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Department of Classics, Box 353110

9 June 2009

To: Department of Classics Review Committee

Douglas J. Wadden, Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Planning,
Office of the Provost

Ana Mari Cauce, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Robert C. Stacey, Divisional Dean, Arts & Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences

Janice M. DeCosmo, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs

James S. Antony, Associate Dean, Academic Programs, The Graduate School

Augustine McCaffery, Senior Academic Program Specialist, Academic Programs,
The Graduate School

Jacob K. Faleschini, President, Graduate and Professional Student Senate

From: Alain M. Gowing, Chair, for the faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students
in the Department of Classics

Re: Departmental Response to Review Committee report

We would like to begin by thanking the members of the Review Committee for their hard work over the course of the review and for producing such a useful, supportive, and reaffirming report. It is gratifying, to say the least, to find the Department repeatedly judged to rank not only among "the very best programs in the nation" but, as one external reviewer remarked, among "the top ten." We especially appreciate the favorable comparisons drawn between our own program and those with whom we often vie for graduate students: a point we often make in discussions with the administration is that this department competes with the best Classics programs in the country. As we hope will become clear from the following, we welcome all of the helpful observations and recommendations made by the Committee. Almost without exception, their concerns match our own, and we are grateful for their constructive advice -- both to us and to our administration -- on how to address those concerns.

We are also grateful to the two representatives from the Graduate and Professional Student Senate who took the time to meet with an assembly of over twenty Classics graduate students. We value our graduate students highly and were pleased to see that the two GPSS reviewers concluded that our "[s]tudents very much appreciated the department's collegial atmosphere, the advising they receive, their opportunities to

create their own research and dissertations, and that they could go their own pace while efficiently passing core academic benchmarks.”

Before turning to our response proper, we would like to express our disappointment at the absence of a representative from the Office of the Provost at the exit discussion of the Review. We had been informed in the charge letter signed by Gerald Baldasty, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, and dated 12 February 2009 that “a representative from the Office of the Provost will participate in the meeting” scheduled for February 27, 2009. On the morning of the 27th, we received e-mail from the Graduate School informing us that the representative from the Office of the Provost would not attend and that the Office of the Provost would not be sending an alternative representative in his place. Had we known earlier that no representative would attend, we would have had the opportunity to make clear to the Office of the Provost about how important, in our view, it was to have a representative from the Office of the Provost in attendance at the exit discussion. The evaluation of the Department’s strengths and vulnerabilities conveyed to us by the Review Committee at that exit discussion -- and confirmed by their written report -- is one we are especially eager for our administration at all levels to hear.

The report of the Review Committee deems the overall health of the Department to be “excellent.” However, it also identifies two especially pressing needs, echoing and reinforcing two particular concerns we raised in our self-study, namely, support for our graduate students and a faculty position. As the report observes, “in normal times [the Department’s] most pressing support needs for improvement are well within the realm of achievement.” While granting that these are not normal times, we feel that these concerns need to be reiterated here, if only by way of underscoring two ways in which our “needs for improvement” could be readily met.

Tuition waivers

As the report of the Review Committee stresses, our graduate program has become “competitive with the very best programs in the country.” Understandably, therefore, safeguarding and enhancing this program is our highest priority; we strongly believe that the undisputed excellence of our undergraduate program (excellence well documented in our self-study and remarked in the Committee report) is directly related to the caliber of our graduate students and graduate program. We have long felt -- and, whenever an opportunity presented itself, lamented the fact -- that the graduate stipend is inadequate. We made this point more than once in our self-study; and not surprisingly, our graduate students also voiced this concern in their meeting with the GPSS representatives. In order to compensate, we regularly offer ‘top ups’ (at present, \$5000) to fellowships offered to incoming graduate students in order to render our financial aid package competitive with the other programs to which our applicants are likely to be admitted (these include, e.g., Berkeley, Michigan, Yale, UCLA, etc.). Funds

for these supplemental stipends come from our Greenfield Endowment. But given the fact that the 'payout' from this and indeed all our endowments has recently been cut in half and will remain at that level for the foreseeable future, it is going to be increasingly difficult for us to maintain the same level of support we have been able to offer our graduate students in recent years.

One way in which the effects of our reduced endowment payouts could be mitigated is through the granting of tuition waivers to accompany our fellowships. The report makes an emphatic plea for such waivers; both external reviewers reiterate the point in their separate letters. This would dramatically reduce the cost to us of providing fellowship support; we typically have offered at least one (and, in better years, two) entry-level, year-long Fellowships as well as a number of quarter-long Dissertation Fellowships (typically, we award 4-5 of these quarters per year). Although we have occasionally received some waivers to accompany one of the entry-level Fellowships, we have not been able to count on them. In their absence, however, the cost of these Fellowships is considerable, since they entail payment of tuition and benefits as well as a stipend. The granting of tuition waivers on a permanent, predictable basis for the entry-level Fellowship as well as for our Dissertation Fellowships would go a long way toward ensuring that we can maintain -- and, once the financial situation has improved, enhance -- our current level of competitiveness.

Faculty position

The report emphasized the need to bring the faculty back up to strength. There can be no question that we are understaffed. It is striking -- as the Committee noted -- that in 2009, as effectively a faculty of nine (since Jim Clauss is currently Director of Honors) we are at the same number as we were in 1988, despite having at one point been a faculty of eleven with permission to hire in a twelfth position. But through departures for personal reasons and recruitment to administration, our numbers have diminished. This poses a number of challenges, as we observe in our self-study and as the Committee affirms; our graduate students, too, are feeling the effects of our reduced numbers, as they indicated in their conversation with the GPSS representatives. We understand that this is a difficult time to be asking to hire; and we also understand that our Divisional Dean is as eager as we are to address this problem. Nonetheless, we would argue that our track record suggests that when resources allow, restoring at least one position to this Department should be a high priority for the College.

