As the results of program review indicate, the Department of English is a complex unit with wide-ranging responsibilities. It supports a variety of important service programs such as English as a second language, General Studies Writing, and General Studies Literature. In addition, the department offers several undergraduate majors and minors as well as graduate work in one area of concentration at the doctoral level and five areas at the masters level.

The Program Review Committee final report calls attention to the strength of the department’s doctoral program in Rhetoric and Writing and its M.F.A. program in Creative Writing and urges the department to use its limited resources to ensure that these programs become even stronger. While acknowledging the many contributions it makes to the University, the report finds that the department has operated as a “network of loosely-knit programs.” As such, it has had difficulty in setting priorities and identifying areas that are most critical to its mission. Consequently, the department has not made the difficult decisions necessary to use limited resources in ways that create greater integration among programs and enhance the strength of those areas it deems critical. The Program Review Committee calls on the department to turn its attention to these matters during the 2002-03 academic year, beginning the process of identifying priorities and using them to focus existing resources on the department’s strongest and most critical areas. Only then, as the external reviewers and PRC note, will the department be able to make a compelling case for additional resources.

Dr. Thomas Wymer offers a detailed response to the PRC’s final report. It is thoughtful and thorough, indicating potential pitfalls of various suggestions contained in the report (e.g., redirecting the efforts of literature faculty from a struggling M.A. in literature to greater integration with American Culture Studies and the department’s signature programs in creative writing and rhetoric and writing). Unfortunately, Dr. Wymer’s response focuses more on defending the status quo than suggesting ways that the department can begin to address the challenges identified by PRC. I encourage Dr. Wymer to embrace the constructive approach suggested by PRC, begin to think strategically, and help his colleagues establish priorities and a sharper direction that will enable the department to grow in strength.

With the following stipulations, I accept the recommendations contained in the PRC’s report:

The department should develop a revised mission statement that addresses the PRC’s concerns and submit it to the College by the end of fall semester 2002. In the spring semester of 2003, the department should use the revised mission
statement to develop a strategic plan that identifies areas of strength, establishes priorities that can be achieved with existing resources, and indicates areas that the department will de-emphasize or eliminate. This should be submitted to the College no later than June 1, 2003. Consideration of future requests for positions and other resources will be based on how they enhance areas of strength identified in the strategic plan. If the department believes that a retreat would be useful in undertaking these activities, the College will provide financial support.

As indicated by PRC, the department currently supports too many graduate programs, spreading its resources too thinly and failing to strengthen its strongest programs. An important part of the strategic planning process that PRC asks the department to undertake is identifying areas of strength and establishing priorities with respect to graduate education. Therefore, the department’s strategic plan should identify one and at most two programs (in addition to Rhetoric and Writing and Creative Writing) in which the department can build strong programs. It should also explain the synergies among these programs and how these synergies will strengthen individual programs and graduate education in English as a whole. In identifying the programs it proposes to support, the department should consider the following criteria: student demand, quality of students recruited, placement of graduates, current faculty resources to deliver the program, potential for generating external support, centrality to University mission. If the department includes a masters program in literature among its priorities, my preference is that such a program be offered in collaboration with the American Culture Studies Program rather than as a free-standing masters in literature. If the department recommends a free-standing masters in literature, it should include a full rationale for its decision. In doing so, the department must explain how it will create a distinctive program with existing resources that does not duplicate or compete for limited resources with the American Culture Studies Program. When the department submits it strategic plan (no later than June 1, 2003), the Dean of the Graduate College and I will review the department’s plan for graduate education and respond to its suggestions. As the department moves forward with its strategic planning process, the Dean of the Graduate College and I will be available to meet with the department or appropriate committees to provide guidance and answer questions.

To clarify the department’s relationship with the Integrated Language Arts Program, I shall ask Associate Dean Elizabeth Cole to convene in September 2002 a meeting that will include the appropriate associate dean in the College of Education and Human Development, the Chair of the English Department, and appropriate faculty and staff in the College of Education and Human Development. The understanding reached at this meeting should guide the department in its strategic planning process.
The department should develop a plan for reduced teaching loads for selected faculty, using the criteria suggested by PRC. That plan should be submitted to the College for approval no later than December 15, 2002 if course releases are to become effective in the 2003-04 academic year. Because the College already allows the English Department to award significantly more releases for administrative/service activities than other departments (in recognition of the heavier teaching loads for doctoral faculty), the College will also review releases allowed for administrative/service activities in light of the new teaching load policy.

The College has already begun to work with Rhetoric and Writing faculty to promote Writing Across the Curriculum, hiring a faculty member to conduct a study of department needs, existing practices, and best practices during Summer 2002. We will use that report as a basis for developing a program in consultation with Rhetoric and Writing faculty.

Given changes in the administration of General Studies Writing, Rhetoric and Writing faculty should make proposals for involvement in GSW to the Director of that program.

While the department has a number of difficult issues to address, I believe that program review has suggested a process for establishing priorities that will strengthen the department. I look forward to working with the department’s leadership and faculty as they develop a workable strategic plan that will help the department overcome the problems it faces and realize its significant potential.

_________________________ ___________________
Donald G. Nieman, Dean Date

Concurred:

_________________________ ___________________
John W. Folkins, Provost Date