College of Arts & Sciences
Dean’s Response to Self Study Report of the
Department of Physics & Astronomy

December 31, 2007

The report of the Department of Physics & Astronomy and the Chair’s response to it provide a good foundation for the review of the department’s achievements and goals. We thank the Department Chair, Dr. Richard Miller, and the department for their efforts. We especially commend the self study committee and its chair (Paul Wiita [chair], Doug Gies, Xiaochun He, Hal McAlister, Bill Nelson, and Unil Perera) for the considerable thought and time that they devoted to this important endeavor.

The Dean’s Office acknowledges the Department’s report of its excellent achievements in research, instruction, and service over the review period. As the report details, the department has a very strong faculty who contribute to all areas of university life. Research programs have strong foundations and are growing. Students in the program are well prepared for future activities.

The Department has experienced significant new resources over the last five years, funded by commitments from the previous action plan and by new sources such as the Brains & Behavior (B&B) and Molecular Basis of Disease (MBD) initiatives. The resources have lead to a growth and strengthening of both faculty and graduate students. With respect to faculty, its size was relatively constant from 1996 to 2003, at 16-17 tenure track faculty. As a result of action plan commitments plus two additional new hires (one biophysicist from the Brains & Behavior initiative and one astronomer from a conversion of a staff position), the department has already increased by four to its current level of 22 (including a Lecturer line added in 2004) and will grow to 24 by the fall of 2008 (current searches in Astronomy to work on CHARA-related activities and in Physics in the area of condensed matter). Thus, the Department’s faculty has increased by 41% over a five-year period. New support for graduate students have been provided including an increase in GLA funding and 5 MBD and B&B graduate research fellowships of $22,000 each and the a subsidized health insurance program for all full-time graduate assistants.

The external review team’s visit 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 focus 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 particular, there are two areas that we
would like the external review team to help us gain greater clarity on how best to growth the
Department’s undergraduate and graduate programs. Both are small (with an average of 5
BS and 6 PhD graduating per year), and both have some difficulties retaining majors. We
welcome suggestions on how these programs might be enhanced and expanded. Furthermore,
we are interested in ideas about how we can capitalize on distinctive strengths of the current
programs and how we might strengthen their links to initiatives such as our STEM teacher
preparation programs and our area of focus programs.

The review of departmental programs includes review of research centers, which in the case
of Physics & Astronomy, means a review of CHARA. Thus your comments on CHARA will
be appreciated; please see Appendix B5 for the CHARA report.

The Dean’s Office again congratulates the Department of Physics & Astronomy on its
achievements in recent years, and we thank it for its thorough and thoughtful self-study. We
look forward to the external reviewers’ visit and to working with the Department on an action
plan that will make many of their goals achievable in the next five years.

Lauren B. Adamson, Dean

Charles Derby, Associate Dean