TO: Donald Nieman, Dean  
College of Arts and Sciences  

FROM: Stephen Chang, Chair  
Department of Geography  

RE: Unit Response to Program Review Committee Report  

The Department of Geography appreciates all of the hard work performed by the Program Review Committee (PRC) on our behalf during the past year. This document is our response to the report submitted by the PRC to the Department in May and will focus primarily on the **Findings and Recommendations** outlined at the end of this report. Although the Department of Geography has made great strides since our previous program review, there is still a need for improvement in the areas of majors, curriculum, and scholarship. In addition, we find ourselves in the midst of exciting change as the Department of Geography prepares to join the Department of Geology (GEOL) and Center for Environmental Programs (ENVP) in a new School that is to come into being in summer, 2006.

[1] **Creation of a School**: This is the focus of the first and most detailed recommendation in the PRC report (pp. 13-16). The Department of Geography agrees with the PRC that creation of a School provides us with challenges and opportunities that are both new and exciting. In fact the landscape surrounding the formation of the School is quickly evolving. When we prepared our Self Study in summer, 2004, the idea of the School had only recently been introduced. In addition, our discussions with representatives from GEOL and ENVP were still informal when the external reviewers visited the Department of Geography in November, 2004. Representatives from the three units have been meeting on a regular basis since early 2005, and detailed discussions to finalize the structure of the School are ongoing at the time of this writing.

Since the PRC submitted its report to the Department of Geography in May, all three units have voted to join the new School. Currently, we are crafting the governing documents which will address many of the major issues regarding the School that are listed in the PRC report. These documents will be voted upon by the faculty of all three units in fall, 2005. These issues include

- **a)** defining the administrative authority of the School and the requisite autonomy for the Departments to maintain their disciplinary identities within the School.

- **b)** budget, planning, hiring, merit, promotion and tenure.

The governing documents are also being crafted to minimize duplication of effort and responsibility and maximize cooperation between the units within the School.

It is difficult to predict how the School will function and evolve once it is formed. However, the Department of Geography agrees with the PRC vision of the School as an instrument that will forward our desire to develop a better rounded curriculum for our students and a home that will facilitate a
substantial and sustained increase in creativity and scholarly activity (i.e., publications and grants). We also hope that, in coming years, synergies between the three units will lead to the development of new undergraduate and graduate programs that fully utilize the intellectual potential of our faculty. All of this will allow the Department of Geography to better pursue the missions and initiatives of the College and University. This, in turn, will enable the School to more forcefully advocate for the new faculty that the Department of Geography urgently needs to be a full partner in these innovative, interdisciplinary initiatives.

In particular, recent experience indicates that significant research opportunities will be created within the School. Although the School will not come into being for another year, the expected structure has already generated collaborations between the three units on several grant initiatives. The Department of Geography is, and will be, a full and active participant in these collaborations.

Finally, we agree with the PRC that it is in the best interest of the Department of Geography to share common space with GEOL and ENVP when the School forms. Although we have already begun to collaborate on several fronts, it is our firm conviction that these efforts will be enhanced if we reside under one roof.

[2] **Number of Majors**: We agree with the PRC that the Department of Geography needs to increase its number of majors. The Department will now work with our national academic society (Association of American Geographers) as well as peer institutions in the Great Lakes region to develop strategies to increase our number of majors. One strategy, as the PRC suggests, may be to encourage and spotlight senior student portfolios, internships, and research projects in introductory level classes. The fact that all of our recent Geography graduates are securing jobs when they leave BGSU, despite the fact that the employment market is tight, will work to our advantage. Although it is impossible to predict future success in this area, we do know that other small departments have been able to increase their numbers of majors in the recent past. After receiving input from colleagues at other universities, the Association of American Geographers, and peer institutions in the region, the Department of Geography will develop a plan that includes a blend of strategies that we feel will best lead to a successful outcome at BGSU. This plan will be submitted to the Dean for his review and approval by the end of Spring Semester, 2006.

[3] **Curriculum**: The Department of Geography has revised and refined its curriculum in line with the recommendations of the previous program review, which recommended that “the department reorganize its programs around one or two foci.” We recognize that our current curriculum for the major can be further strengthened in the following areas:

(a) physical geography.

(b) quantitative methods.

(c) undergraduate research methodology.

(d) capstone experience.

While we recognize that curricular improvements can be made, the Department of Geography is currently doing a good job educating our majors, as is evidenced by success in their careers. We disagree with the notion that the high placement rate of our graduates is the result of market demand that “appears to exceed supply.” In every instance, our students have undergone a competitive evaluative process, where the educational experience provided by the Department of Geography has enabled them to prevail.

