


University of Washington Correspondence
INTERDEPARTMENTAL

DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN
LANGUAGES & CIVILIZATION

Date: February 14, 2011

To: James Antony, Associate Dean and Associate Vice Provost in the Graduate School, Box 352191

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



Re: Departmental response to Report of Ten Year Review Committee

The faculty of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC) has read the report of the Ten Year Review Committee and the concomitant GPSS report and we herewith kindly submit the following response.

In the main, the department is very satisfied with the reports. The faculty is especially pleased to see that the committee and GPSS reports recognize the excellence of NELC faculty and its students. We are very proud of what we have been able to accomplish given our limited resources. We thank the committees for their diligence, support, and hard work in gathering the data and producing the reports.

We similarly are very pleased to see that the committee recommended in the strongest possible terms that the UW administration replace our recently vacated position in Islam and that it recognized this position as vital to our academic mission and the on-going success of many other units on campus, including *inter alia*, History Department, the Ellison Center, Middle East Center (MEC), the Law School, Comparative Religion Program, the Jackson School of International Studies (JSIS), and the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Near and Middle Eastern Studies (IPNMS). However, the context of this lost position requires clarification. In point of fact, the UW has lost a total of *three* positions in Islam in the last few years, i.e., two others in History and in the Law School. The former position was to become a joint appointment (50% FTE) in NELC upon promotion to Associate Professor and the latter was a very active adjunct position in our unit. The three lost positions have had an adverse aggregate impact upon NELC and have forced us to waive many credits and rethink our curriculum in order to matriculate students in a timely fashion. Thus, the one lost core position is not an isolated occurrence, but rather it represents a third moment of degradation in our Islamic Studies Program that has long

been a bragging point for the UW. The NELC faculty is in full agreement with the committee's recommendation to replace the vacated core position in Islam immediately.

The committee also recommends that, "NELC should consolidate its resources, work as a team, and take better advantage of opportunities afforded by collaboration with other units." The NELC faculty remains unclear as to exactly what this means. The general statement appears clear enough to us, but how it is to be implemented, under what circumstances, and what specific opportunities are meant remains unclear. We already enjoy a close relationship with many other units on campus, as outlined in our self-study. One place where consolidation and collaboration already is taking place is in the funding of graduate students. The GPSS report observes the dearth of teaching assistant positions in the department and notes that "one of the (NELC) students was able to obtain a TA in the past with the Jackson School." However, what the GPSS report did not note is that many Jackson School students, as well as those in Comparative Religion, Comparative Literature, History, and elsewhere have received TA positions in NELC. We have made all of our TA appointments based on a combination of skill sets and need. This is especially the case for TAships that depend on a student's ability with Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish. So while we acknowledge that the current financial situation of the university does not provide us with sufficient TA support and that the support will continue to diminish, we already share the little TA support we receive with many other units as student abilities allow.

A third recommendation of the committee suggests that NELC "establish a graduate colloquium to connect *all students* in Middle East Studies, ancient and modern, and enlist graduate students to lead this effort." As the GPSS committee report makes clear, such a group already exists and has been extremely active for several years. The NELC student organization connects not just its own graduate and undergraduate students, but also those in the JSIS, MEC, History, and the IPNMS. In fact, the group is highly organized and holds an annual conference that remains a source of great pride to us. Recently they have taken to launching a film series. As department chair I meet with the president of the student organization once a quarter to check in and see what they are planning. I have felt it important not to interfere or impose departmental directions that might determine the sorts of events they hold, since they already possess a clear sense of direction, inclusivity, and autonomy. Hence, their events have been very successful. In addition, NELC has enjoyed the presence of the Association of Central Asian Students (ACAS), a successful student group that meets regularly on campus since 1978. This student group organizes its own colloquia and presents papers at its annual event. Recently, the NELC student association and ACAS have begun to collaborate to strengthen each other's efforts. We do not know why the committee did not hear about the NELC student association or about ACAS in their interviews with the students, but we are pleased that the GPSS report observed this.

