February 26th, 2015

Wendy Crone
Interim Dean, Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Madison
217 Bascom Hall
500 Lincoln Dr.
Madison, Wi 53706

Dear Dean Crone and Members of the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC),

First, I would like to thank the Committee for their careful review of our decennial report, and the associated recommendations as communicated by Dean Cadwallader in his memo of March 27th, 2014. I am pleased to report that we have made a concerted effort to address all of the recommendations made by GFEC, and that we have made concrete progress on nearly all of them. In what follows, I will review each of the recommendations offered by GFEC, and summarize our progress toward and/or successful implementation of each.

A number of recommendations concerned the ways in which we use our department website and other official channels to communicate with graduate students about important policies, deadlines, and other procedures relevant to their progress through our program. In response to these recommendations, our Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Robert Asen, worked closely with our Graduate Program Coordinator, our Graduate Committee, and the rest of the department to both create an official Handbook of Graduate Study for the department, as well as streamline website content for graduate students. The handbook has been approved and in use in the department for some time, and we have made it clear to all faculty and students that the official handbook is the “law of the land” with respect to graduate program policies and procedures. The handbook itself is available for download on our department website, and we are continuing to work on bringing the less formal discussion of these policies and procedures on various other pages into alignment with the handbook.

In addition to establishing a graduate program handbook and working on improving our general communication with graduate students about the program through our website, we have also carefully considered the recommendation that we implement formal representation for graduate students in our department meetings and on departmental committees. Thus far, faculty have been reluctant to incorporate a formal graduate student representative into our regular departmental meetings. However, we are still considering the possibility of incorporating graduate student representation on specific committees.

With respect to the recommendation that we work with the College to improve our teaching facilities, we continue to struggle with problems of scale. To explain, our most significant needs (for

Department of Communication Arts

Vilas Hall 821 University Avenue Madison, WI 53706-1412
FAX: 608-262-9953 Department Office: 608-262-2543 Chair’s Office: 608-262-2277 Graduate Office: 608-262-3398
info@commarts.wisc.edu www.commarts.wisc.edu
example renovation of the facilities in which we teach Communication Arts 100, a large Communication-A course offered in relatively small sections), vastly outstrip the parameters for projects considered through the Instructional Lab Modernization (ILM) exercises. However, I am pleased to note that last year, with the help of the College and some leveraging of gift funds, we were able to complete one of these out-sized projects, the upgrading and renovation of our principal large lecture space, Vilas Hall 4070. This room is used for many of our TA-supported courses and among other things, serves as a regular venue for a central part of our graduate curriculum, departmental colloquia. Nonetheless, like many others around campus, we continue to struggle against obvious fiscal headwinds in our efforts to improve our teaching facilities.

Another point stressed in last year’s assessment by GFEC was the fact that our percentage of enrolled underrepresented minority students over the 10 years covered by the review exercise. We wholeheartedly agree with the committee that this issue deserves our careful attention, and members of our Graduate Committee have worked hard to address this troubling trend-line. Though we are not quite at the end of our graduate admissions process for this year, to date we have admitted one AOF candidate and a number of other students of color. We are working very hard to recruit these students, and remain committed to reversing the pattern of the last 10 years with respect to underrepresented minority enrollment in our graduate program.

Relatedly, we are also continually in search of greater resources to support graduate scholarship and education generally, increasingly through development. In line with broader fundraising goals of the College, however, we are cognizant that it is often difficult to raise funds for graduate support from alumni that, by and large, think primarily in terms of undergraduate programs. Thus we are pursuing a general strategy of bread-based engagement with our alumni and other possible donors in the hope that such engagement might pave the way toward future fundraising around graduate support.

Once again, I would like to offer our thanks to the Committee for helping us identify concrete policy implications flowing from our recent decennial review process. We have found these recommendations extremely helpful and in a number of areas have already seen dramatic benefits from their implementation. We plan to continue working on those areas where we have not yet been able to fully implement some suggestions, and hope to make further progress in the months ahead. We appreciate the care and effort involved in reviewing our decennial report materials, and we hope that you find our progress toward implementing GFEC’s recommendations satisfactory.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Michael A. Xenos
Professor and Chair
Department of Communication Arts
University of Wisconsin-Madison
March 27, 2014

Professor Michael Xenos  
Chair, Department of Communication Arts  
6152 Vilas Communication Hall  
821 University Avenue  
CAMPUS MAIL

Dear Professor Xenos:

As you know, an important part of the university’s ongoing review process is the vetting of graduate programs by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) of the Graduate School. When the College of Letters and Science assembled a review committee to conduct a 10 year assessment of the Department of Communication Arts’ academic programs, a member of the GFEC, Pamela Potter, was asked to join the committee and was given responsibility for attending to graduate training issues of particular interest to the Graduate School. Professor Potter led a discussion of the review at the GFEC meeting on March 14. In this letter, I summarize the committee’s discussion.