In addition, the Department needs to refine its BG Perspective curriculum to further emphasize the intellectual skill development that is emphasized in the General Education White Paper. As part of our overall evaluation of current offerings, the Department of Geography will propose two new courses for BG Perspective credit. The first will be an introductory physical geography course while the second will
be an introductory human geography course. These courses may replace one or more existing offerings.

Our ability to successfully implement these curricular changes will require sufficient faculty resources. While the synergies created by the formation of the School will help, the Department will still need faculty lines to replace two recent and three impending retirements. Given our diminished human resources, the Department of Geography cannot continue to service the University community with a disproportionately large share of general education course offerings, while simultaneously making the improvements in our major curriculum, as discussed above.

[4] **Assessment**: The Department of Geography agrees with the conclusions of the PRC. We will work energetically to implement our assessment plan, including an electronic portfolio system, across the curriculum and will report our progress to the Student Achievement Assessment Committee on an annual basis. Finally, we will study and discuss all assessment results as we revise our curriculum.

[5] **Workload Policy**: We agree with the PRC recommendation. Virtually all scholarly activity is generated by a distinct segment of the Department faculty. However, all faculty have identical teaching loads (9 credit hours per semester). We believe that this effort should be redistributed so that the teaching load for Geography faculty with active research agendas is reduced. This will enable faculty to commit more time and energy to scholarly endeavors. Given our conversations with GEOL and ENVP, it is possible that the issue of differential workload assignments will be addressed at the School level. So we request that the Dean allow us to defer presentation of this policy until spring, 2007, or one year after the School has formed.

[6] **Department Focus**: Again, we agree with the PRC that the Department needs to review and refine its current focus of regional change. Following the previous program review, we were required to identify a single focus for the entire department. However, given emerging areas of research and the changing nature of the discipline, we anticipate that several interconnected foci will evolve to reflect the skills of the entire faculty. In addition the revised focus must conform with the new curricular and scholarly synergies that will emerge as the Department of Geography joins GEOL and ENVP in the new School. Although the departmental focus is to be submitted to the Dean for his review and approval by the end of the 2005-2006 academic year, we again request that submission be deferred until spring, 2007, or one year after the School has formed.

[7] **Departmental Leadership**: We agree with the PRC that departmental leadership needs to take on a less centralized and more participatory management style. These changes will be facilitated by three key factors. First, a new Department Chair will be appointed in fall, 2006. This will provide the opportunity for implementation of a new management style. Second, our remaining junior faculty will be going up for tenure and promotion in fall, 2005. Once this threshold is passed, the Department will be in a position to delegate more responsibility to these junior colleagues. Finally, when the School comes into being, the responsibilities of the new Chair will be diminished as substantial authority shifts to the School Director. This diminished set of responsibilities will provide a unique opportunity for the Chair to assess how best to increase the role of the faculty in departmental governance. We will present a plan to redistribute responsibilities within the Department to the Dean for his review and approval by the end of fall, 2005.

[8] **Merit System**: Although the Department implemented all of the recommended changes to its merit document following our previous program review, we agree with the PRC that additional revisions are necessary. In particular, the Department of Geography needs to bring its merit document in line with the standards that our faculty must follow to achieve tenure and promotion to both associate and full professor. This revision will encourage faculty to embrace a departmental culture that places a premium on the successful acquisition of external funding and the publication of peer reviewed scholarly work, which includes the scholarship of engagement. For example, the Department will revisit the issue of
paper presentations at conferences to link the presentation of research findings to the subsequent publication of results. In addition we will reevaluate the assignment of points for the teaching of independent studies courses to ensure that this is proportionally consistent with the assignment of points for in-load classes. The Department of Geography will revise its merit document by the end of fall semester, 2005.

[9] **Visibility**: We agree with the PRC that the visibility of the Department of Geography on campus can be improved. We need to increase the number of events that highlight the rapidly increasing academic accomplishments of our faculty and students to all sectors of the University community. This will aid in our attempt to increase the number of Geography majors. We will work toward the:

(a) re-establishment of Geography Awareness Week activities to give the campus community the opportunity to learn more about our discipline and job prospects in the field.

(b) development and regular maintenance of a far more attractive and comprehensive departmental website than the one that currently exists.

(c) publication of a newsletter that regularly updates the BGSU community as well as our alumni about events taking place in the Department.

The Department intends to reach beyond the recommendations of the PRC when it comes to visibility. We will strive to work together as a more cohesive unit and create a committee-of-the-whole to thoroughly assess strategies that can be employed to educate the entire university community about the numerous accomplishments of both our faculty (paper presentations, publications, grants) and students (academic achievements, co-op experiences, research results).