The committee's fourth recommendation reads: "Support undergraduate excellence in Near Eastern Languages and Civilization by expanding access to critical courses. Demand for Arabic remains high, and NELC is well-positioned to be revitalized under a new, activity based budget model." We could not be more pleased with this recommendation and see the replacement of the now vacant position in Islam as only *one* step towards meeting this demand. We still need additional lecturer and TAs resources to meet the ever-increasing demand for Arabic. Moreover, these positions and all other lecturer position in NELC must be made *permanent*. The presence of permanent lecturers would decrease NELC's dependency upon temporary funds from Title VI centers. Now more than ever instruction in Arabic language is of critical importance for American competitiveness in government, business, and in manifold other fields. Limiting access to these critical courses in a sustained and meaningful way only hampers our ability to produce citizens informed about the Middle East and Central Asia.

In reference to the committee's fifth recommendation to "work with the Chair to reward collaboration across programs, areas, and personalities to avoid further fragmentation of the faculty," we welcome specific suggestions for making this a reality. As described in our self-study, NELC faculty already has begun to rethink its entire curriculum and it is particularly interested in providing advance listings of courses taught in NELC to other units and obtaining their advance course listings in exchange. This would allow us to cut down on curricular overlap and enjoy greater synergy with other units.

NELC faculty also concurs with the committee's final recommendation that the department not undergo another decennial review for a completed term of ten years. We feel this is apposite given the successful strides the department has taken since its last review.

Suggestions in the Report not Listed as Recommendations

Three items suggested in the report do not appear among the final recommendations and so we address them separately here. The first is that NELC consider offering NELC MA students an option to write a MA Thesis. The suggestion seems eminently wise to us and we already have voted to adopt the policy formally and have moved to implement this change in our graduate literature and on our web site.

A second suggestion was that the deadline for Foreign Language Area Scholarships (FLAS), which is currently rather fluid, should be scheduled in a way that works in concert with graduate application deadlines in mid-January. This would provide NELC with an opportunity to use FLAS awards as recruitment tools for incoming

students with extraordinary language skills. We are very much in agreement with the proposal, but we will need assistance from JSIS to affect such a change since the FLAS awards are allocated through that unit.

A third implicit recommendation that appears in the body of the report, but not in the final list, is that NELC not serve as the home for a Ph.D. Program. The report states that “neither the graduate students nor the faculty endorse the idea...” However, the NELC faculty sees nothing in the GPSS report about this and does not understand how undergraduate or MA students would be able to assess the worthiness of such an idea. Moreover, by our own account, the faculty is somewhat divided over the issue. Some members of NELC’s faculty already work closely with other Ph.D. Programs in History and Comparative Literature. Others serve as committee advisors for Ph.D. candidates in the IPNMS. There has been some discussion in the Graduate School whether to move the latter Ph.D. program into NELC or perhaps JSIS. NELC faculty has discussed this issue and agrees that while placing the IPNMS in NELC is not advisable at this time, given the recent loss of positions, it strongly contends that placing the IPNMS in JSIS is also undesirable. The NELC faculty would like to see the IPNMS remain in the Graduate School for now until time and resources make it possible to consider a useful and meaningful relocation.

Items in the Self-Study Left Unaddressed in the Committee Report

The faculty of NELC also observed that a number of key issues and queries to which we requested special attention and response were left unaddressed in the committee report. First, the NELC faculty had asked the committee to assess the viability and usefulness of its proposal for vast curricular changes. The faculty had asked whether such changes might help to alleviate some of the resource problems, and how the proposed curriculum changes might affect units that depend upon our culture and language courses. We see nothing in the report about this.

In addition, the section entitled “Resources to Support NELC” makes no reference to NELC’s eight adjunct faculty, its research professor, or the on-going integration of numerous affiliate and visiting scholars, many of whom are very active in the department (at no formal cost to the department). Each of these individuals helps to broaden the expertise currently available in the department and directly benefits NELC, not only because many offer a gratis lecture every year, but because each is available to consult with faculty and students. Moreover, each of these individuals benefits intellectually from association with NELC faculty.

In addition, while the report rightly recognizes the uniqueness of Central Asian Studies within NELC, it is important to point out that it also is an important resource. The department’s long tradition of teaching Central

Asian history and languages has helped generate and inform a variety of ongoing initiatives in Central Asia, such as the Silk Road Center in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, a library and research center developed with the aid of a four-year million dollar federal grant. Demonstrating the impact and continuity of these initiatives is a nine-part public lecture series on the “Silk Road” at the Seattle Asian Art Museum this spring that will feature contributions by at least four UW faculty and graduates.

