MEMORANDUM

TO:        Don Nieman, Dean, Arts and Sciences
FROM:      Marc Simon, Chair, Political Science
SUBJ:      Unit Response to Program Review Committee Findings and Recommendations
DATE:      June 2, 2005

The department would like to thank the Program Review Committee, and especially Dr. Geoffrey Howes, for their work in conducting this review. The committee findings and recommendations reflect a detailed reading and analysis of both the department’s self-study document and the external reviewer report.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the committee recommendations. The department has used this time to meet and hold discussions which have clarified our plan for the future. Based on these discussions, we have arrived at several positive responses to the recommendations, some of which we have already begun to undertake. The following sections describe our ideas, which we present to the dean in an ongoing dialogue about the future direction of the department.

1. General Comments
The department appreciates the praise in the PRC report for our achievements in teaching and research. We have worked hard to attract and retain faculty members who are excellent scholar-teachers. We ask our faculty members to teach a large number of students, and we have achieved significant increases in the number of majors, general education students, and total students we serve. We also ask our faculty to be productive in research and active in service and engagement. Unfortunately, we must also ask our faculty members to accept salary and benefits which are much less than competing universities. This has created a challenge for faculty retention which will not go away.

We had to face this reality this spring semester as we lost one of our best junior faculty, Glen Biglaiser. Glen served BGSU for 5 years, published a university press book and several articles, and was an excellent teacher. He took a position at Texas Tech University, where he received a lower teaching load in a Ph.D. department and a 25% pay raise.

We recognize that university budgets will always be under pressure, and that it is difficult to make commitments of resources. From comments on p. 15 of the PRC report, it appears that the PRC is prevented from recommending an increase in faculty lines. However, we note that the external reviewers made a strong case for increasing the size of the faculty in our department, offering comparative data to show that we are woefully understaffed compared to similar universities. Furthermore, as the PRC has noted, we lost staff members, down from 2.25 to 1. In short, we are struggling to do more with less.

As we continue to engage in the planning process that is program review, it is difficult for our department to set realistic goals if they are not also connected to resource commitments from the college. Therefore we ask that in his final report, the dean provide a clear indication of the type and level of resources that the college is willing to commit to the department. Like everyone else, we will do the best we can with what we have. But we will make better choices and better plans if we have a realistic idea of the support we can expect.
2. Specific Findings and Recommendations of the PRC

a. Tenure and Promotion Expectations
The department believes that it is healthy to revisit tenure and promotion expectations on a regular basis. With the addition of two newly tenured faculty members this fall, and the expectation of one retirement in the near future, it is important for new faculty members to have clear sense of tenure and promotion expectations. The department suggests that the tenured faculty should meet in the fall and propose clarifications to the existing promotion and tenure document that, without specifying a particular number of items, provide an objective standard for promotion and tenure which is clear to both newer faculty members and the dean. Our goal will be to reassure the fears of newer faculty that the exceptional performance of recently tenured faculty is not the new minimum requirement for tenure.

b. Graduate coordinator
The department recognizes the need for a full time, continuing faculty member to assume the role of graduate coordinator. Our plan is to appoint Dr. Shannon Orr as MPA coordinator for 2006-07 and beyond. We will use the coming year (2005-06) as a transition and will encourage Shannon to work with the current coordinator Miriam Wilson and the Chair and to participate in all MPA decisions.

c. Evaluation of Focus of MPA program
The department is committed to graduate education, and we appreciate the PRC’s concern that our graduate program should involve all of our faculty members and provide a distinctive, focused, degree which can attract high quality students. After much discussion, our department strongly objects to the recommendation that we discontinue the MPA program and replace it with an MA in Political Science. Our rationale is that the MPA degree is much more attractive to students and leads to real employment, whereas the MA degree in Political Science is mainly a vehicle for students to move on to Ph.D. programs or for secondary education teachers to renew their licenses. We note that our MPA alumni have in fact achieved solid job placement and, in several cases, have enrolled in strong Ph.D. programs in Political Science as well as Public Administration.

