Dear Alumni and Friends,

Once again, it has been a year of change at The University of Akron. The President stepped down in May of last year, less than two years after taking over. Shortly thereafter, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. John Green, was selected as the Interim President. In turn, the Associate Dean for Academics, Dr. Linda Subich, was selected as Interim Dean of the Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Subich is from the Department of Psychology. She is a common-sense leader with whom I have worked in the Dean’s Office for the past five years. I am confident she will do her best to support all units in the College over the next few years until a permanent Dean is appointed. We do not expect that to happen until a new President and Provost are named and they have time to evaluate the situation. Of the eleven Colleges comprising UA, more than half have interim Deans. Filling those positions will take a couple of years and will likely have a major impact in shaping the future of UA.

During the time these leadership changes were occurring, all of the academic departments on campus were undergoing program review. Program review is process whereby academic programs and units are evaluated to identify areas of strength, areas for improvement, areas of growth and future needs and to set priorities. Important metrics used for these evaluations usually include historical enrollment, degree production, student credit hours, research productivity, quality of instruction, job placement and overall impact to the University. In principle, this process is intended to make programs and departments stronger. In practice, the process has been used at UA in the past as a way to criticize and cut programs using poorly defined criteria with no metrics. This year was no different. Despite this, I am happy to report that the geology-related BS and BA programs scored in the upper 10% of the programs evaluated in the Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences. Despite an approximately 23% decline in overall University undergraduate enrollment over the past five years, geology programs have remained stable with between 110-125 majors per year. Our four-year retention, year-to-year persistence and six-year graduation rates of 80% were higher than the College averages. About 10% of our majors are also students in the Honors College. Sadly, our geography programs were targeted for elimination. We are no longer permitted to admit students in the undergraduate or graduate GIS programs. We will continue to teach GIS courses to geology students and others across campus and we will continue to teach a variety of Geography general education courses. However, we will phase out the GIS degree programs over the next few years.

Shortly after we completed program review, we were asked to prepare a three year plan. Part of that plan involved developing a mission statement and supporting goals that could increase matriculation, retention, persistence and degree completion. After much discussion, we developed the following department mission statement:

The Department of Geosciences immerses students in field- and laboratory-based experiential learning through paired masters-bachelors level instruction, preparing students for high-demand careers in oil, gas and mineral discovery industries and in fields related to environmental protection. In addition, the department supports a liberal arts education by offering natural science, social science, critical thinking, complex systems, domestic diversity and global diversity general education courses. Geoscience faculty members also perform fundamental research in areas related to geographic information science, geology and environmental science.

(continued, next page)