We appreciate as well the Committee's suggestion that we consider hiring someone with expertise in reception. Our principal need at present is for someone with a specialization in Greek poetry or perhaps imperial Greek literature (as the Committee recognized), but we are cognizant of the fact that reception is very much an emerging area. A hire in this area would enhance and complement existing strengths in this field on the part of Professors Connors, Hinds, and Blondell in particular.

It is possible, too, that there may be an opportunity here to collaborate with another department such as Comparative Literature or the Division of Art History. Moreover, under the current circumstances, we are not averse to thinking in terms of joint appointments, as the Committee suggests.

Recommendations for improvement

The Review Committee made several astute suggestions for improving the quality of our program, and it is our intention to address all of these.

Learning goals: Among them was the desirability of a “direct and separate articulation of specific learning goals for undergraduate majors”; it is recommended in consequence that “the department develop these and make them available to students through printed materials and its web site.” While we address this issue to some extent on pp. 160-61 of our Undergraduate Brochure (and very broadly in our Mission Statement), we plan to undertake substantial discussion of this issue at our next departmental retreat.

Classics 430: The Committee endorsed our desire to offer more frequently a 5-credit version of Classics 430, our popular course in Greek and Roman mythology, with TAs. We have only been able to do this on a few occasions over the past fifteen years, hampered by a dearth of TAs. While we are in fact offering the 5-credit version with TAs this coming fall, given that our graduate cohort will shrink in the next couple of years because of funding pressures, it is not clear how regularly we can offer this. As is true of most of our large lecture classes -- and we offer many more of these than other Humanities departments -- we could fill any number of them if we had more faculty and more graduate students (a point underscored by the report).

New courses: The Committee approved of our attempts to “pilot new courses” by having faculty, and especially new faculty, offer from time to time courses of particular interest to them that might become permanent offerings. Such, for instance, was Professor Kamen’s recent course on Greek Slavery, or Professor Stroup’s on epistolography. We feel strongly that this is an effective way to keep the curriculum vibrant and relevant. The Committee wondered if such courses might more effectively be offered as 300-level courses, and this idea is worth exploring.

Graduate offerings: The report of the Committee drew attention to the number of graduate courses our students end up taking, quite a few more than “their counterparts in other programs.” This is a consequence in part of the way financial support is tied to registration requirements, in part of a desire to expose our students to as wide a variety of texts, authors, and methodologies as possible. We did address this issue in 1998 with the establishment of ‘floating’ or ‘exam preparation credits,’ which permit a graduate

student on three occasions to forego a course in order to prepare for examinations. The situation certainly warrants revisiting, especially as we admit better-prepared graduate students.

The notion of the 'two-quarter long' seminar suggested by the Committee has been discussed before, and in general has been judged impractical for a variety of reasons, especially the possibility of scheduling inequities that can arise.

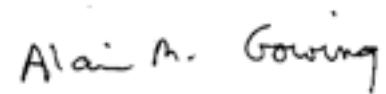
Development: Although we have been quite successful in the area of development, we agree that efforts to expand development would be repaid, especially given the current financial circumstances. The Committee recommended, for instance, the establishment of an annual alumni lecture, something we have discussed on several occasions but never taken action on. We feel that we already engage in a number of 'town-gown' activities -- such as our sponsorship of the local chapter of the Archaeological Institute of America (and the annual faculty lecture) or our annual teachers' conference -- though more can be done. But the point is well taken: we need to 'take charge of our future' in this area, as the report put it. Chief among our desiderata in this area is an endowed professorship, a goal the Committee report enthusiastically endorses.

Staff: The Review Committee rightly notes that the Department has run for some time on a very limited staff. Our administrator, Doug Machle, has for many years done a remarkable job, and as is clear from our self-study, we very much value his expertise, experience, and selfless dedication to the Department. The report acknowledged the challenges posed by our administrative understaffing -- apart from Doug, we currently have a .75 FTE secretary; hourly funding (for, e.g., a student assistant) was taken from our budget long ago, and we have been paying for this out of the Department's endowment. Unfortunately, since both the self-study and the Committee report were written, further cuts to the departmental budgets have made it all but inevitable that we will need to cut our secretary back to .5 FTE. In short, this is an area of serious concern. It is our intention to request restoration of the secretary's position to at least .75 FTE as soon as the College's finances allow. Ideally, as the Committee report observes, we should have a full-time secretary.

It was especially gratifying to read that the Review Committee found the Department of Classics to be "even more distinguished today" than it was at the conclusion of our very successful 1998 review, "the very model of an outstanding Humanities program deserving of crucial institutional support" and one "poised to jump several notches in the rankings." At the same time, the reviewers noted that as was true in 1999, the Department is at "a very critical juncture with the very real possibility of a precipitous decline or a continued path towards national preeminence." We could not agree more. The Committee's report, combined with our self-study, makes a strong case for a renewed commitment on the part of the administration to preserving what is by any

measure one of the preeminent Humanities departments at the University of Washington and one of the most respected Department of Classics in the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Alain M. Gowing". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and slightly larger than the others.

Alain M. Gowing
Professor and Chair
UW Department of Classics