

## INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

05 January 2015

To: Professor Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean, Graduate School  
Professor Judith A. Howard, Divisional Dean for the Social Sciences, College of Arts & Sciences  
Professor David Canfield-Budde, Academic Programs Specialist, Graduate School

From: William G. Boltz, Chairman, Department of Asian Languages & Literature

Re: Departmental response to the report of the 2014 decennial review committee

### *Preamble*

The faculty and staff of the department wish at the outset to express our deep appreciation to Professor Karen Zagana, chair of the review committee and to the committee members, Professors Naomi B. Sokoloff (UW), Kirk Denton (Ohio State), Alisa Freedman (U of Oregon) and Stephanie Jamison (UCLA) for the extraordinarily thorough and conscientious efforts that they have put into this somewhat onerous task and for the comprehensive and thoughtful report that they have issued.

We will respond to the report section by section, mentioning three kinds of things as they arise, (i) errors of fact or understanding (which in fact are remarkably few), (ii) explanatory or supplementary comments when called for and (iii) further considerations arising from points made in the report but involving matters not directly or explicitly dealt with in the report itself.

There are many laudatory and favorable comments scattered throughout the report, for which we are especially appreciative. As nice as it would be to draw attention to these with comments one-by-one in our response, we will forgo this temptation, instead registering our sincere gratitude and appreciation here for the review committee's generous recognition of our various strengths.

**Department of Asian Languages & Literature**  
Decennial Review Committee Report - Departmental Response

N.B.: **Boldface** or *italic* headings here are references to the corresponding parts and sections of the review committee's report.

**Part II. Overview**

The report in paragraph one correctly sets out the undergraduate degree programs offered in the department. In listing the Southeast Asian languages that we teach, but for which we have no major, the report says that “instruction in [these Southeast Asian languages] is required by the Title VI funding that underpins the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in the Jackson School...” My understanding as department chairman is that strictly speaking the Title VI funding does not *require* us to offer instruction in these languages, but that it is expected because the application narrative submitted by the JSIS and approved by the college for renewal of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies listed these languages as offered; we are therefore expected to offer them as a matter of honoring professionally this part of the renewal application. In either case, whether they are required to be offered or only that we are expected to offer them, we do it, as the report correctly states, as a contribution to Southeast Asian studies at UW generally and in particular in a spirit of collegial cooperation with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and the JSIS. The department has received very little in return in the way of reciprocal benefits from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies or from the Jackson School, and has felt for some time that this is a bit of a one-way street. We would prefer to have the freedom to decide for ourselves what Southeast Asian languages we would like to teach, at what levels they should be taught and in what ways they can best be linked to our other offerings, with the goal of establishing a Southeast Asian languages B.A. degree program. This cannot be done until the restrictions that have been externally imposed on us, telling us what Southeast Asian languages we must teach and how we must teach them, are relaxed.

**Part III. Program strengths**

*Section 2. Faculty Research Profile*

The first full paragraph says that there are five lecturers (including senior lecturers) in the South Asian part of our department, but in fact there are only four, and of those one is part-time (the lecturer in Bangla) and one varies from year to year as lecturer or assistant professor, according to the vicissitudes of funding and AHR rules.

In the following paragraph dealing with the Chinese part of our department the “one Visiting Assistant Professor” should in fact read “one Acting Assistant Professor.”

### *Section 5. Teaching*

The final paragraph of this part mentions that graduate students have commented (“complained” is the report’s word) about a lack of courses. And this is, in part, a consequence of the our graduate faculty being “stretched too thin,” as the report suggests. But it is important for us to point out that being “stretched too thin” is an oblique way of acknowledging that we have too few faculty to cover the needed areas.

The situation is particularly acute in the Chinese language and literature part of the department, where two professors cover more than three thousand years of Chinese literary history, virtually all of which is richly represented in the extant, transmitted literary repertoire. No other credible North American college or university with a graduate program in Chinese literature manages with only two literature professors; most have three, some have four.

### *Section 6. Improvements since 2004-2005*

The addition of a 0.5 FTE graduate student service appointment to oversee undergraduate advising has indeed been a very beneficial step, but it is not really an “addition” in any material sense, since it is funded out of the department’s annual “TA” allocation from the college. So it is in fact simply a re-allocation to this advising position of what would otherwise be a TA position.

This section ends with a reference to “modest support for travel to conferences and workshops” that we provide for lecturers and senior lecturers. In fact we provide support in *exactly* the same amount for lecturers and senior lecturers that we provide for professorial faculty; at present this is \$900 per academic year per faculty member. And we impose the same eligibility requirements on lecturers and senior lecturers that we impose on professorial faculty to receive such funding.

## **Part IV. Issues and Challenges**

### *Section 1. Funding for Graduate Students*

Paragraph one here states directly what we consider to be the most serious, most pressing issue in the department, *viz.*, the “comparative lack of funding for graduate students.” The sense in which this lack is “comparative” is only that we have been able, with a little effort, luck and good will from outside agencies, been able to come up with *one* graduate level fellowship to support an entering graduate student in the recent past, instead of having *zero* such tools at our command. But that one is not within our control *per se*; it has to be requested annually and approved by the Graduate School and the Vice-Provost for International Studies. While we are very appreciative of the support we have received in the past for this, we cannot assume that we will always be so successful.

