MEMORANDUM

TO: Donald Nieman, Dean
   College of Arts & Sciences

FROM: Holly Myers-Jones, Director
       Center for Environmental Programs

RE: Program Review Committee Report

On behalf of the faculty of the Center for Environmental Programs (CEP) I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the Program Review Committee (PRC) and of Drs. Gigi Berardi and Ian Worley who served as external reviewers for the program review process. Overall we found the program review to be both stimulating and invigorating. The Program Review Committee made recommendations in twelve areas and I will address each of these below. A reconfiguration of the departments of Geology, Geography and the CEP has been proposed since the completion of the PRC’s work. Therefore, our response to the PRC’s report is informed by this new opportunity.

1. Strategic Plan – We are in agreement that a new strategic plan for CEP is needed and we will proceed with this recommendation. Since the strategic planning process must include both faculty and staff and the Advisory Board we realistically expect to be able to present the strategic plan to you by February 1, 2005.

2. Mission and Statement of Goals – We concur with the PRC, a revised mission statement and goals will be part of the revised strategic plan.

3. Curriculum Revision – We concur with the PRC’s recommendation to revise the curriculum for both majors for inclusion in the 2006 Undergraduate Catalog. We look forward to creating a more focused and streamlined core curriculum, but we remain committed to developing focused areas of emphasis that represent the interdisciplinary nature of the program rather than relying solely on an established minor as recommended by the PRC. Although perceptions abound across campus both within departments and in professional advising offices that an established minor will enhance career success, we have no evidence from either alumni or other programs that this is the case. We will explore a combination of ways to allow students to choose from a focused, but interdisciplinary area of emphasis or a defined minor.

4. Academic Advising – As part of the curricular reforms, we will embed advising into the curriculum leading to an increased role for faculty in the advising
process. We have already begun this process by involving more faculty members in advising students on the selection of courses for the area of emphasis.

5. Faculty Resources – Requests for new faculty resources will be dependent on the outcome of the reconfiguration and on an assessment of the new hire in Political Science to meet the needs of the Environmental Policy and Analysis major.

6. Merit Document – The merit document will be revised by the end of fall semester 2004. With the school initiative, however, we realize that another revision may be necessary with reconfiguration of the unit.

7. Faculty Retention and Success – We recognize the reluctance of the PRC to endorse a proliferation of new policies and we appreciate the careful attention the committee and the external reviewers gave to these issues. Nevertheless, faculty members feel strongly that there remains a tendency to favor a traditional academic model of strong, independent, disciplinary-based departments with the needs of interdisciplinary units in a subordinate role. Perhaps this portion of the self-study was unclear in terms of the request we are making which is for the unit to establish tenure and promotion guidelines that are acceptable to individual departments insuring that environmental faculty will be evaluated by their respective departments for tenure and promotion based on the standards of an interdisciplinary environmental program. We would like these to be unit-to-unit agreements, not specific to individuals, as is current practice. Of course, there will continue to be a need to make expectations clear to new hires through carefully crafted letters of appointment as is now being done. The development of a school integrating environmental and earth sciences may alleviate some of these problems. The College has been very supportive in our efforts to bring clarity to the tenure and promotion process and I look forward to discussing this with you.

8. Utilization of Staff Resources – The PRC made several excellent recommendations in this area that we have begun to implement. Responsibilities are being shifted to the Assistant Director and we are developing a plan to involve faculty in advising. With the impending retirement of the secretary and the reconfiguration we will have an opportunity to restructure in a more effective manner. I look forward to discussing this with you.

9. Facilities – The primary need of the CEP in terms of facilities is laboratory space. We acknowledge the PRC’s expressed concerns over the cost of creating new laboratory facilities and we recognize our responsibility to ensure that lab space assigned to the program be utilized to the fullest extent. We have recently revised one of our courses working with the College of Education and turned it into a laboratory class. We are anxious to be able to include a laboratory course as part of our revised curriculum. That is why we are pleased with the efforts the College has made on our behalf in finding laboratory space and I look forward to continuing to work with you on this matter.

10. Fundraising – We concur with the PRC that fundraising should be a high priority of the CEP, however, we feel that the CEP has an excellent track record in this area, which was not acknowledged. With a relatively new faculty, it will take a couple of years for grants to develop, however, we often do not get recognition for grants because credit goes to the tenuring unit even if the proposal was developed as an outgrowth of CEP interests and activities. Since program review we have received a major gift for equipping an environmental science lab
and we have developed a new plan to raise more funds from alumni. There is much more that can be done and I look forward to discussing this with you.

11. Master of Arts in Teaching – We concur with the PRC that “substantial further study” is necessary before pursuing an MAT in environmental science. Our interest in moving this along quickly is derived from what we perceive to be a high demand for this type of degree based on inquiries we get on a regular basis about graduate opportunities. Reconfiguration may provide expanded faculty support for an MAT program. We will continue to study this option, but realize that this is a longer-term project.

12. Assessment of Student Learning – A comprehensive plan for assessment of student learning will be deferred until the curriculum revisions are complete. We believe that the PRC’s deadline of spring semester 2005-2006 is appropriate.

13. Advisory Committee – The CEP concurs with the PRC’s recommendation concerning the role of the Advisory Board and we accept the proposed timeline.

As I stated earlier in this memo, faculty and staff from the CEP found the program review process to be beneficial and rewarding. One of the unexpected outcomes of program review was recognition of the need to empower interdisciplinary approaches to a greater extent at BGSU. The external reviewers reminded us that environmental science is now listed by several funding agencies including the National Science Foundation as a separate discipline in its own right. The CEP has been at the forefront of developing opportunities for our students to be engaged learners and promoting our efforts to the community. We added a service-learning requirement to our introductory courses before the development of the university-wide initiative. We have worked diligently to make sure that the local communities they serve acknowledge the efforts of our students and our individual students as well as student projects were reported on in the local press at least six times last year. Yet, we feel that our efforts are not yet gained university recognition. You have been exceptionally supportive of our efforts, but I would like to include in our discussion of program review a discussion of how we can gain greater recognition for our efforts on campus.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss program review with you in more detail and to formalize our plan for the future.