Combined Unit and Dean’s Response to the Program Review Committee Findings: BGSU Firelands 2001

In accordance with the vast majority of the documentation provided in the most recent Program Review Committee Report, it is my belief that this report is both helpful and informative with regard to the overall operation of BGSU Firelands. The authors have captured the essence of the important work that transpires on this campus and have also noted the degrees of forward progress that have taken place here during the course of the past few years. Most importantly, this report lauds the work of those who toiled diligently to create self-study reports that were probative but also established in a manner that would lead to increased clarification regarding student learning and futuristic forecasting.

I concur with the finding and recommendations of the Program Review committee, subject to the following stipulations and elaborations:

- Concerns regarding assessment of student learning, beyond that of traditional patterns of grading, must be considered within a defined set of parameters. Because assessment here has been driven primarily by the wants and needs of individual faculty members, in general, the program review team was accurate in noting the lack of a comprehensive approach to student assessment of learning (p. 14) at BGSU Firelands. Although BGSU Firelands did have a liaison to the university’s Student Achievement Assessment Committee, the dissemination of data regarding student achievement assessment and the implementation of actual assessment strategies seems to be lacking. More action is certainly needed in this area. During the course of the early weeks of July 2001, Qinzhu Zhang, Office of Institution Research, Firelands College, was assigned to work with department chairs and corresponding faculty members in order to bring about more coordinated efforts in this area. The major concerns regarding assessment, as noted in the document, appear to rest with the 2-year programs. It seems logical that faculty involved in the 4-year degree programs on the BGSU Firelands campus use the same assessment instruments/criteria utilized in the departments/units on main campus. Duplication of such systems would seem to be counterproductive. Therefore, faculty involved with the 4-year programs at BGSU Firelands should organize and execute annual meetings with their counterparts on main campus in order to compare overall assessment outcomes.

- Discussions regarding assessment data and curricular reform must also be considered within a defined set of parameters. While not disagreeing with the need for assessment of learning outcomes (i.e., and in keeping with the previous section of this response), there are myriad other factors that influence curricular change: change in the discipline; accrediting agencies (e.g., for Respiratory Care Therapy and Health Information Technology); input from external advisory boards (e.g.,
Concerns addressed with respect to professional accreditation can be interpreted in misleading ways (p. 14). As the self-study reports, only a small number of programs have selected not to be a part of an accreditation body. Research indicates that receipt of the actual accreditation “seal” is not nearly as powerful as the process of examining programs for compliance with the basic tenets of these agencies. Accreditation is, in the opinion of the Firelands faculty, often simply not necessary. Accreditation organizations are habitually expensive and can become the sole raison d’entre for faculty, student, and staff academic life. While affiliation and accreditation will continue to be sought for a number of programs at BGSU Firelands, other programs will continue to exist by examining and, when possible, implementing the standards of the most prominent organizational accrediting bodies but not by becoming fully associated with said groups.

Analysis of marketplace claims and enrollment patterns must be undertaken (p. 15). Little disagreement will be offered here. However, it is critical to note that marketplace competition is indeed most intense in the two-year arena. Qualitative data indicate that students, at times, will select programs, not based on quality, but rather on accessibility. If certain programs are available to a student twenty miles less distant from his/her home or place of employment, the selection decision is often instantaneous. Thus, to make a decision on program elimination based strictly on declining enrollments in a selected program area is, in the most basic sense, hazardous. However, as is noted in the BGSU Firelands 2000+ Strategic Plan, it would be equally hazardous to ignore data gathered from multiple sources that posit prominent trend lines pointing toward program elimination.

Contradictory claims regarding technology support and availability are quite perplexing (p. 15). In general, student, faculty, and staff accessibility to and for computer usage is excellent. There is a regular computer maintenance program here; computer problems are resolved quickly and correctly; all labs have quality computers installed and maintained; and, as has been noted in several recent newspaper articles, BGSU Firelands even loans older computers to students to take home. The Cedar Point Center will house the essential materials to surpass most distance education technology available on main campus; concomitantly, BGSU Firelands is investing in a dedicated laboratory for the 4-year Visual Communication Technology (VCT) degree (lab targeted date for opening 8-20-01),
and, within days, will have the same new supernet technology infrastructure as main campus.

- Statements presented with regard to the need for oversight in the area of program expansion, especially as directed toward BGSU Firelands, should be judiciously interpreted (p. 15). In principle, the faculty and staff of BGSU Firelands would agree with the administrative sensibility of the Office of the Provost providing oversight for all levels of program expansion. However, it is important to note, as a clear tenet of this response, that the Provost should be charged with this responsibility, not only at Firelands, but also as related to all academic programs throughout the university.

- As was noted in an earlier section of this response, overall assessment efforts can and will be expanded here at BGSU Firelands. However, this assessment expansion process should be permitted to take place simultaneously with the initiation of new programs. The faculty and staff of BGSU Firelands would agree that all new or expanded programs must include a carefully constructed assessment plan; however, to move beyond that point and to restrict program development without a fully executed assessment plan (pp. 15-16) would be dangerous to the vibrancy of this organizational entity.

- The recommendation regarding the need for Electrical-Electronic Engineering Technology to complete a self-study report is both logical and prudent (p. 16). Given the fact that the self-study data does not currently exist, it would be the recommendation of this office that continuation of said program be conditional and rest solely on the preparation of the self-study materials. Should no self-study data be provided by May 2002 (the date proposed by the Program Review Committee), active discussions regarding programmatic closure or strict limitation on student admissions into said program must be undertaken.

- Concerns noted with respect to morale are difficult to assess at this point in time (p. 17). Change is always onerous. The BGSU Firelands faculty and staff have experienced three deans in the course of the past four years. All indications are that Dr. William Balzer, my predecessor, was extremely well received by most members of the faculty and staff. Salaries remain an area of concern but that same sentiment could be found in many colleges and/or schools at Bowling Green State University. Precisely the same percentages of raise dollars granted on main campus were provided to faculty and staff at BGSU Firelands. Recent efforts to present salary data in comparison to other Ohio two-year campuses will continue to be gathered and disseminated. At present, the regional deans (i.e., from institutions throughout the state) are collaborating to prepare a report that should allow some insight into how each institution compares in the area of salary.

Regional campuses throughout the country face unique and difficult challenges. Isolation from main campus is always a concern. Lack of broad-based support and respect is, concomitantly, a topic of discussion for faculty, students, staff, and administrators. Nonetheless, BGSU Firelands
has emerged a quality teaching and learning center, serving the specific needs of residents from communities in Erie, Huron, and Ottawa Counties. The campus is a place of vigorous student and programmatic growth. Estimates for overall increase in student population for 2001-2002 are, conservatively, set at 6%. Demands from the community continue to exist with respect to the development of new undergraduate and graduate degree options. Given the material contained within the body of the Program Review Committee Report, suggestions, recommendations, and considerations offered will be infused into the overall operational life of this campus. The desire for improved academic and nonacademic services is of utmost importance to all those employed at BGSU Firelands. Given this recognized need to improve, the faculty and staff will immediately begin to examine ways to incorporate appropriate recommendations, from this report and others, in order to make BGSU Firelands the best regional campus possible!

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James M. Smith, Dean                          Date

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John W. Folkins, Provost                       Date