



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
The Graduate School
G-1 Communications
Box 353770
Seattle, Washington 98195-3770

Telephone: (206)543-5900
Fax: (206)685-3234

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To: David B. Thorud, Acting Provost
Office of the Provost
Box 351237

From: Gail L. Dubrow
Associate Dean for Academic Programs

Subject: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization 10-Year Review

Summary and Recommended Action

At its meeting of November 4, 2004, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team that reviewed the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization's B.A. and M.A. degree programs, the Chair and faculty of the Department, and the Divisional Dean for Social Sciences of the College of Arts and Sciences. The Council unanimously recommended that the continuing status of the undergraduate and graduate degree programs be reaffirmed, with the next review scheduled in five years—the 2009-2010 academic year.

I concur with the Council's recommendations and comments.

Background

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization offers the B.A. and M.A. degree programs. The study of Near Eastern languages and civilization has a long history at the University of Washington, beginning as early as 1909 with courses in Persian, Arabic and Hebrew language and literatures. In 1953 graduate study in Comparative Turkic Studies began through the Far Eastern and Russian Institute. It was transferred to the Department of Asian Languages and Literature in 1968. The present comprehensive study of the languages and literatures of the Near East began in 1965 with the development of an interdisciplinary program in Near Eastern studies. In 1970, the Near Eastern Studies was established as the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literature. Following an intensive review, the Department was reorganized in 1984 and renamed Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, which reflected a more inclusive and integrated focus.

The department faculty currently consists of 8.0 full-time teaching FTEs, excluding the Chair who teaches primarily outside of the department. The distribution across rank includes 2 full professors, 3 associate professors, and 3 assistant professors (one position is currently vacant). The department has 1.5 FTE permanent office staff and a .75 FTE grant coordinator. With the addition of three program options since 1994, the undergraduate enrollment increased from 20+ in 1995-96 to 46 in spring of 2003. Increased student interest in the Middle East and Central Asia has added to the growth in undergraduate enrollment.

Since the previous ten-year review, the department has made progress in several areas. Significant changes in the field nationally and within the University environment in the past decade, however, have presented major challenges to the department. The increased demand for language instruction nationally has had direct impact on the department. As a result, students have experienced difficulty in gaining access to the department's Elementary Arabic, Modern and Biblical Hebrew, and Persian language courses. Student interest has risen as well in Islamic Studies, Central Asian Studies, or Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Particularly, Islamic Studies has experienced unprecedented growth due to increased prominence of Islam in international affairs.

In the past decade, universities nationally have experienced increased demand for Near Eastern languages courses, while research and experimentation centering on how such languages might be taught most effectively also have increased. Technological change has been a powerful force in language instruction, intensifying the need for academic units to build an appropriate technological infrastructure. These changes are reflected in current and prospective students' expectations that program information will be provided online and also in the way that students "want to learn." These changes have increased an academic unit's need for additional staff to maintain a web site and provide support for academic computing.

Other emerging issues include the need for increased cross-disciplinary dialogue. There is an increased need for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches to literary analysis. Comparative literature programs are undergoing profound transitions from the historical dominance of Western literatures to a broadened international scope.

These national trends were reflected within the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization from 1993 on, as the department experienced growth in faculty size, curricular development, and student enrollment; innovations that included digital media and other technology-assisted pedagogy; faculty research and grant activity; and significant increase in community outreach and development efforts. These developments have increased time demands on the NELC Chair and faculty to address transformations in these areas.

Program Review Process

The review committee was comprised of five faculty – three internal and three from peer institutions. Julia Herschensohn, Professor and Chair of the Department of Linguistics, served as the committee Chair. Other internal members included Richard Dunn, Professor and Chair of the Department of English; and Terje Leiren, Professor and Chair of the Department of Scandinavian Studies. The external committee members included Michael Bonine, Professor and Head, Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Arizona; and Gilead Morahg, Professor and Chair, Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies, University of Wisconsin. The review committee conducted a two-day site visit on March 4 and 5, 2004, when they met with faculty, students, staff, and key administrative faculty.

Findings and Recommendations

The review team found the department's mission to be appropriate, particularly given the importance of study of the Middle East currently. It found the department to be potentially competitive with other comparable university programs nationally, particularly with respect to the breadth of its language offerings. Only about 15 or 16 universities in the national offer all four contemporary Middle Eastern languages. The department's offering of the Central Asian Turkic places it within a small group of programs nationally which offer this area of study.

The review committee found the faculty to be of the highest caliber and to have achieved an impressive research record. They noted the department's strengths include its breadth in the quality of instruction and research, its interdisciplinarity and innovative use of technology. NELC's primary challenges are the faculty's overextended teaching obligations. The department offers an extensive language program. Language instruction is essential to the department's mission and lies at the core of the Title VI centers' mission. Faculty teach various levels of the principal Middle Eastern language courses in addition to content courses for majors, and large survey courses that introduce the cultures and societies of these civilizations to undergraduates. Faculty effort devoted to the low-level language courses prevents the offering of more general civilization courses that would draw a larger undergraduate audience and advanced courses that would strengthen the department's limited offerings to its majors and graduate students. It limits as well the department's ability to fully realize its liberal arts education mission and prevents the development of a comprehensive, four-year instruction program in languages the department teaches, except for Arabic which is sufficiently staffed.

