


INTERDEPARTMENTAL

Department of Physics Box 351560

DATE: October 21, 1997
TO: Elizabeth L. Feetham, Acting Associate Dean for Academic Programs
The Graduate School, Box 351240
FROM: Stephen D. Ellis, Chair 
Department of Physics
RE: Review Committee Report, Ten Year Review

The Department of Physics appreciates the considerable effort that went into the preparation of the Review Committee Report. For the Department the review process represented an opportunity to thoroughly assess our strengths and our weaknesses, our successes and the challenges we face. We thank the Review Committee for sharing this process with us.

On the whole we agree with the assessment of the Review Committee as described in the Committee Report.

- The Department agrees that the last ten years have been marked by many strong additions to the faculty and by the move to an outstanding new building. We also consider the possibility of moving from a ranking of 14 into the top 10 as an attainable goal of extremely high priority.

- The Department agrees that the most serious challenge to maintaining both our present quality and our momentum for continuing improvement is the question of replacements for the large number of retirements expected in the near future. Our current agreement with the College concerning the next seven retirements specifies that no new faculty will be hired, four positions will be recaptured by the College and three will be employed to convert faculty now supported by "soft money" (the "queue") to State funded positions. Such a course of events will not only stop our momentum but likely move us in the other direction. It is also clear that, with such a reduction in teaching faculty, our instructional programs will be severely hampered. We wish to express strong support for the major recommendation of the Review Committee - that the Department retain its current size and that the College work with us to plan for the orderly replacement of the many faculty expected to retire in the near future. A logical first step in this direction would be the elimination of the plan to recapture four of the next seven retirements.

- The Department agrees that the twin issues of low faculty salary levels compared to our peers and of a high level of salary compression due to hiring at market

levels with only small raises are having a serious impact on faculty morale. With little expectation of any change in the raise picture, the salary issue will continue to be a very serious problem for both existing faculty and future hires.

The Department wishes to further thank the Review committee for its insightful comments and recommendations concerning our teaching programs and directions for the future (certain clarifying details will be appended to this response). We will continue to work to address the concerns raised. We are particularly aware of our noncompetitive position on the issue of graduate student fellowships and hope that the College can work with us on that issue. On the issue of the future the Department is excited about the challenges we face to hire new faculty who will both enhance our existing strengths and define new directions in both research and instruction. The Department is well aware both that the previous Ten Year Review highlighted the inadequate conditions in our previous building as a primary concern and that, since that report, the University has graciously solved the problem. We look forward to similarly effective assistance on the issue of faculty hires.

The Department of Physics thanks everyone involved in this study for their assistance.

APPENDIX - Detailed Comments.

- With respect to the statements made in the final paragraph on page 3 of the Report concerning tutorials and physics majors, we are concerned that a misunderstanding may have arisen. While not stating it explicitly, the statements suggest that physics majors may have a relatively more negative view of the tutorials in the Introductory Physics sequence than non-majors. The results of the student evaluations performed by the Physics Education Group are clear on this point. In rating the relative effectiveness in enhancing the learning process of the various components of the class, the tutorials are rated as highly by members of the Honors section, taken as representing the views of most pre-Physics majors, as by the overall Introductory student cohort. The Committee presumably heard from the small cohort of physics majors who would prefer to be more thoroughly challenged (we appreciate this attitude and we attempt to respond!) but this view does not seem to be representative of the overall group of Majors.
- With respect to the comment on page 3 of the Report that the "College of Engineering would like a more formal assessment procedure" we would appreciate receiving more detailed information. Several members of the Physics Education Group have been working for some time with the Dean of the College of Engineering and with Engineering faculty precisely on the issue of assessment of the impact of the Introductory Physics sequence. Our impression is that this process is successful. If this is not the case, we would appreciate hearing more about the concerns.