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August 23, 2005

To: Phyllis M. Wise, Provost  
Office of the Provost  
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From: Elizabeth L. Feetham, Acting Dean and Vice Provost  
The Graduate School

Re: Interdisciplinary Near and Middle Eastern Studies Ph.D. 5-year Review

*Summary and Recommended Action*

At its meeting of April 7, 2005, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team that reviewed the Interdisciplinary Near and Middle Eastern Studies (IPNMES) Ph.D. degree program and the former and current Directors of the program. The Council continued discussion of the program review on April 21, 2005. The Council unanimously recommended that the provisional status of the Ph.D. degree program be continued with the next review to be scheduled in five years, specifically in the 2008-2009 academic year.

The Council recommended that an interim report be submitted by the newly appointed IPNMES Director to the Deans of the Graduate School and the College of Arts and Sciences, and to the Provost by the end of Spring Quarter 2007. The interim report should respond to the following issues.

1. Governance: Establish a steering committee to provide a governance structure, to develop admissions guidelines and establish a systematic process for student advising.
2. Curriculum: Consider development of an introductory undergraduate course and core graduate course via buy-out of faculty time. Initiate discussions aimed at establishing formal arrangements that enable students' access to methodology and language courses in discipline-specific areas.
3. Intellectual Focus: With input of steering committee and students, define the future intellectual direction of the program. What is the value added of the program and its importance to the UW?
4. Resources for Program: Actively seek potential resources for development that may be tapped for student and programmatic support.
5. Ph.D. Program Options: Consider options to strengthen the interdisciplinary core, e.g., develop a program track or a graduate certificate with strongest department allies.

I concur with the Council's recommendations and comments.

## *Background*

The Interdisciplinary Near and Middle Eastern Studies Group received Board of Regents approval in 1991 to offer a Ph.D. degree program, to be located administratively in the Graduate School. Its first students were admitted in 1993-94. Since its inception, the program has acquired a strong reputation for the excellence of its teaching and the quality of its graduates. The program offers students a comparative perspective in the following fields: Near Eastern languages and literature (Arabic, Hebrew, Persian [or Dari or Tajik]; Turkish and Central Asian Turkic languages; Near Eastern linguistics; Islamic law, history, institutions, theory, and mysticism; comparative religion (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Students are required to have methodological training in at least one discipline and to gain competency in at least two regional languages.

The University of Washington has a long history of Middle East studies. It has a large and inherently interdisciplinary commitment that is spread over three administrative units. The Interdisciplinary Near and Middle Eastern Studies program is the only unit that offers a doctoral degree. The two other units—the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization and the Middle East Center located in the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, provide substantive undergraduate and master's-level training in language, literature, the humanities and social sciences that make doctoral research possible.

As an interdisciplinary program, the Middle Eastern Studies program does not have dedicated faculty lines and is dependent upon the interest and commitment of faculty from other academic units. Thirty-two faculty from humanities and social sciences departments currently participate in the IPNMES program. The high quality of students admitted to the doctoral program has been a strong incentive for faculty involvement in the program, particularly faculty in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Languages and Civilization and the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, which do not offer doctoral programs. Participating faculty are active on the admissions and student evaluations committees.

The program has fifteen students currently enrolled. Graduates of the Ph.D. program are in increasingly high demand for teaching positions at academic institutions and for research appointments. Every program graduate has obtained a tenure-track position or a multi-year post-doctoral position. They will play major roles in teaching, research and policy debates about the region in this country. In addition, one administrative support staff serves as an adviser to students and performs limited administrative responsibilities.

## *Review Process*

The review committee included five members, three internal and two from peer institutions. The committee Chair was Professor Robert Stacey, Department of History, and other internal committee members included Ann Anagnost, Associate Professor of Anthropology, and Paul Burstein, Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Jewish Studies Program. External committee members included Mary Layoun, Professor and Chair of Comparative Literature, University of Wisconsin at Madison, WI, and Robert Vitalis, Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. The review site visit was held on February 26 and 27, 2004. At that time the review committee met with the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program faculty, students and staff, and key University administrative

faculty. Prior to the review site visit, the internal committee members meet with several faculty involved in the Ph.D. program concerning issues facing the program.

### *Review Findings*

The review committee found the Near and Middle Eastern Studies Ph.D. to be a rigorous and extraordinarily high quality program. The program has had remarkable success in placing its graduates in academic positions inside and outside the United States. In spite of its success the program remains fragile due to inadequate resources both programmatically and for student support, and the nature of its interdisciplinarity.

