

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON



OFFICE OF THE CHAIR

Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

October 15, 2001

Dr. Marsha L. Landolt, Dean
The Graduate School
University of Washington
Box 351240
Seattle, WA 98195

RE: Ten-Year Program Review – Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering

Dear Dean Landolt:

I am writing to offer some comments on the "Report of the Program Review: Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Spring 2001". In general, we are very pleased with the written report and the oral feedback we were given last spring. However, we do feel some items might be improved.

On the first page of the review (paragraph two), the committee indicated concern over our relationships with other parts of the University. We currently have ties with the following units for joint teaching or research: Evans School of Public Affairs, Urban Design and Planning, the Applied Physics Lab, Marine Affairs, Bioengineering, GTTL, Geological Sciences, Geography, Chemical Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Industrial Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. I think we failed to convey the real breadth of our UW ties to the review committee. Given the reduction in our faculty over the last 15 years, we find it necessary to partner with other departments for both teaching and research. We view these partnerships as a positive development and will attempt to aggressively expand them in the future.

On the third page (paragraph three), the committee recommended that we not rely on national rankings to measure our progress, but rather concentrate on building up our critical areas and investing more in our PhD program. While the national rankings are difficult to ignore, we have never focused on simple improvement of our score as a primary strategy. We recognize that our PhD program needs improvement and we have taken a number of steps to address the issue. The adoption of a "coursework only" masters program has helped free resources to fund PhD students and we anticipate large increases in our graduation of PhD's in the next few years. This emphasis on the PhD program is also mentioned in the third paragraph on page 4.

On page four, governance of the department is discussed. We spent a substantial amount of time at our recent department retreat discussing department governance and it appeared that the majority of the faculty favor changing the current structure. This topic will be discussed when our new chair is named by the first of this year.

This same section mentioned the undergraduate council that advises the chair on student matters and suggested a similar graduate council be named. We intend to adopt this recommendation.

On page seven the computing facilities were mentioned and concern was raised that not all graduate students have equal access to computers and software. Nearly all our PhD students have computers on their desks that are generally provided by their faculty advisor. We are taking steps to improve our graduate student computer labs and are currently converting a room for additional graduate computers and project workspace.

Regarding the recommendations to the department beginning on page 5:

- 1) Pending possible reorganization with the appointment of a new chair, I have appointed an assistant professor and an alternate to serve on the Strategic Planning Committee. I also appointed alternates for the other members of the committee, generally taking associate professors or women.
- 2) We agree that graduate students should play a bigger role in the department's activities and are taking steps to appoint a graduate student council to advise the chair on student issues. We will also involve undergraduates and graduate students in department committees and position searches. We have discussed targeting some of our seminars to all the graduate students rather narrow sub-areas. These seminars might also have receptions associated with them to encourage student and faculty interaction.
- 3) I previously mentioned steps being taken to enhance our PhD program and agree with the suggestion to adopt strategies to provide competitive multi-year offers to attract the best students.
- 4) The new chair will need to review the current strategic plan for the department and evaluate its goals in light of current budget limitations. In general we think it offers a good overall direction for the department.
- 5) The hiring plan will be reviewed by the faculty this fall and provide input to the new chair.
- 6) We could not agree more that More Hall is in need of substantial renovation. Teaching in new classrooms in Mary Gates Hall and the new Electrical Engineering Building has revealed to our faculty just how out of date our facilities really are. It appears that a new CEE building is years away and we should get more aggressive in seeking UW funds and raising money through the development process for classroom, office and student space renovations.

Recommendation #4 for the college mentioned concern among junior faculty about mentorship advice and the need for more information and interaction from senior faculty who serve as mentorship chairs. This process definitely needs improvement and steps are being taken to address this issue. I asked our representative to last year's college promotion and tenure committee to review candidates who would be up for promotion next year. These people will meet with the chair and the P&T representative to outline steps needed this year to make a better package for next autumn. The mentorship

committees need to be given new and clear instructions about their responsibilities. The chair will also start occasional meetings with the assistant professors to get their insight into department operations.

I believe that this review can be a very positive event for our department and welcome additional comments on my suggestions outlined above. If you require any further information please contact me.

Yours very truly,



G. Scott Rutherford
Professor and Acting Chair

cc: Denice D. Denton, Dean
College of Engineering