MEMO

TO: Program Review Committee
FROM: Frank Percival, Biology Department Chair
RE: Program Review Report
DATE: September 23, 2005

1. Current Status

Compared to other departments in the College, the Biology Department is in a different place with respect to the program review process. A number of extenuating circumstances during the period leading up to and extending beyond the original due date for submitting an assessment plan resulted in our being granted a one year extension in December 2004 for the completion of our plan. Consequently, our activities this year are being directed first toward completing a plan that can serve as an effective foundation for ongoing assessment of our program’s effectiveness and then toward developing the mechanisms for gathering data that can be used as evidence for program review.

We had met as a department on a number of occasions during the past year and a half to work on this project, and four meetings this semester have brought us to the point of having a draft plan for the Committee’s consideration. You will find a copy of the document attached to this memo. Although the goals will undoubtedly go through further refinement and the assessment activities are still untried, we feel that we are ready to begin the process of assessing our students’ learning. Our concern as a department is to develop ways to carry out these activities that will provide the information we need for program improvement without diverting so much time into program review that the educational program itself ends up being impacted negatively.

2. Planned 2005-2006 Review Activities

The first objective for this academic year is to work with the Program Review Committee to complete our plan for assessment. One advantage of developing our goals and assessment strategies at this point in time is that we have had the benefit of being able to compare our ideas to those proposed by a number of other departments. Our sense is that what we are proposing is in keeping with the spirit of what is taking place across campus, and we do not anticipate finalizing the plan being a lengthy process.

This Fall, we will also establish the means for collecting student work into a portfolio. Considering how well we are doing with respect to three of the four departmental goals in our review plan will involve examining examples of student work, and we will begin having them submit assignments and research reports electronically for that purpose. Beginning in the Spring of 2006, we will add giving the Major Field Test in Biology (Educational Testing Service) both to our introductory students in BIO5 and to our graduating seniors.

By the end of this academic year, we should have gathered a substantial body of data which can be used as evidence for assessing student learning. Time will be set aside at the beginning of Mayterm for the Department to examine the evidence and to discuss together its implications for our program. At that time, we would be in a position to think through possible ways in which we might alter our educational approaches as we seek to improve the way in which we educate our students.