PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT
DEPARTMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS

**Review Process**

The Department of Telecommunications prepared a self-study document following program review guidelines. An external review team, composed of two faculty members from other institutions, visited the campus, reviewed the self-study, and interviewed unit personnel, students, and University administrators. A liaison from the Program Review Committee (PRC) met with the Department Chair to discuss the program review materials. The PRC reviewed the self-study and external report and discussed both with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. This document reflects the PRC’s findings and recommendations.

**Summary of the Self-Study**

**Overview and Mission**

The Department of Telecommunications (the “Department”) has both technical and liberal arts links. Their mission “is to develop community and national leaders who excel in the telecommunications field ….” In addition to the generation of students with the desired attributes, it is also a goal of the Department to engage in research about telecommunications.

The Department is located in the College of Arts and Sciences, and had been a part of the School of Mass Communications. Five years ago, after its initial program review, the Department broke from the School and refocused their efforts. The Department is in the process of revamping its undergraduate curriculum by focusing on new and emerging digital media technologies and media literacy. The Department has also developed a preliminary draft of a master’s program.

**Faculty and Resources**

The Department has seven full time faculty and a faculty member who is one-fourth time in the Department and three-fourths time Director of the Women’s Studies
program. The Department has two majors, one offered with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, and the other with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications (BAC) degree; a minor in Telecommunications is also available. The Department has a wide array of links to radio and television resources around campus where students can gain experience. These include WBGU-FM, WFAL, BG Radio Sports, BG Radio News, WBGU-TV, and BG-24 News. In addition, faculty have reached out to programs around campus including Ethnic Studies, American Culture Studies, History, Theatre, Women’s Studies, and the School of Communication Studies.

The self-study reports the faculty resources to be somewhat meager for the array of duties they have undertaken and in light of the proposed Master’s program. One faculty member is expected to move from the Department to Women’s Studies when she returns from her Faculty Improvement Leave. This will leave seven full time faculty and two instructors (plus one more in Spring, 2002) to carry the load. The Department has about 250 majors. The greatest demand seems to be for TCOM 103, the first course in the curriculum. The other courses seem to have manageable sizes. For example, for the year 2000-01, Dr. Ha, who taught TCOM 103, had 310 students spread over six sections for an average of 52 students per section. No other faculty had an average class size over 30. The advising load is fairly heavy. The 250 majors are spread over 7 faculty with an average of about 36 per faculty. However the load is not evenly distributed. The faculty have decided to establish an undergraduate advisor with reassigned time. The Department is supported by one classified staff person and one administrative staff person whose job is to maintain equipment and facilities.

A considerable amount of technical equipment is required to support a program of this kind; the equipment is housed in West Hall. There is both audio and video equipment, including labs for student use. The self-study states that the equipment is somewhat dated and requires a good deal of repair. In addition, given the number of majors, the lab space is heavily used.

Because of equipment support needs, the Department, which seems to have a substantial operating budget, is not as well-supported as it first appears. Travel to conferences expenditures amount to about $650 per person per year.

Because of the recent stand-alone placement of the Department and in spite of recent faculty turnover, the self-study reports a spirit of renewed buoyancy in the Department. New initiatives have been identified and, though they have not yet been started, the energy has returned. The main problems identified in the self-study revolve around a lack of current and reliable equipment and a lack of faculty to support plans they are developing. The self-study is careful not to emphasize technology training more strongly than thinking and academic skills. The equipment is a secondary consideration
to the delivery of longer-lasting skills. The primary emphasis is on the thinking skills basic to the degree.

**Strengths and Challenges**

Strengths revolve around the faculty who have credible research records and some grant activity. At least three of the faculty have reputations outside of the University. The faculty include one full professor, four associate professors (one untenured), and three assistant professors. The curriculum is in the process of being revised. Participation in graduate programs through service on student committees has been a strength of the Department. The Department also has shown progress on assessment; learning outcomes are stated and the use of an internship, required of all students, has begun. Placement is not well monitored. Bowling Green’s program does not have high visibility in the major markets for communications, which are on the coasts. However, there are viable and important regional markets in the Midwest that are well served by this program.

