MEMORANDUM

TO: Donald Nieman  
Dean, Arts and Sciences

FROM: Julie Barnes

DATE: June 10, 2004

RE: Department Response to the Program Review Committee Report

We would like to thank the Program Review Committee for their work on the report for Computer Science. It is always gratifying to receive recognition of the work that you have been doing and confirmation of the resources necessary to continue to do an excellent job.

There is one error of fact that we would like to point out. On page 3 in the Description of Staff Resources section, it states that there are “…three support staff. Additionally, a System Administrator…. ” Currently, there are only three support staff including the System Administrator.

The recommendations of the Program Review Committee will help to add some needed structure in achieving the goals outlined in our Self-Study. However, while the Committee recommends that we manage faculty workloads, it has also specified the delivery of at least four planning documents by December 2002 and this does not include the review of the undergraduate curriculum that we proposed in our Self-Study. The last major curriculum review of the undergraduate curriculum took over a year to formulate and implement. We would prefer to finish the undergraduate curriculum review before examining the graduate program and hope that the delivery of documents related to the graduate program could be postponed to the 2003-2004 academic year.

Deliverables designated by the Program Review Committee:

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Program Review Committee Recommendations

The Department endorses the majority of the recommendations by the Committee. A primary concern is the timeline designated. There is also a question of the benefit that some of the documents requested will have. This is especially true of the Review of the Committee Responsibilities. Some additional information and comments are included below.

1) Department Planning
   a) Target size of the Department
      Historically, economic conditions and other variables have caused enrollments at the undergraduate and graduate levels to vary dramatically. We currently have approximately 350 undergraduate majors and 50 graduate students. In the early 1980s, the Department had as many as 900 undergraduate majors and a minimum GPA was required to become a CS major. This is the current situation at Ohio State University where the Computer & Information Sciences department has implemented an enrollment cap. A question for the administration to consider is how to maintain a feasible faculty/major ratio in CS: enrollment limits or additional faculty? We can select a target size for student enrollment, but it may conflict with the University’s goal of increased enrollment.

   b) Management of Workloads
      I think that we have struggled with this issue since I came to BGSU in 1990. Management of workloads is a continuing effort conducted by the Department’s Personnel Committee. Our Merit Document specifies that faculty, after obtaining tenure, may select either the “Research” or “Service” Track. There are currently three faculty on the Service Track. Pending retirements will reduce the number of faculty on the Department’s Service Track and force further realignments.

   c) Plans for External Funding
      The Department has begun offering incentives to faculty to increase external grant submissions. For example, faculty may receive a more favorable teaching schedule by guaranteeing to submit a proposal. The suggestion of the external reviewers to look into the NSF program for undergraduate research was very helpful.

   d) Faculty Scholarship

   e) Curricular Revisions
      There is a conflict between the Department’s timeline in reviewing the undergraduate curriculum next year and the Committee’s recommendation to start the review of the graduate program next year. We would prefer to complete the review of the undergraduate program before starting the graduate program. Trends in the ACM/IEEE undergraduate curriculum guidelines may influence the direction of our graduate program.

   f) Faculty Recruitment
      We eagerly endorse the Committee’s suggestion to hire new faculty before retirements actually occur.

2) Administrative Use of Faculty Time

   The committee structure has been reviewed in the past. There are at least two fewer committees now than there were several years ago. At the present time, there are essentially four department committees: Personnel, Undergraduate, Graduate, and Facilities. Although governance by consensus is somewhat inefficient, it has helped to maintain a high level of
collegiality within the department. While the Department can revisit this issue, it is highly unlikely that changes will result.

3) Distinctiveness of the Graduate Program

To be done as per the self-study.

4) Assessment

The primary problem that the Department has with this recommendation is the proposed deadline. The Department has struggled in the past to determine what is meant by “assessment.” An example of a “student-outcomes-assessment plan” from another department would facilitate the development of our own and hopefully eliminate hours of debate in defining what constitutes such a plan.

5) Research and Grant Productivity

Incentives to increase grant productivity have been mentioned elsewhere. The external review found that research productivity was, in fact, reasonable given the programs and student load that the Department supports. The Department hopes that the establishment of research groups may also cause some progress in this direction. (This has worked well before, but loss of a key staff position and faculty reduced the impact of these groups.)

6) Resources

a) Faculty Recruitment and Retention

Two faculty have been hired, but looming retirements make this a continuing battle. The Dean has been very cooperative and helpful and the Department looks forward to filling additional positions by continuing these joint efforts. Several strategies to improve recruitment have been identified and will be employed.

b) Technological Support

The Department of Computer Science, at one time, was the major user of computing facilities on campus. However, total computer usage has increased and computer science usage has become a smaller and smaller percentage of the total usage. Thus, ITS decisions are based, and perhaps must be based, on filling the needs of the campus as a whole efficiently. This has made coordination with ITS difficult. We look forward to opening the lines of communication between the two departments.

c) Space

Space is a primary concern for the Department. The nature of computer science has changed over the years. It has gone from the use of a centralized mainframe to the use of a distributed network of workstations. Twenty-five years ago, a new faculty member would have been delighted with a terminal connected to a mainframe in his/her office. Now, new faculty anticipate having at least one, if not two computers, for their office plus lab space for additional workstations for their research. If probationary faculty acquire external funding for equipment, we will need to find space for it. A similar situation exists with the expectations of graduate students. Graduate assistants expect an office with computer access for their studies. It is no longer sufficient to point them to the nearest general computing lab. If we are successful in acquiring external funding for graduate research assistants, we will need more office space to accommodate them.
The other space issue concerns a lab in which the Department has priority in scheduling its classes. In the old Student Union, the computer lab had 90 workstations with two reservable sections. It was not an ideal educational setting, but we managed to give our students an opportunity for supervised, hands-on activities. The computer lab in the Bowen-Thompson Student Union has proven inadequate for any type of supervised instructional activity by the Department and in fact cannot be reserved for such. In reading student evaluations of teaching, the major criticism that students in 100-level CS classes have is the fact that we do not have computers for students to use in the classrooms. Without digressing into a pedagogical debate, a department lab is a more cost-effective way to address this issue.

We look forward to working with the Dean on this issue.

d) Graduate Student Stipends
We look forward to working with the Graduate Dean on this issue, but the question is where will the extra money come from? At a recent meeting of the CS chairs of Ohio universities, the issue of increasing the subsidy level for master’s programs in CS was discussed. The consensus was that such an increase does not automatically translate into increased funding for CS departments or CS graduate students and may in fact negatively impact some state universities. Also at this meeting, it was obvious that CS departments in the smaller institutions are also being “creative” in bundling stipends, fee waivers and other benefits to make their offers more attractive to prospective students. Without additional money, BGSU will fall further behind.

e) Library Holdings

The Department’s Library Representative will continue to press for electronic access to IEEE journals. Success in acquiring this access would be very helpful to our research efforts.

f) Faculty Salaries

The Department will continue to address salary inequities on an individual basis with the Dean. It is imperative to prevent the loss of current faculty to other institutions.

C: M. Gromko