Thus we don’t see any value added by changing to an MA program. To support our view, we provide data, (in addition to that on p. 32 of our self study), on enrollment trends in MA vs. MPA programs. Furthermore, we have created a proposal for a refocused MPA degree (attached) which we believe addresses the concerns raised by the external reviewers and the PRC.

In brief, our plan is to change the existing MPA degree program from one with 10 concentrations to a degree with 4 focused “tracks.” The tracks would allow for all of our faculty to participate in graduate education (particularly the American politics scholars who played a smaller role before). The new, focused degree program could be aggressively marketed to potential students and raise the quality and quantity of applicants we receive.

The four tracks are:
- Local Government Management
- International Development Administration
- Politics and Public Policy
- Individualized Planned program

The International Development Administration track would be especially appealing to students who wish to pursue careers in international organizations and international non-profits (nongovernmental / aid organizations, what we call NGOs). Nationally, there are very few programs—either MPA or MA—which provide this training, and yet this is where most of the jobs are in international affairs. This degree would be attractive to undergraduates with no work experience but especially to returned Peace Corps volunteers, military members, and others with international work experience who wish to move up in the field.

The Politics and Public Policy track would build on existing strengths in American politics and public policy and train students to work in administrative and research positions in federal, state, and local
governments, as well as employment directly in the political process—for parties, elected officials, and interest groups. Because it is not as narrow as some degree programs (such as the Applied politics MA offered by Akron, or programs in Campaign management), this MPA track would be attractive to students who wanted some flexibility in their career path. Again, we believe that the MPA degree name will serve them better than the MA in their careers in public service.

Finally, the Local government management and planned program tracks would meet the needs of traditional MPA students who we still attract in significant numbers. It would draw upon existing assets in the MPA program, and maintain our engagement with area local governments and nonprofits as well as our alumni base. Graduates would continue to find placements in local government, and with the individualized option could concentrate further in areas such as human resource management.

After many meetings and much deliberation, our department is united behind this proposal, and we hope that the dean will accept this as an alternative to the recommendation of the PRC. We believe it will be better for the department and the university as a whole. A more detailed description of the program, along with data supporting the marketability of the MPA degree, is attached to this memo.

d. Assessment
We appreciate the praise for the steps in assessment which we have undertaken thus far, but understand that our department has a long way to go. The department has formed an ad hoc assessment committee, which has recommended that we pursue assessment of the major in POLS 290 (Intro to Political Inquiry) a required course, and pair that with assessment activities associated with a required capstone course (to be numbered POLS 490). The committee has also recommended additional discipline specific learning outcomes, and we intend to implement these as soon as feasible. With regard to graduate assessment, as part of the reorganization of the MPA curriculum we intend to implement an assessment program that goes beyond the current practice of comprehensive exams and experiential paper/thesis that students are currently required to complete. Ideally, graduate assessment would also provide students with data that they could use to demonstrate the skills they have acquired to a future employer. Also, graduate assessment will need to evaluate the learning outcomes of each concentration area in the MPA degree.

e. Undergraduate Curriculum
Our department, along with all others, has recently purged from the catalog those classes which had not been taught frequently in the past. While it is still possible to eliminate a couple of additional courses, the arrival of new faculty members and the demands of students in other programs we serve will create a need to add courses as well. We will seek to justify changes based on assessment and on the contribution that the changes make to satisfy the demands of our majors and students in related programs. We hope that the college will be supportive of curricular changes that we propose.

With regard to the number of subfields, the department intends to reduce them from 6 to 4 by combining International Relations and Comparative Government into one subfield, and combining American politics and Public Administration into one subfield. We would retain Political Theory and Public Law as separate subfields due to the high demand for public law courses from pre-law students and our desire to move toward a requirement in Political Theory for our majors.

Attachments: Proposed Revisions in MPA program; Data on MA and MPA degrees