The GFEC was impressed with many aspects of your program. You offer a wide-ranging and deep communication program, and the program’s quality is reflected in the selectivity of admissions and the high rate of matriculation among admitted students. The committee applauded the excellent support packages you provide graduate students and the opportunities you offer graduate students to teach after their five-year funding guarantee has expired. The GFEC was also pleased by your extremely high job placement rate for your PhD recipients.

While the GFEC was very impressed with your graduate program overall, the committee saw a number of areas where improvement is warranted. Most concretely and doable, along with other graduate programs on campus, you should have a graduate handbook (for a template see: https://kb.wisc.edu/GSAdminKB/page.php?id=34123). In addition, the information on your website about your graduate program should be updated. The GFEC specifically believes that information on departmental policies, deadlines, a grievance procedure, published forms and departmental operations should be easily accessible online and updated regularly. Beyond this, the review committee recommended that you consider permitting graduate students to serve on department committees and be represented at department faculty meetings. The GFEC agrees that such participation would be valuable, improving the quality of information that graduate students receive and socializing them into the practice of departmental service. Fourth, given the state of some of your classrooms, the GFEC believes you should find ways, including the use of L&S funds, to upgrade your teaching facilities. Finally, the review noted that “whereas the Graduate School and the division have maintained stable rates of 20-30% of enrolled targeted

Graduate School
Bascom Hall    University of Wisconsin–Madison    500 Lincoln Drive    Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1380

Dean's Office  608/262-1044  Fax: 608/262-5134
Graduate Admissions & Academic Services, Diversity Resources  608/262-2433, Fax: 608/265-9505
Accounting  608/262-5835  Fax: 608/262-5134
Human Resources  608/262-5802  Fax: 608/262-5235
Professional Development & Engagement  608/262-1044, Fax: 608/262-5134
minorities, Communication Arts has shown a steady reduction from 22% in Fall 2003 to 8% in Fall 2012.” While the small size of many graduate programs can lead to significant fluctuations in percentages of enrolled underrepresented minority students from year to year, the drop in URM enrollment in your program over the last 10 years nevertheless deserves attention, and we believe the department should renew its efforts to increase its diversity.

The GFEC highlighted a number of other issues, and I was pleased to see that your colleagues, Kelley Conway and Vance Kepley, have already begun to think these matters through on your department’s behalf:

- Improve communication about teaching and fellowship opportunities and decisions. We are glad that Professors Conway and Kepley have committed to improving communication in this area;
- Raise funds to increase support for graduate students. Again, we are glad that you are already working with the Foundation to improve the funding situation for graduate students;
- The reviewing committee heard film students’ concern that they had inadequate opportunity to lecture in their academic area. We appreciate that funding may make increasing such opportunities impossible and believe, as you intend to do, that better communication about the constraints the department faces would be helpful;
- We appreciate your commitment to improve professional development opportunities for your graduate students; and
- We appreciate your efforts to work with L&S to relax the minimum enrollment requirements for graduate courses so that your students can participate in more graduate student-only courses.

The concerns raised in the review notwithstanding, the GFEC is pleased to accept the report of the Review Committee. In fact, I want to reiterate the generally positive tone of the GFEC discussion of the review of the Communication Arts program, and I want to congratulate you on your efforts to maintain first-rate graduate studies. We request that you report back to the GFEC in writing no later than the March 2015 meeting regarding your thoughts and efforts in addressing the above recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

Martin Cadwallader
Vice Chancellor for Research
and Dean of the Graduate School

xc: John Karl Scholz, College of Letters and Science
    Maria Cancian, College of Letters and Science
    Daniel Kleinman, Graduate School
    Kelly Haslam, Graduate School
    Jocelyn Milner, Provost’s Office