The Department of Telecommunications offers academic work in a dynamic area at the intersection of technology, communication, and culture. Student demand remains strong, and the department serves approximately 250 undergraduate majors. Since its separation from the School of Communication Studies (SCS) in 1998, the department has developed a good advising program that serves these majors well. It has also expanded its internship program, providing students with invaluable experiences that help them prepare for careers, and collaborated with SCS to begin improvement of the West Hall studio facilities that are so vital to the undergraduate experience.

Despite these accomplishments, the department has had difficulty in establishing a clear mission in the wake of its separation from SCS, as the Program Review Committee’s final report indicates. Revision of the undergraduate curriculum, mandated in 1998, has not been completed. In addition, the department seems uncertain about the appropriate mix between theory and application, social science approaches and technological proficiency emphasized in the major. Planning for a masters program has begun, although its focus and potential market remain unclear and the resources necessary to implement it are problematic in a difficult fiscal environment.

The PRC’s recommendations direct the department to clarify its mission and develop greater focus. They also join the external reviewers in suggesting that the department seriously reconsider its relationship with SCS. With the following stipulations, I accept the recommendations contained in the PRC’s report:

Given the overlapping and, indeed, intersecting pedagogical, scholarly, and intellectual interests of the two units, the Department of Telecommunications must seriously reconsider its relationship with SCS. As long as the two units remain separate, we risk duplication of resources and fail to take advantage of the obvious synergies between them. We also fail to seize opportunities to build on these synergies to enhance program quality. Consider graduate education. Rather than exploring a masters degree for which the demand is unclear, we should draw on the considerable talents of Telecommunications faculty to enhance the quality of graduate education in SCS. Similarly, we should hire faculty with expertise in new electronic media who can enrich undergraduate programs in IPC, Journalism, and Telecommunications, not just one of these areas. I am aware of the hard feelings that led to the decision to leave SCS and am cognizant that these have not disappeared in the four years since the separation. However, personal differences should not trump programmatic needs and opportunities. I am confident that, as professionals, faculty in the two units can develop a plan for reintegration that will allow them to take advantage of the synergies between the two units, build on the mutual professional interests of faculty in both, create a School of Communication Studies that is nationally recognized, and better serve our students. I ask
faculty to look to the future rather than the past, think about program development, and imagine the ways in which reintegration will enrich their programs and professional lives. During October 2002, I will meet with faculty in both units to discuss the prospects for as well as the obstacles to reintegration and consider ways to overcome the obstacles. Should these efforts prove unsuccessful, we must find other ways to avoid duplication and ensure program excellence. Therefore, wherever there are overlaps between SCS and an independent Department of Telecommunications (e.g., in graduate education or faculty hiring), the College will support development and growth in SCS.

The outcome of the discussions outlined above will profoundly influence the department’s mission. Once the department has determined its relationship to SCS, I ask it to proceed with revising its mission statement, as requested by PRC, and submit a completed statement to the College by May 1, 2003.

Irrespective of whether the department proceeds to reintegrate with SCS, it must complete revision of its undergraduate curriculum. I, therefore, ask that work on curriculum revision continue and that the department have its plan ready to submit to an external consultant by May 1, 2003. I do not believe PRC’s concern about “the adequacy of the proposed curriculum” is a reflection on the department’s performance. PRC recognizes the difficult task of curriculum development in a rapidly changing discipline that requires a blend of intellectual skills, theoretical perspectives, and technological competence. As a result, it suggests working with a consultant to assure that we achieve an appropriate mix.

Because of the resource implications, the need to proceed strategically in developing new general education courses, the interest and expertise of other units in this area, and TCOM’s limited resources, the department should consult with the College before launching a new general education course in media literacy.

I strongly endorse the idea of a University-wide or, at the very least, a College-wide task force to explore how we can best and most efficiently meet the technology needs of a wide variety of programs (art, film, telecommunications, and journalism, among others) that are heavily reliant on digital media technology. I will consult with the Provost about how the task force should be constituted, its charge, and the timeline for its investigation and report.

I look forward to working with the department as it makes decisions that are critical not only to its own future but to the future of communication and mass media studies at BGSU. I believe that we are poised to make great strides in these critical areas that will enable us to create a nationally prominent program and better serve our students. I am confident that faculty in the Department of Telecommunications will work with the College and colleagues in SCS to take advantage of this opportunity.
Donald G. Nieman, Dean

Concurred:

John W. Folkins, Provost