May 30, 2003

TO: Heinz Bulmahn
Vice Provost for Research and
Dean of the Graduate College

FROM: Fred D. Miller, Jr., Director
Social Philosophy and Policy Center

RE: Response to Program Review Committee Report

I shall respond to the report of the Program Review Committee (PRC) on behalf of the directors and staff of the Social Philosophy and Policy Center. First, though, I would like to thank all those who have been involved in reviewing the productivity of the Center: the two external reviewers, who diligently labored to understand our mission and programs, and to absorb the appraisals of faculty and administrators with whom they met on their visit to campus; the members of the PRC, for their careful study of all of the documents and their helpful recommendations; Vice Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate College Bulmahn and Dean of Arts and Sciences Nieman, for their guidance throughout the review process; and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs, for his many helpful suggestions, particularly on the composition of the itinerary for the external evaluators.

The Program Review Committee advanced three recommendations, and I shall address them in turn and in detail:

(1) The PRC stated: “Space for Conferences. The Center should work with the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs to seek a solution to the perennial problem of not being able to schedule conferences on campus with sufficient lead time.”

The PRC’s concern on this point is well taken. As the Center’s Self-Study Report noted:

The Center has, over the years, experienced considerable difficulty in securing appropriate venues on campus for our conferences. Invitations must be sent to potential speakers at least 20 and preferably 24 months in advance, or these busy scholars will have already committed their time to other writing projects. This presents a problem with BGSU offices that control feasible accommodations. Although the Center receives the
utmost cooperation from the Provost’s Office and the Admissions Office, the latter of which has graciously ceded us space that they use for recruiting new students, the Center has been unable to guarantee alternative space well-enough in advance to send out timely invitations. The Center’s directors regret having to displace Admissions, and greatly appreciate their willingness to help us on several occasions. Is there any way that the problem can be alleviated, so that twice each year the Center does not have to importune busy administrators with our recurrent requests?

This problem should be alleviated by the availability of suitable and attractive space in the refurbished Bowen-Thompson Student Union. Several factors, however, have complicated the Center’s ability to situate its conferences at the Union. Their planning process extends out to a year, which is insufficient for our planning purposes. Thus, we still must importune the Provost’s office and Admissions with requests to use McFall as backup for a site in the Union that may or may not become available to us for each conference. This process, no doubt, tries the patience of these busy administrators and their staffs, and the extended negotiations delay the mailing of our first and subsequent rounds of invitations to scholars. For a recent example, we are now well into the summer in sending out invitations for our “Justice and Global Politics” conference, which is scheduled for October, 2004. First round invitations, we have learned from experience over twenty years, must go out, at the latest, twenty months before a conference will be held in order to attract the top scholars in their fields. These individuals are much in demand, and their schedules fill up quickly. Invitations cannot be sent until we are guaranteed space on campus, and thus with the extended negotiations and uncertainty, the first round of invitations for this conference did not go out until early May, when most faculty are involved with finals and their imminent departures for summer engagements. It is very difficult to locate renowned faculty during the summer months, since they are in great demand and scattered throughout the world on their summer projects.

Recently, we received assistance on scheduling the “Justice and Global Politics” conference on an ad hoc basis, as in the past. However, no permanent solution has been put in place for scheduling future conferences at BGSU. A permanent solution would be a great asset to our conference program, which as the external evaluators noted, and the PRC reported, is one of the flagship enterprises of the Center and the university, and one of our best-known and most highly valued programs.

Summary: The Center will work with the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs to find a solution to the problem of scheduling conferences on campus with sufficient lead time.

(2) The PRC offered three recommendations for augmenting the Center’s “connection with and contribution to the mission of the University,” and I shall address each point in turn.

(a) “[T]he Center should expand its advisory board to include faculty from additional units...”

The Center’s advisory board has played and should continue to play an invaluable role in counseling the Center’s directors on its various programs, including recommending future conference topics, suggesting participants for conferences, colloquia, and the lecture series, “talent spotting” promising junior faculty for our conferences, journal, and Resident Scholars Program, and identifying BGSU graduate students who would be strong candidates for the fellowships that the Center raises from external sources.

The Center’s directors concur that it would be very helpful to add new members to our advisory board from departments at the University in addition to the Philosophy Department. The board in recent years has been composed of faculty from philosophy, while its founding board included members from other departments, in particular from the Political Science Department. Each advisory board member has received a Senior Research Fellow appointment at the Center, which involves responsibilities and benefits. The former includes functioning as an advisory board participant, and the latter involves invitations to participate in all Center functions, to introduce speakers at Center conferences, and to receive a stipend for research and travel. As the Self-Study Report noted, since its inception in 1986, the mission of this program has been to “stimulate the research of members of the BGSU Philosophy Department by actively engaging them in all of the programs of the Center and in an advisory capacity to the Center’s directors.” With the creation of the Philosophy Department’s graduate program in applied political, moral, and social philosophy, this program has served as a magnet for attracting faculty to the BGSU philosophy program.

The mission of the advisory board and the Senior Research Fellows program can be expanded. It is our
intention to enlarge the board to include faculty from related disciplines with which the Center has been working in recent months—as an outgrowth of this program review process—on a new and exciting interdisciplinary program: the “Mini-Conferences.” As I will describe this new program, below, we have thus far worked with History, Journalism (with Interpersonal Communications and the Telecommunications Departments to be included during the next phase of planning in September 2003), and we have begun exploratory conversations with Sociology. We are expecting to name to the advisory board/Senior Research Fellows program three to four new members from related disciplines by December 2003. These appointments will be for a period of two years, and will be made available to members of departments with which we will be collaborating on the Mini-Conferences. Thus, these rotating appointments will allow us to interest members from many more departments in the activities of the Center and to solicit their advice and recommendations.

