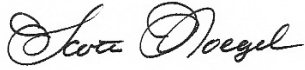


INTERDEPARTMENTAL

DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN
LANGUAGES & CIVILIZATION

Date: October 20, 2014

To: Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning, Graduate School

From: Scott Noegel, Chair, Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC), Box 353120


Re: NELC Ten Year Review Report Query

The following constitutes a response to the request following our departmental ten-year review that the department articulates how it “has progressed on communication with its external partners.”

Background: The self-study that NELC created leading to its ten-year review included the following statement:

The second challenge identified by the *last decennial review* was that NELC faculty feels that other units see NELC primarily as a “service unit” that offers language training for them and that these other units do not recognize NELC for its content courses and intellectual contributions. The faculty of NELC envisions the department as a hub with spokes that connect it to many other units on campus. These units depend upon NELC for language instruction, content courses, and faculty resources. While the NELC faculty enjoys the relationships it has with the faculty in these many units and the interdisciplinarity and potential for synergy they bring, many of the NELC faculty are not pleased with their standing in relation to these other units and would like to see NELC’s relationship to them *articulated more clearly at the Division and College levels*.

Please note that the challenge thus was articulated in our more recent self-study *and* in the decennial review before it. Unfortunately, this challenge again remained the only one unaddressed by the external committee’s report, and thus, the department was placed in a position to report on the progress of something it already had recognized for two decades would require support and articulation from the dean’s office. Consequently, when I returned from my sabbatical in September of 2012, I requested of Dean Michael Shapiro a joint meeting with him and Dean Judy Howard so that I could obtain some guidance on how we might together achieve more fluid communications across divisions, especially as it pertains to the Jackson School (JSIS) and its Middle East Center (MEC). Please note: This was the *sole* source of faculty concern in NELC. We long ago had achieved strong working relationships and open communication with all the other units on campus with whom we work including Ellison Center, History, Classics, Cinema Studies, Comparative Religion, Jewish Studies, and Comparative Literature. NELC also has a number of strong partnerships beyond campus that include *inter alia*: Center for Arabic Studies Abroad, American Research Center in Egypt, Society of Biblical Literature, the American Research Institute in Turkey, Cunda Ottoman and Turkish Summer School,

and the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City partnership. The deans kindly agreed to meet, though this meeting did not occur until the winter quarter. I shared with both of them the concerns of NELC's faculty and we agreed that we should hold another meeting, this time with the current director of the Jackson School, Resat Kasaba. This meeting occurred last spring.

This was a very helpful and positive meeting. It was revealed that much of the concern focused on the recognition of a general lack of academic leadership in the MEC, which had led over time to the MEC becoming nearly entirely staff-driven. Directorship of the MEC is essentially a nominal appointment, as it included a year during which the current director was on sabbatical and out of the country; and the MEC has held no faculty meetings for a few years. As Dean Howard informed me, the MEC was not unique in being a staff-driven center. Nevertheless, the lack of academic direction had resulted in some peculiar practices that the NELC faculty were finding difficult to understand and negotiate. Indeed, the staff member who was left with the responsibility for maintaining the MEC, was now making critical decisions concerning the future funding aspirations of the MEC, which faculty do and do not receive financial support for organizing events and attending conferences, and the like. Thus, it was agreed that it would be best in the future for NELC faculty to go directly to Resat, rather than the staff person, with their inquiries and requests.

Ascertaining a mutually beneficial direction was especially important last year, since the MEC was drafting its request for the renewal of its Title VI funding to the federal government (its *raison d'être*). Because of this timing, at the meeting I shared the faculty's additional concern that, up until the time of the MEC's current director, the Title VI application process had been a very transparent one that included close discussions with the NELC's chair and faculty about its instructional needs and intellectual direction. This is because many of the elements fundamental to the proposal include funding components for language instruction undertaken only in NELC, and because all previous applications had included the profiles, CVs, and accomplishments of NELC's faculty. Resat kindly expressed a willingness to make the process more transparent and to alleviate the concerns of NELC's faculty by sharing them with the MEC director and staff member. Resat was very accommodating and I was relieved to see that he acknowledged NELC's faculty and curriculum as vital to the JSIS's success at receiving Title VI grants. Afterwards, I communicated to our faculty what I perceived to be a successful and responsive meeting that held the promise of greater communication with, and transparency from, the MEC. They received this in a very positive and collaborative spirit. Consequently, I have every hope for better collaboration between the units in the future.

At the same time, I would be remiss in my duty as department chair, if I did not add that the time since that meeting has not been entirely "wrinkle free." Late in the spring of last year, I received a phone call from Dean Shapiro informing me that a Title VI funding proposal had come from the MEC to Dean Howard, who passed it on to him, and that many elements of the proposal again included funding requests that would impact language instruction and the faculty in NELC directly. He wanted to know what the language priorities were from NELC's perspective (fyi: the two perspectives were not entirely commensurate). This was rather surprising, as we had been under the impression from the meeting, and from other conversations with Resat, that our department would be consulted directly *before* the proposal was drafted. Then, a few days *after* I discussed our language priorities with Dean Shapiro, I received an email from Resat that read: "As you know we are *starting to work* on the Title VI grant applications. I would like to meet with you to discuss the Center's support for Arabic instruction" (emphasis mine). While I certainly appreciated the renewed air of inclusivity behind the request, the timing was a bit puzzling. It also left out any mention of MEC funding that would go to support the teaching of other languages offered in NELC such as Turkish, Modern Hebrew, and Persian. Also omitted was the Uyghur language taught in NELC by way of partial funding from the Ellison and China Centers

(a topic I had to take up with the directors of those centers, who, I hasten to add, were exceedingly supportive and successful).

I also must report that, as timing would have it, just this very morning, and after some effort, I received from JSIS a copy of the faculty list that was included as part of the recent MEC Title VI application process (I requested the proposal, but I received only the list), and (sigh...) NELC faculty profiles and representations of their academic works and accomplishments again were included in the application without our consultation. I found it especially curious that my own profile and scholarship was integrated into the report, since my discipline is the ancient Near East, and I have been told repeatedly from the MEC that its focus (and funding agenda) is completely on the contemporary world.

In sum, despite a few wrinkles that we have had to iron out, which hopefully are the result of the old system undergoing change, I am pleased to report that there has been progress in this endeavor, though as predicted and requested, it ultimately has come through the support and influence of the divisional deans, who have helped to forge a path, often behind the scenes, to ensure greater communication and transparency from JSIS/MEC as we move forward. It will be incumbent upon the incoming chair of NELC next year to make sure this path remains clear so that NELC can retain the right over its own self-representation in future Title VI application cycles, and so both units can continue to enjoy greater dialogue and work toward their mutual benefit.