Dean’s Response to the Program Review Committee’s Final Report
Department of Geography
October 2005

The Department of Geography has responded constructively to the recommendations contained in its last program review. While it has not fully addressed all of the recommendations, the department has made significant progress in a number of important areas. Research productivity has grown, albeit through the efforts of about half the faculty. The department has embraced collaboration with other units, including the Center for Regional Development, the Center for Environmental Programs, and the departments of computer science, geology, and journalism. Collaboration has opened up new opportunities for research and, perhaps most important, establishment of a new school that has the potential for stimulating research, curriculum development, and engagement with the community. The department has also made significant contributions to undergraduate education. It offers an impressive number of seats in BG Perspective courses and has developed an admirable internship program that serves its majors well and is, in many ways, a model for other liberal arts disciplines to emulate.

Despite its recent accomplishments, the department faces a number of challenges, as indicated by the Program Review Committee’s (PRC) report. While participation in the new school will help the department address a number of these challenges—enhancing research productivity and external funding, attracting more majors, increasing visibility, and creating a more dynamic curriculum—others require discussion and action by the department itself—notably, developing greater participation in department affairs, cultivating new leadership, and creating a merit system that recognizes high quality contributions in teaching, research, and service.

I accept the PRC’s recommendations with the following stipulations:

1. As the PRC was completing its report, the department was engaged in discussion of the advantages of joining with the Department of Geology and the Center for Environmental Programs to create a new school. Subsequently, all three departments voted to join the school. They are now completing work on a charter, and I expect the new school to become a reality in July 2006. The College strongly supports this organizational change and will continue to work with the units to make it successful. Indeed, establishment of the new school is critical to address a number of the challenges the department faces.

2. I believe the department has programs that are attractive to many students and that it can increase the number of its majors. I encourage it to work closely with the College and the Office of Admissions to determine where the best opportunities for recruitment lie—i.e., with prospective BGSU students or with BGSU students who have not declared a major or are changing majors. The department’s recruiting plan must be careful to focus efforts on the largest population of potential students and seek to develop ways to inform and attract them. I also encourage the department to work with other units in the new school to consider developing interdisciplinary opportunities that will be attractive to students. I look forward to seeing the department’s recruitment plan in April 2006, but encourage it to develop a plan that includes realistic benchmarks, can evolve, and will be periodically
revisited so that the department can take advantage of opportunities the new school offers to develop programs that meet student needs.

3. I agree with the PRC that the department must conduct a thorough review of its curriculum that is informed by the results of assessment and develop plan for curriculum revision that is consistent with the department’s focus and resources. In doing so, I encourage it to consider opportunities for curricular innovation opened by the new school as well as the suggestions made by the PRC. I look forward to reviewing the department’s plan in April 2006.

4. While the department has made important strides in assessment, there is much more that it needs to do. Notably, it must be sure that it has a rigorous assessment procedure for the major as a whole and that the results of assessment are used to revise courses and the curriculum. I will ask Dr. Simon Morgan-Russell, who provides leadership for assessment in the College, to meet with Dr. Chang and the faculty to discuss future directions the department might take. The department’s next report to the Student Achievement Assessment Committee should provide evidence that significant progress has been made in moving the department’s assessment efforts ahead and that assessment is informing curricular revision.

5. I agree with the PRC that the department must develop a differential workload policy. Dr. Chang agrees with this recommendation but notes that workload issues may be addressed by the new school. Therefore, he requests that the deadline for submission of a new policy be extended until spring 2007. I disagree. The department should begin its own discussions of a differential workload policy this year and provide the College with a report on those discussions and a new department policy by April 2006. That policy may be revised as a result of deliberations that occur within the new school during the 2006-07 academic year. However, it is important to have a policy in place as soon as possible.

6. I agree with the PRC that the department must review the focus it developed in the wake of the last program review to assure that it is integrated into the department’s research emphases and curriculum development. Dr. Chang agrees with this recommendation but notes that the department’s focus will evolve as it becomes part of the new school. Therefore, he requests that the deadline for submission of a report on the department’s focus be extended until spring 2007. I agree with Dr. Chang. I hope that the department’s focus will be refined in light of curricular and research collaborations opened by the new school. Consequently, I ask that the department review its focus during the 2006-07 academic year and submit a report to the College in May 2007 that discusses any changes in the department’s focus and explains how its focus has been incorporated into its research emphases and has informed curriculum revision. The report should also address the way in which the department’s focus contributes to collaboration with other units in the school and fulfillment of the school’s mission.

7. Dr. Chang accepted a one-year reappointment as department chair, beginning July 1, 2005. This appointment was designed to provide continuity that would facilitate the final steps necessary to creation of a new school. During the spring semester 2006, I will initiate a chair succession process within the department designed to provide longer-term leadership for the school. In the meantime, the department should develop a plan that will facilitate more participatory management of department affairs and redistribute
responsibilities within the department. That plan should be submitted to the College by March 1, 2006.

8. The department will be revising its merit policy during the coming year in response to the recommendations of the Standards Committee on the Scholarship of Engagement. The College has already provided guidelines for revision of department merit documents that address the concerns the PRC expressed about the Geography Department’s merit policy. Those guidelines will require the department to move away from the “point system” it currently uses and develop a new system that is designed to assess the overall quality of faculty contributions and is calibrated to faculty members’ allocation of effort and the criteria established in the department’s promotion, tenure, and merit policy. However, the nature of the revisions required by the Standards Committee and the College are more fundamental and far-reaching than those suggested by the PRC. Therefore, like other departments, the Department of Geography will have a deadline of fall 2006 to develop a new merit policy.

9. I agree with the PRC that the department should develop a strategy for increasing its visibility on campus. That strategy should be developed in concert with the new school. In devising its strategy, I encourage the department to focus on activities that will have the greatest return for the time invested. Given the proliferation of newsletters competing for community members’ attention, for example, I would urge the department to think very hard about whether a newsletter will repay the efforts that go into it.

The department has serious challenges facing it. Given the success it has enjoyed in recent years and the possibilities opened by participation in the new school, however, I am confident that it will be able to overcome those challenges and enhance the strength of its programs and collaborations. I look forward to working with the department and the school in the coming years to build strong, unique programs that serve students and the community.

____________________________________  ___________________
Donald G. Nieman, Dean                     Date

Concurred:

____________________________________  ___________________
John W. Folkins, Provost                    Date