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To: Phyllis Wise, Provost
Office of the Provost
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From: Suzanne T. Ortega, Dean and Vice Provost
The Graduate School

Re: Department of Asian Languages and Literature 10-Year Review

Summary and Recommended Action

At its meeting of November 3, 2005, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team that reviewed the Department of Asian Languages and Literature Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Master of Arts (M.A.), and Doctor of Philosophy degree programs. In addition to the review team, the meeting was attended by the Department Chair, Associate Chair, and Graduate Program Coordinator, as well as the Acting Associate Dean for Arts and Humanities in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The review committee recognized the scholarship of the faculty in Asian Languages and Literature, many of whom are highly regarded and well known for their scholarly work. Nevertheless, both the review committee and the department representatives noted that the department is pulled in too many directions and trying to respond to too many needs at once. Many of this department's challenges seem to be related to an ongoing tension between the needs of graduate and undergraduate teaching and the faculty's highly respected research. Of particular note is the department's relationship with the Jackson School of International Studies and its many federally funded Title VI Resource Centers that need its assistance for teaching a wide variety of Asian languages. The review committee also provided a number of detailed suggestions, particularly in the area of departmental climate and cohesiveness, the lecturer cohort, graduate support issues, community outreach, and the like.

The department responded by detailing issues of outmoded departmental structures in languages and literature. Because interest in Asia on the part of students and the public in general continues to grow, the department finds its ability to maintain quality in all the areas of their current mission to be limited.

The Council agreed that the department appears to be pulled in many directions. Program continuation was recommended for another ten years, with the next review in 2014-15. The department is asked to develop a plan within the next three years that lays out structural changes in the unit that will improve its ability to respond to a more limited range of needs than at

present. More coordination of responsibilities related to the Title VI center grants will be necessary, perhaps in discussions facilitated by the College.

I concur with the Council's recommendations and comments.

Background

Although the Department of Asian Language and Literature was established as an autonomous unit in 1969, records indicate that at least one Asian language (Sanskrit) was taught at the University of Washington as far back as the 1890's. In 1909, the Regents voted to establish the Department of Oriental History, Literature, and Institutions. As time went on, programs were added in this unit (which, from 1949, was known as the Department of Far Eastern and Slavic Languages and Literature): Chinese (1926), Japanese (1928), Korean (1944), Mongolian (early 1950s), Tibetan (1952), Hindi and Tamil (1967), Thai (1967), Vietnamese (1981), and Indonesian (1991). According to the department's draft strategic plan, in 1949 the department was reorganized "as a separate unit entirely devoted to the study of the languages and literary cultures of Asia." Typically, faculty classify themselves in the two broad areas of literature and linguistics, which it sees as related and complementary areas. In addition, the department has an ongoing mission of teaching various Asian languages, both to new speakers and to so-called "heritage" students, both as part of the university's overall interest in providing this kind of instruction, and as a mechanism by which Title VI area studies centers in the Jackson School of International Studies fulfill their mission and continue to receive federal grants in these areas.

Review Process

The review committee was composed of six members, three internal and three from Asian language and literature units at peer institutions. The committee Chair was Professor Galya Diment, Chair of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature. Other local members were Professor Gary Hamilton, Department of Sociology and Jackson School of International Studies, and Professor Sharon Hargus, Department of Linguistics. The following individuals served as external committee members: Professor Ashok Aklujkar, Asian Studies, University of British Columbia; Professor Naomi McGloin, East Asian Languages and Literature, University of Wisconsin; and Professor Shuen-fu Lin, Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan. The review site visit was conducted on April 12-13, 2005, at which time the review committee met with Department faculty, students, and staff, as well as with key University administrative faculty. Prior to the review site visit, the internal committee members held discussions with the then department chair, the heads of the JSIS area studies programs, and the chair of the search committee, appointed by the College of Arts and Sciences, for the next department chair.

Review Committee Findings

The review committee gave high marks to the quality of faculty scholarship that focuses on important scholarly issues in rigorous ways. Despite the many missions facing this unit, the strong national and international reputation of these faculty should be sustained and preserved. The review committee also applauded the quality of the junior faculty and noted that their skills and abilities that complement those of the senior faculty will need to be carefully nurtured for retention and tenure.

The committee also made a number of observations about a variety of areas in the department that warrant some attention, including the division of labor among the staff, the lack of cohesiveness in the lecturer cadre, the overall organization of the department, and the need to develop and promote better communication among the various departmental areas. For a number of these observations, the committee offered a variety of cost-effective methods for creating more community across the perceived "divisions" in the department.

The review committee also focused on the relationship of the Asian Languages and Literature department both to the service mission of language instruction for the campus as a whole, and for the Title VI Centers in the Jackson School of International Studies. In both instances, the department, in consultation with both the humanities and the social sciences divisions of the College of Arts and Sciences, will need to rationalize the extent to which it can serve the overall campus needs for instruction in Asian languages, and the extent to which it will work collaboratively with the area studies Centers to offer the languages on which the Centers' funding depends. To do this may involve curtailment or rearrangement of some of the department's current activities. However, any changes should bear in mind the necessity of sustaining the faculty's strength in research and scholarship.

Council Recommendations

The Council was both surprised and concerned at the lack of a coherent vision offered by the department for addressing some of its challenges, as well as a seeming inability to prioritize the elements of its mission. The Council was in agreement with the view that the department appears to be pulled in many different directions. The Council, however, also takes the view that it would be in the department's best interest to offer a rational basis for its activities. Doing this will require some difficult choices, as well as consultation with Arts and Sciences about activities that might be given up.

Program continuation is recommended for another ten years, with the next full review in 2014-15. The department is asked to develop a plan, to be submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences and to The Graduate School within the next three years, that lays out structural changes in the unit that will improve its ability to respond to a more limited range of needs than at present. More coordination of responsibilities related to the Title VI center grants will be necessary, most likely in discussions with JSIS that should be facilitated by the College.

C: Mark A. Emmert, President
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