**Link to University and College Mission**

Media literacy is a “substantive part of the [Department’s] curriculum.” This emphasis is central to the University mission. The Department also contributes to the technological sophistication of the students. In addition, the Department has a history of interaction with other departments across campus, including Art, Computer Science, Film, Geography, Interpersonal Communication, Journalism, Music, and Visual Communications Technology. These interdisciplinary connections contribute to the distinctiveness of the Department’s programs. Another feature of the program that contributes to its distinctiveness is its integration of curricular and extracurricular components. The self-study states: “The main distinction of the TCOM program at BGSU is that it fosters a two-pronged approach to undergraduate education: through learning in the classroom and through extracurricular involvement of students in traditional media outlets.” The self-study pointedly mentions duplication of content between the Department’s courses and those offered by other departments on campus.

For its size, the Department faculty reflects diversity in race and gender. This aids in attracting and recruiting a diverse student population. The student population learns not only in the classroom setting but also in internships and in extracurricular activities in the media area. The primary alternative program is at Ohio University; a major difference between our program and theirs is that students at Bowling Green can begin working with the technology as sophomores, while Ohio University prefers its students to wait until their junior year. This difference allows the Department’s curriculum to “focus on course topics from a social science perspective,” while still addressing hands-on exposure to technology. The basis of the curriculum is the way that media both directs and reflects the society around it.
The Department is efficient in its use of funds to support the technology itself. The self-study asserts that the salaries of the faculty, particularly the senior faculty, are much below market and will require some adjustment to prevent faculty from leaving the University. The Department believes that both the equipment and the salaries are below the level needed for adequate performance and for maintenance of the quality of faculty. For the younger faculty to be successful in their quest for tenure, many require access to technology. But the self-study claims that these faculty are stretching the limits of technology currently in place and failure to provide better technology may jeopardize their ability to gain tenure.

Plans

The self-study presents a detailed plan for the revision of the undergraduate curriculum. The timetable proposed for completing the many curriculum modifications is 2001-2002, which has already passed. Other goals for the next seven years, include maintaining advances already made in advising, working collaboratively on research, and launching a new master’s degree, Telecommunication in the Public Interest. The Department also plans to strengthen links to alumni. To support these efforts, the self-study’s plans include three new faculty (spread over three years), updated technological support, and increases in faculty salary.

SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

The external review team was asked to particularly address two questions:
1) What progress has the Department made in re-focusing its undergraduate curriculum?
2) For the proposed master’s degree in Telecommunications and the Public Interest, does the rationale make sense and is the program feasible?

Progress in the Undergraduate Curriculum

Following its withdrawal from the School of Communication Studies the Department has, in the view of the external reviewers, made the required transition in curriculum. The external reviewers recommend that the sequences established by the Department for majors be treated with more flexibility than appears in the self-study. The Department might, according to the external reviewers, try to start the technical training earlier in the student’s career. The external reviewers also praised the Department’s support of general education with a large media literacy course, but point out the large investment of faculty time that would entail.
The Proposed Master’s Degree in Telecommunications and the Public Interest

The external reviewers argue that the proposed master’s builds on the Department’s strengths and is likely to have “broad appeal.” Two different programs or tracks have been proposed, one professional and one aimed at students going on to Ph.D. programs. The external reviewers say that demand for either is not clear and that some kind of market study is needed before moving forward. The external reviewers also argue that until added resources are made available, the master’s cannot be properly supported.

Resource Needs

The external reviewers observed that the faculty is well regarded across campus. They also pointed out that, in their opinion, the faculty is stretched to the limit and that further increases in teaching can only come at the expense of research. The external reviewers also argue that facilities are in bad repair and are “sorely in need of replacement.” They recommend that the Department extend working relations to other departments with similar technical needs, such as VCT and Journalism. In this context, they suggest that the University consider “creating a central, fully digitalized production center.”

Future of the Department

The external reviewers find that the atmosphere in the Department is better than it has been for some time. However, they report, there is some residual uneasiness between the Department and the School of Communication Studies. The external reviewers state that the Department cannot, even if the number of tenure-track faculty were expanded to nine, meet the expected needs of the undergraduate and M.A. programs. Furthermore, the faculty is capable of substantial involvement with doctoral programs, which is less likely to happen under the current configuration. The external reviewers suggest that the Department’s long-term interests would be best served by re-joining the School of Communication Studies and that the foundation for such a move should be laid now.