Another resource unmentioned in the report is that of the American Research Center in Egypt-Northwest Chapter (ARCE/NW). This organization was founded by a faculty member in NELC almost ten years ago and has since then grown to be an important partner with NELC, co-sponsoring six to eight public lectures a year on all aspects of Egypt. Some NELC students also have received travel grants from ARCE to undertake research in Egypt.

Finally, the faculty of NELC had asked that the committee not merely clarify the relationship between NELC and other units, especially the Jackson School, but that it request that the upper administration assist in clarifying this relationship. This is not addressed in the report. Instead, the committee cites a structural impediment as a reason to explain NELC’s difficulty working with the MEC. No mention is made of what exactly this impediment might be and no clear solution is given as to how to remedy the situation. Moreover, the NELC faculty has long understood this impediment not as a structural one, but rather one based in protocol, procedure, autonomy, and perception.

Since NELC has several area programs under its umbrella, we proceed on the assumption that we have autonomy in designing and arranging our curriculum, testing our students’ proficiency, arranging for teacher evaluations, selecting how TA packages should be allotted, and in all other decisions required of a department. However, some members of NELC’s faculty have experienced tensions in these areas with regard to who should be making such decisions, NELC or the MEC, especially when MEC monies are involved. Thus, for those in NELC, the difficulties that exist between the two units are not structural.

However, the impediment is also one of perception. Many faculty members in NELC have long felt that the JSIS/MEC perceives NELC as a service unit that solely teaches languages. That this is indeed the case is confirmed in the committee’s report that states that the MEC’s federal funds depend entirely upon NELC’s “language instruction.” However, the MEC also depends upon NELC’s numerous culture courses and upon the inclusion of NELC faculty in its roster of active faculty, and upon the publications produced by NELC faculty, most of which extend well beyond language instruction. Moreover, though the committee report avers that,

“Tensions exist between NELC and MEC, as they do between most language departments and Title VI centers,” the faculty in NELC sees no evidence to support this assertion. Indeed, NELC works collaboratively and flawlessly with other Title VI centers at UW including the East Asia Center and the Ellison Center for Russian East European and Central Asian Studies. Thus, the NELC faculty politely reiterates its request that the upper administration assist in solving these issues.

Factual Errors in the Committee Report

As in any process that depends upon numerous conversations across diverse units, factual errors sometime make their way into final reports. We therefore take this opportunity to clear these up. First, in the section entitled “Resources to Support NELC” the committee’s report inaccurately lists the lecturers for 1) Biblical Hebrew, 2) Modern Hebrew, and 3) Uyghur as supported by the MEC. This is incorrect. The lecturer in Biblical Hebrew is supported by way of funds from the Dean’s office, the lecturer in Modern Hebrew through funds obtained from the Jewish Studies Program, and the lecturer in Uyghur depends upon funds from the East Asia Center, Global Studies Program, and the Ellison Center for Russian East European and Central Asian Studies. The MEC provides funding *only* for one half-time lecturer in Persian and one and a quarter-time lecturer positions in Arabic. As for the Persian lecturer, the Dean’s office covers the other 50% of the FTE. With regard to the FTEs in Arabic, the International Studies Program covers one fourth of the salary and NELC covers the remaining 50%. Since much is made in the report about the funding relationship between NELC and the MEC, we feel it important that we do not slight our many other partners and instead make transparent the true levels and intricacies of these funding arrangements.

Moreover, our previous *two* self-studies and decennial reports have recommended in the strongest terms that funds be allotted to create *permanent* lecturer positions in the key areas of demand, including Arabic, Modern Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish. None of the monies obtained by way of the three Title VI centers, the Jewish Studies program, or the Dean’s office is permanent. They are *all* temporary allocations. Moreover, with the aforementioned loss of three important positions in Islamic studies in the last few years the need to cover still additional courses has only increased. These facts thus render factually incorrect the following statement found in the report’s section entitled “Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (sic!) at UW”: “The request by the previous Review Committee has been met largely through lectureships provided by federal governmental grant monies secured by the Middle East Center under the current leadership.” On the contrary, these needs have been met only *in part* and only on a *temporary* basis. The two previous self-studies and decennial reports have made it clear that the current arrangement offers no solution.

Conclusion

We again thank the committees for their hard work in creating these reports. We concur in the main with their findings and offer our thoughts above as points of clarification. We look forward to continuing our academic mission in conjunction with the many units that depend upon our courses and expertise.