Success in the placement of IPNMES graduates in departments across a range of disciplines and the high professional visibility of the faculty are two important markers of its quality were noted by the review committee. A distinct difference of IPNMES from other Middle East area studies Ph.D. programs is the placement of graduates in both language and culture and in social science departments. Its eight graduates have secured appointments in both full-time tenure track position and post-doctoral fellowships. Faculty's publishing records and scholarly profiles in their respective disciplines and in Near and Middle Eastern Studies are comparable to peer institutions and, in some instances, they lead the field in their scholarly work.

The review committee found IPNMES's interdisciplinarity presents drawbacks. They noted three areas that require attention and which they urged be addressed. (1) IPNMES faculty have their appointments in discipline based units. Faculty are not compensated for their efforts in the program. Thus, a core group of faculty has not been established to provide a governance structure or to determine a common intellectual direction for the program. Common courses are not offered to students, nor are seminar programs or speaker series that would provide an academic focus. Successful students must be highly self-motivated and independent, more so than if they were in a disciplinary academic unit. (2) No formal agreements exist between Near and Middle Eastern Studies and key humanities and social sciences departments that enable students' access to required graduate courses, i.e., core methodology and language courses. (3) IPNMES is seriously under-resourced. The previous five-year review team concluded the program was adequately funded and had the capacity to meet its basic goals without additional funding. The review committee emphasized that the program cannot continue its current level of excellence without a significant increase in financial support. IPNMES is supported by an unpaid Director, limited staff support, no teaching assistantship positions, no office or common space for students, and no general program operating funds. The program has one three-year graduate fellowship that may be assigned for use by the program triennially and funded by an endowment created by a private donor, and one 9-month research assistantship. This situation hinders student recruitment. The review committee noted that the program could benefit from a large introductory-level undergraduate course and a core graduate course, but the lack of funding prevents "buying out" of faculty time from their academic units.

The review committee recommended remuneration of the IPNMES Director, either by at least 2 weeks of salary, or with comparable release time. They considered the current size of the doctoral program to be appropriate. Increased financial support through RA and TA appointments for three years to two entering students would assist in student recruitment. The committee urged the IPNMES Director to hold discussions with relevant departments to establish agreements directed at guaranteeing students' access to needed graduate courses. Additionally, the committee recommended that a steering committee should be established involving faculty from participating academic units to formalize the admissions process, improve student advising,

clarify the program's intellectual direction, pursue untapped funding sources to develop an undergraduate course with the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization and the Jackson School of International Studies, and a core graduate course.

### *Council Recommendations*

Future leadership of the IPNMES program was the Council's concern. The Council supported the review team's recommendation that formation of a steering committee was needed to establish shared governance of the program. The Council concurred with the committee's recommendation that the four complementary Near and Middle Eastern Studies units should be headed by four different faculty. This concern arose due to the then IPNMES Director's simultaneous appointments as the Director of the Middle East Studies Center as well as the Middle East Studies Program. A consequence of this situation is the sense of alienation by faculty in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC). The Council recommended the inclusion of NELC in future decisions about IPNMES.

The Council noted IPNMES faculty are nationally prominent and the top two or three in their respective fields, and that graduates of the program were of high quality and have had outstanding placements. The Council discussed strategies to increase student recruitment and the need for financial support packages that include teaching and research assistantships to be competitive and draw from the national pool of prospective students. Fragility of the IPNMES concerned the Council due not only to the lack of a strong resource foundation but also with departmental hiring practices if participating faculty should leave the University and implications the situation would present for the program. Since IPNMES is not involved in departments' hiring processes it is unlikely departing faculty would be replaced in the same specialty areas.

The Council recommended that the IPNMES leadership define what gives intellectual coherence to the program—what is its future intellectual direction, and identify the comparative programmatic benefits that it offers. The Council acknowledged the necessity of the University having a Near and Middle Eastern Studies Program and the importance of understanding this region of the world, but questioned whether the IPNMES is the best model to offer training in this area. Council members questioned whether the program is interdisciplinary since it resembles an area studies program. It was the opinion of the former Director that the program was multidisciplinary rather interdisciplinary and that it provides high quality training in each given discipline along with students gaining language skills. Although the social sciences do not require language proficiency, the IPNMES program has demonstrated a market need for such skills.

c: Mark A. Emmert, President  
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Susan E. Jeffords, Vice Provost for Academic planning, Office of the Provost  
Robert C. Stacey, Divisional Dean for Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences  
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Director, IPNMES  
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Members of the Near and Middle Eastern Studies Review Committee  
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