External Reviewer Recommendations

1) The proposed undergraduate program has the student choosing a nine credit hour focus on top of the ten classes for the major. The external reviewers suggest “a less demanding structure of required core courses and fewer foci, each with a smaller number of required courses.” They also recommend that the curriculum take a less equipment-intensive direction until equipment resources are made available.

2) The external reviewers find that the proposed M.A. needs more study. They call for more clarity of the two foci. They note a need for both a comparative analysis of
other M.A. programs in Ohio and a market analysis for future graduates. Finally, they suggest that opportunities for financial support be explored.

3) Equipment and technological resources are needed, and this is true across campus. A study of how best to provide the equipment for all programs should be mounted at the university level. The fundamental choice should be between separate media production facilities in the several departments that use them, or a single “campus-wide facility to match the broadband transmission capability at BGSU.” The external reviewers also support the development of a university-wide media literacy course, and the addition of two faculty to the Department.

4) The external reviewers suggest that an “open-ended reconciliation plan” be developed that would allow for the possibility of the Department’s eventual reunion with the School of Communication Studies.

**PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE FINDINGS**

Based on a review of the self-study and external review documents, the PRC finds that there are several areas of Departmental strength and potential, as well as some areas in which the Department can improve.

1. **Mission.** Because of the relatively small size, the Department’s mission with its multiple goals is not commensurate with its resources. For example, the Department’s faculty have an interest in graduate education and research agendas that investigate the social implications, context, and effects of modern media; the Department currently offers two majors, a BA and a BAC, and a minor with strong enrollment; and the Department also proposes a new M.A. and possibly a media literacy course. In response to a previous program review, the Department is in the process of revising its undergraduate program. The mission has a strong emphasis on liberal arts but also strives to meet the interests and technology training needs of a more professionally oriented student body.

2. **Undergraduate curriculum.** The PRC finds that the Department was asked to revise its undergraduate curriculum in the last program review in 1998, and that this task is not yet completed. The revision of the curriculum deserves high priority and should be informed by market trends and student demand.

The PRC finds that the duplication of course content in media studies courses, identified in the self-study, is important to the Department’s curriculum revision as well as to the curriculum offerings of other departments.
3. *Technology.* Because of its focus on the media, technology is both part of the subject material of the discipline and a necessary part of the program’s infrastructure. However, the PRC wonders whether the faculty’s emphasis on technology is as strong as it should be, particularly in the undergraduate program.

In addition, the PRC believes the Department has not articulated the extent to which technology training and the intellectual skills championed by the program should integrate. The Department has had an undergraduate program with some balance between technical and intellectual skills. However in designing a new program there is a need to determine if the current balance between technology and production is optimal.

4. *Structure.* Because the Department is now separated from the School of Communication Studies, the PRC finds that the Department’s options for participation in graduate programs are limited. The PRC does not find the necessary support for further development for the proposed master’s degree, either from the external reviewers, the Arts & Sciences College, or the Graduate College. The Department’s best opportunity for participation in graduate programs is in the School of Communication Studies.

The PRC agrees with the external reviewers that the most logical structure would have the Department as a member of the School. It is not necessary, however, that the Department reunite with the School at an administrative level at this time. That outcome might be a goal for the future. The PRC finds the Department could participate in the School’s existing graduate programs, at both the master’s and doctoral levels, without committing itself to any necessary administrative or structural relationship with the School. In this way, the Department could retain autonomy with regard to personnel matters, while it could at the same time benefit from collaboration with the School with regard to graduate programs. Similarly, a collaborative relationship might be an effective way to approach the issue of technology support.

The PRC finds that the Department’s increased participation in the Communication Studies Ph.D. program would be valued and should be pursued.

5. *Faculty lines.* The PRC finds that there are too many unknowns to make a strong case for new positions at this time. Any decision about new positions would be more appropriate after the Department has completed its revision of the undergraduate curriculum (as called for in the program review of five years ago) and after it has established its commitment (or not) to collaborative participation in the graduate programs that currently exist in the School of Communication Studies.

6. *Assessment of student learning.* The Department has worked to establish some assessment activities and is refining them.
7. General Education. The PRC finds that the development of a media literacy course has potential. However, the Department does not have the faculty resources to develop and offer such a course while meeting the demands of the two majors and the minor. Furthermore, there are several other departments that should participate in the development and offering of a media literacy course.

