The report of the Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL and the Chair’s response to it provide an excellent foundation for the academic review process. We thank the Chair, Dr. Sara Weigle, and the department for their efforts, and we especially commend the self study committee and its chair, Dr. John Murphy, for the considerable thought and time they devoted to this important process.

Academic program review provides us with an opportunity to highlight a department’s major accomplishments, set goals, and focus attention on current concerns and challenges. This is the department’s second cycle of review. Its first review, completed in 2003, resulted in goals related to program development. Since the last review, the department has established and implemented a doctoral program and graduated its first PhDs. It also established a BA program in Applied Linguistics and is growing the number of majors and it has continued to build a successful revenue-generating Intensive English Program (IEP) and nurture a number of significant international educational collaborations. Unfortunately, the department’s programmatic growth has not been paralleled by a planned expansion of the tenure-track faculty which has remained relatively constant since the last program review; four hires have been offset by 2 unanticipated resignations last year and by 2 retirements.

The upcoming visit by the external review team provides the department and the Dean’s Office with an excellent opportunity to review the progress of the Department and to sharpen our vision for its future. To this end, we will focus here on the goals and objectives put forward by the department in its self study and leave decisions about new resources until the action plan is formulated during later steps in the program review process. In general, the Dean’s Office is pleased with the direction that is plotted in the department’s goals and objectives and agrees with many of the recommendations in the report. In particular, we strongly support the plans to focus on enhancing the scholarly productivity of the faculty and increasing external funding for faculty research and scholarship. These are important targets within the context of a growing doctoral program.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, we would like to focus on three matters where we think that further information and analysis would be particularly useful as we plan for the department’s future. We hope that the external review team will be able to help us gain greater clarity concerning these concerns.

First, given the varied academic programs (i.e, Ph.D., M.A., B.A., and IEP) the department supports, we know that the department is challenged by the demands of balancing across programs. The self-study report details some of the concerns, particularly related to size of graduate stipends, the breadth of course offerings, and number of majors in each program. We would welcome comments about each of these
matters, especially ones that can help us guide difficult decisions related to resource allocation. We note that the PhD proposal had a consideration for how the new program would relate to the other programs, including a plan that it would gain significant support by using the IEP both as a venue for teaching and research. It has clearly provided resources for teaching assistantships. Moreover, in addition (and not noted in the self-study), the department’s base of graduate funding from the state budget has increased since 2004 by 52xx% ($29,000 in research and $15,000 in teaching) and its doctoral students now can compete for research assistantships in our new area of focus program of the Challenges to the Acquisition of Language and Literary. Yet, as the self-study indicates, we still need to gain additional funds for our graduate students, and we would welcome suggestions about how to do so through research in the IEP, external funding, and other programs.

A second, and related issue, is the further definition of the department’s scholarly focus. We are particularly interested in ideas about how best to provide ways for the research and graduate programs’ to coalesce around programmatic areas both to guide new tenure track faculty hires (we now have two on-going searches and hope, as resources permit, to continue our efforts to expand the faculty) and to stimulate collaboration. Thus, we welcome the external reviewers’ guidance in how the department can best take advantage of the university’s area of focus on Language and Literacy and its many international collaborations. Moreover, we would find information about how our programs might best gain additional distinctiveness within the discipline of applied linguistics helpful.

Third, expanding the research profile of the department is, we think, a crucial task for the next period of time. We would welcome the external reviewers’ suggestions about how best to stimulate the faculty’s scholarly productivity. In particular, comments about what types of research grants department faculty can apply for and about investment in infrastructure that might help expand the department’s research profile would be helpful.

The Dean’s Office again congratulates the Department on its development since the last academic program review, and thanks the Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL for this report. Its progress bodes well for the future. The Dean’s Office looks forward to the external reviewers’ visit and to working with the Department on an action plan that will make their goals achievable in the next five years.

Lauren B. Adamson, Dean

MaryAnn Romski, Associate Dean