Summary: The Center will expand its advisory board to include faculty from units other than philosophy and will implement these changes by December 2003.

(b) The PRC recommended that, “[T]he Center should identify ways and means of collaborating (e.g., on research proposals) with other centers and academic units on campus.”

As a result of the academic program review process, the Center has initiated a new collaborative program of Mini-Conferences with departments on campus other than the Philosophy Department. The first of these programs occurred on April 18, 2003, when the Center and the History Department jointly sponsored a colloquium, held in the department’s conference room, at which one of the Center’s Resident Scholars, historian/political scientist Bradley Thompson, delivered a paper on “The American Founding and the French Revolution.” As we noted in the Self-Study, and as the PRC indicated, attendance occasionally flags when those of our Resident Scholars who are not philosophers give colloquia at the Philosophy Department. As a direct result of this program review process, we decided to hold future lectures at the department of each Resident Scholar’s discipline. This first experiment turned out to be a resounding success. The History and Philosophy Departments attended in force, both faculty and students, and the resulting question and answer session was very lively and everyone benefitted from sharing differing concerns and methodological approaches.

On November 14, 2003, the Center and the History Department will co-host a Mini-Conference on “The American Founding,” which will bring to campus for a day two scholars who will deliver papers: Bradley Thompson (Ashland University) will speak on “James Madison and the Founding Generation,” and Saul Cornell (Ohio State) will lecture on “The Antifederalists’ Bill of Rights: The Second Amendment.” The Center will cover the honoraria for the two speakers as well as their travel and other expenses. The History Department will provide two commentators from its faculty or will bring in a commentator from outside the university with funds from its regular speakers’ program (at the department’s suggestion and discretion). Planning for these two programs with the History Department has involved most of the members of the department, all of whom have been unfailingly supportive.

In May 2003, the Center began planning with the Journalism Department for a third Mini-Conference. A preliminary meeting was held at the Center with the department chair and another member of the department and a topic was chosen: “Journalistic Ethics.” A round-table discussion with a moderator is the format that the planning committee selected, and it was agreed that subsequent meetings would also include chairs and interested members from Interpersonal Communications and the Telecommunications Departments. This Mini-Conference will be held in April 2004 and will include working journalists as well as academics.

Preliminary discussions have been undertaken with interested members of the Sociology Department to plan a fourth Mini-Conference, along the lines of the forthcoming one scheduled with History, on the topic of “The Family: Women, Work, and Conflicting Roles.” The Sociology Department has several faculty members who work in this area and the Center has published a book by an economist on this theme, so there are evident, overlapping interests.

Summary: The Center will develop a series of Mini-Conferences in collaboration with other units on campus. The Vice Provost for Research will receive periodic updates on the planning and scheduling of this new program.
(c) The PRC proposed that, “The Center should explore ways of connecting to the University’s Academic Plan.”

The Center will continue to make an invaluable contribution to the University’s Mission to aspire to be “the premier Learning Community in Ohio, and one of the best in the nation.” The Center’s reputation for excellence and its status as the leading institution of its kind in the country, as reflected in the assessments of leading scholars in many disciplines [included in the Self-Study] as well as the report of the external reviewers, directly furthers the mission of the University to provide its students with an “environment grounded in intellectual discovery.”

Getting the word out to the BGSU and local communities about our conferences, colloquia, lectures, and other programs has been a high priority for the Center since its inception. However, we have redoubled our efforts at promoting our conferences, in particular. Recently, our staff compiled Email lists of faculty in philosophy, history, law, economics, and political science in Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana. These lists enabled the Center to send out personal invitations for our “Freedom of Speech” conference (held in April 2003), rather than just sending bulk invitations to departments. This augmented our standard practice of sending brochures to departments for distribution and posting. Faculty from as far off as the University of Colorado comprised the audience for this well-attended conference. Much interest was also evinced by the attendance of BGSU students and faculty, the latter of whom regularly receive personal invitations to our conferences. Undergraduate students who are members of relevant clubs, majors, and minors are also targeted for personal and group invitations. BGSU faculty from related disciplines are given personal invitations as well as invitations to bring their classes to sessions of each conference. As a direct result of participation by a member of the Journalism Department, in the “Freedom of Speech” conference the idea was born for the Mini-Conference on “Journalistic Ethics.”

Summary: The Center will provide the Vice Provost for Research with a plan, by May 2004, for strengthening its connections to the University’s Academic Plan, as requested.

(3) The PRC recommended “Professional Development for Center staff,” stating that, “The Center should devise a strategy that would free the Center’s directors to take faculty improvement leaves...”

This was a concern first raised by the external evaluators and reiterated by the PRC. This has been an ongoing problem at the Center, given the unique abilities and responsibilities of its three founding, senior directors. The Vice Provost for Research expressed a keen interest in promoting this recommendation, and the Center’s directors would be grateful for a remedy, since in its twenty-two years of operations, only one of the directors has been able to take a brief (two-month) sabbatical. The Center’s directors will continue to consult with the Vice Provost about creating a viable plan to accomplish this goal.

Summary: The Center’s directors will consult with the Vice Provost for Research about creating a viable plan for faculty development by May 2004.

Let me conclude by again thanking all of those involved in this program review for their time, thoroughness, and insightful recommendations. We look forward to the success of the new programs envisioned and created as a result of this process, and the enhanced involvement of departments, in addition to philosophy, with the Center’s interdisciplinary programs.

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cc: Mark H. Gromko, Vice Provost for Academic Programs