8. Compensation. The PRC agrees that faculty salaries appear to be below market, in a very general national level comparison. However, data about salaries in the context of the University compensation plan were not available.

PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on reviews of the self-study and external review documents, and consistent with the major findings that resulted from these reviews, the PRC makes the following recommendations. For detail about the rationalization of each recommendation, see the finding with the corresponding number, just above.

1) Mission. The Department should revise its mission statement so that the mission is commensurate with resources, well integrated with (or complementary to) other programs at the University, and supportable by the Dean of Arts & Sciences. The Department must use the mission to decide which activities they wish to pursue and which they cannot support given current resources. Among other issues, the revised mission statement should address the mix of technology and intellectual skills in the undergraduate program, the degree of commitment to participation in existing graduate programs, and the degree of commitment (in collaboration with other programs) to general education and service courses. The revised mission should be presented to the Dean of Arts & Sciences for his approval by the end of fall semester, 2002. To attain the necessary focus for this mission, the Department should gather additional information. It should:
   a) develop ways to better track its graduates;
   b) conduct a market survey of opportunities available for graduates of its programs;
   c) consult with the Dean of Arts & Sciences about the mission of the Department.

2) Undergraduate Curriculum. The PRC recommends that the action of primary importance is the revision of the undergraduate program. This revision should build upon the information gained in recommendation 1. Furthermore, with the consultation of the Dean of Arts & Sciences, the Department should hire a consultant to review the adequacy of the proposed curriculum. The revised curriculum should be submitted to the appropriate College curriculum committee by the end of spring semester, 2003.

3) Task Force on Technology and Curriculum. The role of technology must be addressed both within the curriculum and as infrastructure.
a) The PRC supports the recommendation of the external reviewers that a University-wide task force investigate the advantages and disadvantages of creating a single, fully digitalized facility to support the technology needs of the several departments and programs that rely on media technology. In addition, the task force should review and recommend on the overlap in the curricula in media studies offered by departments across campus. The Dean of Arts & Sciences and the Provost should take responsibility for appointing and charging the task force.

b) In addition, the Department and the School of Communication Studies should continue their recent joint efforts to seek funds for equipment. These efforts should be extended to include a general planning process for acquisition, replacement, and maintenance of equipment.

c) The Department needs to continue to monitor the balance between technical and intellectual skills. Data collected (see recommendation 1) should provide evidence of the adequacy of the program. The annual program review report is to include evidence that the program has developed strong support for the technology needed to offer the undergraduate program.

4) Structure. Given the strong relations between their disciplinary interests, regular and formal communication should be established between the Department and the School of Communication Studies, starting in 2002-03.

a) Rather than develop an independent master’s program, the Departments should explore the possibilities for Department faculty members to participate in the established graduate programs in the School of Communication Studies. If such collaboration appears fruitful, the Department and School should develop a written statement of policy, to be approved by the Dean of Arts & Sciences, that would delineate guidelines for assigning teaching duties in graduate courses, advising and serving on student committees, and teaching loads. Such agreements need not be uniform for all members of the Department, as some faculty may have more interest in and responsibility for the undergraduate programs than others. This document should be presented to the Dean by Jan. 1, 2003.

b) These discussions can extend to the already successful efforts to acquire and manage technology, pending the recommendations of the task force studying a centralized technology facility (see recommendation 2a).

5) Faculty lines. The PRC recommends that requests for new positions be put on hold until the Department has completed its revision of the undergraduate curriculum and until it has established its commitment (or not) to collaborative participation in the graduate programs that currently exist in the School of Communication Studies.

6) Assessment of Student Learning. The Department should revise its learning outcomes and assessment plans as necessary to parallel changes in the undergraduate curriculum.
7) General Education. The PRC recommends that the development of a media literacy course should be pursued only if the Departmental mission places sufficient weight on this alternative and then only if there is collaboration with other units and within a context of existing faculty resources.

8) Compensation. Faculty salaries are a problem outside the scope of program review. These should be addressed through the University-level compensation plan and through the Dean of Arts & Sciences.

The Department of Telecommunications should report annually to the Dean of Arts & Sciences, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.