September 14, 2006

Dear Colleague,

The Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Education and Research\(^1\) aptly named its report “A new beginning.” For more than 50 years, Notre Dame has made purposeful, measurable, visible, and acknowledged progress in developing its graduate education and research programs. We now have the opportunity, and responsibility, to continue the momentum generated by this progress and to take the University to another level of excellence. I believe we have in place all the ingredients to create a viable plan to do so.

Over the past several months, I consulted widely on the committee’s report. These consultations included meetings with large groups of individuals, such as the chairs or directors of graduate study from Arts and Letters, Engineering, and Science, to smaller groups, such as the college and school deans and members of the Graduate School and Office of Research. I also communicated individually with many faculty members and visited with several academic leaders from other institutions. This vetting process helped me in understanding others’ reactions to the report, in gaining a better sense of the University’s challenges and ambitions regarding graduate education and research, and in reflecting on the best strategy for advancing graduate education and research at Notre Dame while at the same time maintaining the University’s emphasis on undergraduate education and its distinctive Catholic mission.

While I have not made final decisions about all of the recommendations in the report, some of which will best be made only after new leadership is on board and new resources are available, I have made decisions about two of the report’s most fundamental topics: the administrative structure of graduate education and research, and budget management.

Before creating an administrative structure, one should first ask: What are the goals one seeks to accomplish, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of different structures for accomplishing these goals? Notre Dame’s goals for graduate

\(^1\) In the title of the committee and throughout this document, “research” refers broadly to activities described in different disciplines as research, scholarship, or creative expression.
education and research are clear. In terms of graduate education, we must attract more of the very best graduate students; enable them to obtain their degrees in a reasonable length of time; and prepare them to compete successfully for positions at top universities, colleges, businesses, and other targeted settings. In terms of research, we must create the infrastructure and support necessary to generate work of the highest quality and to compete successfully for outside funding. We also must provide the support necessary to translate relevant basic research into meaningful applications.

These goals are reasonable and, if approached correctly, attainable. To accomplish these goals, the offices that oversee graduate education and research should be structured and funded so as to emphasize flexibility, transparency, and accountability. The priorities and budgets of these offices, and those of the college/school deans, department heads, and directors of graduate study, must be developed through a collaborative process that produces agreed-upon, ambitious, and measurable objectives.

Based on the recommendation of the committee and other consultations, I have decided to split the position of Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research into two positions that will each report directly to the provost. In my judgment, the advantages of this structure, many of which are enumerated in the report, best enable Notre Dame to achieve its laudable goals in the areas of graduate education and research. The disadvantages of the structure will be minimized as much as possible, in part through managerial and budgetary oversight, some of the elements of which are described below. One of the positions will be titled Vice President for Research; the title of the other, not yet determined, is likely to be Dean for Graduate Studies or Vice President and Associate Provost for Graduate Studies. Adoption of this new structure will require the approval of the Academic Council, President, and Board of Trustees. It is my hope to secure this approval and to launch a national search for the Vice President for Research as soon as possible.

As for budget management, I plan to have the Provost’s Office administer the budgets for both the Office of Graduate Studies and the Office of Research. At present, the budget for the Office of the Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research is determined largely by a formulaic process that is independent of the Provost’s Office. The new budget approach will allow maximum flexibility and greater opportunity for growth, and will ensure that the Office of Graduate Studies is funded directly, based on its aspirations, needs, and successes. In order to keep the Office of Graduate Studies accountable and strong, it is important that the office retain the budget for graduate assistants rather than have these funds permanently reallocated to the colleges. However, it is also important to de-centralize some of the budget planning and responsibility for graduate assistants to colleges and departments, most likely by empowering the Office of Graduate Studies to enter multi-year budget commitments with colleges and departments, which would allow them to create stable strategic plans for their graduate programs. Multi-year arrangements between the Office of Graduate Studies and individual departments would be made in consultation with the pertinent dean. In addition to administering graduate assistant funding centrally from the Office of Graduate Studies, it is also necessary to give either the Vice President for Research or the head of the Office
of Graduate Studies control over centrally located funds dedicated to the financing of seed grants and unbudgeted opportunities that may arise during the course of a year to advance research for graduate students and for faculty, including faculty in departments or schools that do not have PhD programs. This overall approach to budgeting has been successful at many universities, and can be at Notre Dame as well. It will require a more transparent and flexible allocation approach, one that promotes partnership, both in planning and funding, between colleges, schools, and departments to a greater extent than is currently in place. This model should serve the ideals behind the committee’s recommendation of a hybrid model without deflating the position of graduate studies.

I discussed with the deans, department heads, and directors of graduate studies how the many specific duties associated with graduate education and research support might best be distributed among various academic offices and departments. These discussions were fruitful, will continue in the weeks ahead, and will ultimately result in a document clearly delineating the allocation of duties between the relevant offices and departments. The goal is to have strong offices of graduate studies and research while at the same time allowing deans, department chairs, and directors of graduate studies to have the flexibility they need to make better and more timely decisions in areas such as admitting students and awarding stipends in accord with their strategic plans and available opportunities. Having the offices of graduate studies, research, and the college deans all report directly to the provost and locating ultimate budget authority in the Provost’s Office ought to help ensure collaboration and cooperation among all these offices.

In addition to making recommendations about administrative structure and overall budget management, the committee made a number of other recommendations. Some of these recommendations, such as finding ways to encourage more interdisciplinary research “around issues that are critical to human needs of the 21st century and are linked to the University’s mission,” have received strong agreement from the campus community and are already the focus of several efforts. Other recommendations deserve closer study, such as establishing a monthly Provost’s Seminar that promotes cross-college and cross-disciplinary discussion of the relationship between Notre Dame’s Catholic mission and the endeavors of the offices of graduate studies and research. Still others are largely operational, such as how to allocate monies received on grants for faculty academic year salary, and require more consultation with faculty and deans. I will charge the heads of the offices of graduate studies and research to work with college/school deans and others on these operational suggestions.

There is a small number of recommendations and observations in the report that I have chosen not to accept. These include the call to transfer the Notre Dame Press to the Office of Research; the suggestion that undergraduate research is an inappropriate area of support for the Office of Research (sometimes undergraduate participation is an important part of faculty research programs); and the inaccurate characterization of research conducted by graduate professional school faculty as having little to do with the creation of new knowledge, a view which, if adopted, would have potentially negative implications for the research support offered to these faculty.
On the whole, however, the committee's report and recommendations are excellent: they provide a thoughtful and compelling blueprint for future investments in graduate education and research. Again, I thank all the members of the committee for their hard work and helpful report. I also thank the many members of the Notre Dame faculty who read the report and participated over the past couple of months in discussions about it and its recommendations.

All of us must work together, building on the remarkable progress of the past, to push forward to even greater levels of excellence in the future. Our goal is that graduate education and research will soon take their rightful place, as the committee suggests, along side of, and integrated with, undergraduate education and Catholic mission in defining Notre Dame as a Catholic pre-eminent research university. Ultimately, administrative structure, budget management, and operational decision-making are not the most important factors in creating and advancing outstanding faculty research and exceptional graduate programs. Strong leadership, a compelling vision, and faculty commitment are all more important. Indeed, all are required. I look forward to working with you toward these ends.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Thomas G. Burish