The lack of adequate staffing for language instruction undermines faculty morale, hinders research, and diminishes its success compared to other programs nationally. The committee unanimously concluded that if the department is to realize its full potential and develop a successful program, the strategic support of the College of Arts and Sciences is needed to develop a viable staffing model. It may require a substantial new investment from the University. The committee's major conclusion is that additional investment is needed from the University if it is to have an effective Near Eastern Languages and Civilization program that provides service to the entire university as well as to its majors. If additional support cannot be generated, some important decisions need to be made about the relative costs and benefits of particular language offerings and breadth over depth in other offerings.

The committee noted that a number of faculty are leaving the department, are on extended leave, or are actively seeking to leave the department. The large load of language courses and limited resources contribute to this situation. The committee examined interdisciplinary relationships with several other area studies units that are connected to the department. The faculty's perception is that these units view the department as a "service unit" for language training and that their scholarship and intellectual contributions are not recognized, which diminishes support for its mission. Additionally, NELC faculty have supervised a large number of students in the Near and Middle Eastern Studies Ph.D. program; however, department faculty feel they have been given little credit or recognition for their efforts. The department faculty's relationship with the Interdisciplinary Near and Middle Eastern Studies Ph.D. program has been difficult. The department believes that the Ph.D. program does not serve its needs or its students well, particularly due to its social science focus. Greater efforts are needed to build a stronger relationship between NELC and the Ph.D. program.

Although the current Chair provides strong and responsible departmental leadership, the review team noted a strong departmental culture and esprit de corps do not exist within NELC. To address this issue the review team recommended that the department consider offering a department-wide colloquium series to bring together faculty and students, schedule periodic departmental meetings, and identify key committees that would bring faculty together for planning purposes.

The MA program requirements are the most demanding of any MA program nationally. Students must master two Middle Eastern languages and one European research language, e.g. French or German. These requirements ordinarily exist at the doctoral level. Although funding is an issue, the committee considered the demanding language requirements may be one of the reasons for the small number of students (12) in the program. Of the 20 applications for the 2003-2004 academic year, 16 were admitted but only 5 have enrolled in the program. The committee questioned whether the small number of students is the best cohort size or even viable as a graduate

program. The department should plan faculty teaching assignments a full year in advance, which is not the current practice. The consequence is that few 500-level courses are offered that provide a graduate level experience and training. The lack of advanced planning also affects students' programs of study.

Graduate School Council Recommendations

The Council recommended the following action to the Deans of the Graduate School and the College of Arts and Sciences.

1. The Council noted that the five-year period for the next review is intended to address issues that need attention to further strengthen the department; however, it emphasized that the review found high academic quality present in the department overall. The Council recommended that a report be made by June 1, 2006 to the College of Arts and Sciences, the Graduate School and Office of the Provost concerning the department's progress on these issues.
2. Department faculty should work on a long-term plan with Michael Halleran, Divisional Dean for Arts and Humanities in the College of Arts and Sciences, to address staffing issues related to lower level language instruction, to consider other models for language instruction and alternative sources of funding.
3. Instruction of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew should remain a priority. Elimination of any of the languages would weaken the program and reduce its competitive advantage.
4. The department should develop a closer working relationship with both the Near and Middle Eastern Studies Ph.D. program and the Middle East Center in the Jackson School of International Studies.
5. Attention should be directed toward developing an internal culture that will support a stronger faculty-student intellectual community. Attention should also be given to the process by which M.A. students are integrated within the department, e.g. development of a required core introductory course to the field, and student placement upon program completion.

- c: Mark A. Emmert, President, Office of the President
Elizabeth L. Feetham, Acting Dean, The Graduate School
Susan E. Jeffords, Vice Provost for Academic Planning, Office of the Provost
David C. Hodge, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Michael R. Halleran, Divisional Dean, Arts and Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences
George S. Bridges, Dean and Vice Provost, Office of Undergraduate Education
Christine Ingebritsen, Associate Dean and Associate Vice Provost,
Office of Undergraduate Education
Michael A. Williams, Professor and Chair, Department of Near Eastern Languages
And Civilization
Members of the Near Eastern Languages and Civilization Review Committee:
Julia R. Herschensohn, Professor and Chair, Department of Linguistics
Richard J. Dunn, Professor and Chair, Department of English
Terje I. Leiren, Professor and Chair, Department of Scandinavian Studies
Michael E. Bonine, Professor and Head, Department of Near Eastern Studies,
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ
Gilead Morahg, Professor and Chair, Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies,
University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI
Graduate School Council
Augustine McCaffery, Assistant to the Dean/Manager, Academic Programs