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November 21, 2007

To: Phyllis Wise, Provost
        Ana Mari Cauce, Executive Vice Provost
        Office of the Provost, Box 351237

From: Suzanne Ortega, Vice Provost and Dean

RE: Review of the Department of Technical Communication

At its meeting of November 15, 2007, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team that reviewed the Department of Technical Communication (Gaetano Borriello, Review Committee Chair and Professor, Computer Science and Engineering; Richard Gustafson, Professor, Forest Resources; and Robert Mason, Professor, Information School) and with Matthew O'Donnell, Dean, College of Engineering, and Judith Ramey, Chair, Department of Technical Communication. The program review process included a charge meeting on October 20, 2006, between members of the review committee and administrators involved in the review. The site visit, held on November 15-17, 2006, included in-person participation by Sam Dragga, Professor and Chair, Department of English, Texas Tech University, and Suzanne Sowinska, Senior Content Publishing Manager / Engineering Excellence, Microsoft Corporation.

Speaking to the Graduate School Council on November 15, Professors Borriello, Gustafson, and Mason summarized their findings from the Review Committee Report (submitted December 29, 2006). The report included a description of Technical Communication as a high-quality department, a "hidden gem" that is a well-recognized leader in its field, despite its limited resources in terms of space and faculty. Faculty and student morale is very high, and the department's location in the College of Engineering is beneficial to both the department and the college. To truly capitalize on the department's accomplishments and unique position in its field, the department will require renewed investment and/or a realignment that will give it larger presence and visibility both within the University and in the larger research community. Specifically, the department should be considered an important element of any initiatives on campus in the direction of human-computer interaction. Further recommendations can be found in the Review Committee Report.

The Chair of Technical Communication noted that many issues identified in the review have been addressed since submission of the report. The College has secured consolidated space for Technical Communication in Sieg Hall, which will allow for dramatic improvement to group identity and cohesiveness. While the department is especially susceptible to budget cuts and faculty loss due to its size, the unit continues its entrepreneurial approach that has served it well in the face of past budgetary restrictions. The department has begun awarding a new endowed diversity scholarship to undergraduate students. A more detailed statement from the department can be found in the Technical Communication Response to the Review Committee Report (submitted February 13, 2007).

The Council unanimously recommends continuing status for the Department of Technical Communication's degree programs, with the next review in 2016-2017. It recognizes that many of the challenges faced by this department are due to its small size and are shared with all smaller programs. The Council wishes to explicitly commend the department on its thoughtful approach to the review and engagement in the process.

cc:　 Melissa A. Austin, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, The Graduate School
　　　 Matthew O'Donnell, Dean, College of Engineering
　　　 Judith Ramey, Chair, Department of Technical Communication
　　　 David Brown, GPSS President
　　　 Technical Communication Review Committee
　　　 Graduate School Council
　　　 David Canfield-Budde, Academic Program Specialist, The Graduate School