The following paragraph of the Review Committee’s report urging us to “develop a plan” for “funding packages” for our graduate students is of course a constructive and entirely well-meant admonition, but it is also largely chimerical because coming up with real money for any such plan is something well beyond our quotidian power.

### *Section 2. Existing Funding*

The final sentence of the first paragraph says that “some adjustments to the way the TA budget is allocated might be helpful.” The following paragraphs in the report explain pretty clearly how difficult that would be to do. The report then lays out a number of suggestions, most of which, constructive as they are in the abstract, cannot easily be implemented given the constraints on TA assignments that we must deal with. If we are to meet the demand for modern language instruction, virtually all of our TA positions have to be committed to teaching modern languages. The department agrees that offering graduate students a chance to serve as TAs in courses other than modern language teaching would be a highly desirable development, and we have on occasion been able to do this sporadically for a quarter here and a quarter there, but until the college provides enough money for TA positions to allow for this on more than an *ad hoc* basis, it will remain an elusive goal.

### *Section 3. Time to Degree*

Time to degree is heavily affected by the availability and nature of graduate student financial support. Most of our graduate students find their financial support as TAs. This *per force* means that they take two instead of three courses per quarter, and this clearly has an impact on the rate of their progress. We think that the report’s suggestion to “cap” the number of years a graduate student may receive TA support is inappropriate. We monitor graduate student progress, and we do not award TA positions to those students whose progress to degree is wanting. But the nature and scope of PhD level studies in our department is diverse enough that a “one-size-fits-all” cap would be counter-productive. We see it as harshly mis-guided to cut off funding for an advanced graduate student who is doing good work, but who would be forced to give up her / his studies and withdraw from school because of having reached some arbitrary “cap.”

The department graduate faculty have already formally reduced the number of required “fields” at the PhD level from four to three, and have eliminated the requirement that these fields include both a literature area and a text / linguistic area.

### *Section 4. Undergraduate curricula*

The problem of inadequate offerings of required courses is infrequent and pretty much limited in recent years to the Korean major. The explanation is simple; we have only one professorial faculty position in Korean, and that professor has in the past few years been very successful in receiving research grants and teaching-release awards (ACLS, NEH, Simpson Center, junior faculty development, &c.) The expectation of serious research productivity and the need for research publications as a major part of the six-year assistant professor probationary period is such that the department will as a matter of principle not prevent any assistant professor from accepting these kinds of awards. The consequence is that courses do not get taught. Some of the courses in question can sometimes be taught by a graduate student, but the limits on available money and graduate student talent both make this at best a tenuous partial remedy.

The problem does in general bring to the surface the fact that owing to the scope of the department’s offerings and the diverse nature of what our faculty teach and research we are a department of very few inter-changeable parts. This would be ameliorated somewhat were we to be granted the kind of new faculty positions that the report in its first recommendation (part V) calls for, in particular if we were able to add professorial positions in Korean and in pre-modern Chinese literature & cultural history to our faculty. While not mentioned specifically in the report, a position in East Asian Buddhism is also seen as highly desirable by our faculty.

The department has discussed two kinds of innovative course developments at the undergraduate level: (i) *tandem* or *twin courses*, a plan that would pair the expertise of a language instructor with the

research knowledge of a professorial faculty member in teaching two courses simultaneously on a given topic, the first using modern language materials for reading, discussing and writing about the topic, the second a seminar structure focusing on the topic in English (students would be expected to take both courses at the same time); and (ii) a so-called “gateway” course to the undergraduate major, *i.e.*, one course for all majors irrespective of language area. In both cases the desire to put such courses into effect is thwarted by the department’s limited faculty resources. We nevertheless continue to look for ways to implement these plans.

## **Part V. Recommendations**

1. The department is in total agreement with this recommendation for new faculty positions. In addition to the positions listed in this part of the report, the department (and the division, and the college) would also benefit enormously from a position in East Asian Buddhism. We stand ready to mount the necessary searches if we are given a green light to do so.
2. The department would be delighted to receive the kind of funding commitment from the college that the report recommends, enabling us to make TA appointments for courses other than modern language instruction, in particular for a “gateway” course for prospective majors.
3. The department has, as mentioned above, already formally reduced the PhD field requirement by 25% and loosened the coverage requirement for the same.
4. The department agrees that past practice in giving feedback to our graduate students has been wanting, and the Graduate Education Committee has already taken steps to ameliorate this short-coming. Every graduate student will receive an explicit statement and discussion of his / her progress annually, and when the situation calls for it, more frequently.
5. The department’s Undergraduate Education Committee will, as the first step in this regard, undertake a review of undergrad curricula generally, paying particular attention to the frequency of course offerings relative to degree requirements and consistency with what is posted on the department website.
6. The department is not only in complete agreement with this recommendation, but must reiterate that we are operating currently with one faculty office “borrowed” from the Political Science Department, some distance removed from our department in Gowen Hall, and with some TAs squeezed into very inadequate large, unpleasant rooms in buildings remote from the department, from the library and from the students. These arrangements inhibit effective faculty-faculty and faculty-student communication and cannot continue indefinitely.

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