of the new materials science faculty lines will probably be in the Department of Physics, this redeployment of our investment in materials science research will serve to strengthen that Department and its materials science focus while increasing the synergy between it and the Center for Photochemical Science. I am confident that this approach will be successful because it builds on a strong relationship between materials science and the Center for Photochemical Science.

While I wish that we were able to continue support for the Center for Materials Science, I am persuaded that to do so would not be the most effective investment of our limited resources. As disappointing as this decision will be for many faculty members, I believe that it in the long run it will strengthen scientific research and enable us to compete more successfully for external support.

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Donald G. Nieman, Dean                          Date

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Steven Ballard, Vice Provost for Research
And Dean of the Graduate College                Date

Concurred:

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John W. Folkins, Provost                          Date