

December 13, 2004

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Dear Dean Feetham:

In response to the recommendations of the review committee in regard to the IPNMES, I have some general comments and then specific responses.

I think the appropriate place to begin is with a look back at the initial five-year review and three remarks by the recent 10-year review committee. The initial review of the program five years ago set as a primary benchmark of the program's success the ability of its graduates to find jobs. Having met that benchmark the program is still on probation and is said "for all its achievements...remains fragile." The committee notes that the program "has evolved a viable model for the training of new social scientists and humanists in ways that the original area studies model envisioned...through rigorous training, both in language and culture *and* social science methods." The committee further notes that "the appeal of the IPNMES is not necessarily limited to students whose interests are directly interdisciplinary." Having thus noted that the program is, at present, very successful in training social scientists, it also notes that NELC either as a department or as individual faculty members feel excluded and alienated from the program and that the NELC faculty have expressed an interest in transforming this program into their own Ph.D. program.

My five years as chair of this program have led me to believe that, despite its name, it is not actually an interdisciplinary program. It is, as the committee noted, a highly effective program for training social scientists who wish to combine broad and deep language acquisition with solid command of a single discipline. The most effective faculty member in the program, Professor Joel Migdal, has reproduced a version of political science comprehensive examinations for his students and they have generally been placed in political science departments. Professor Resat Kasaba who has also worked very effectively with students in the program has either cooperated with Professor Migdal or has given his students equally impressive training either in political science or sociology. To my knowledge not a single student in the program has ever actually combined two separate disciplines, such as economics, political science, literary criticism, or even historiography. The examination structure of the program, moreover, assumes that students will in fact master one discipline, one area, and two Middle East languages. The program as it stands therefore duplicates the work of the existing disciplines and there is no reason that the students who work with professors Migdal or Kasaba (for example) cannot enter existing disciplinary Ph.D. programs. In fact, many of them do at present and while students have flowed from the IPNMES program into the disciplines no student has ever left an existing disciplinary Ph.D. program to enter IPNMES.

Second, it is clear from the report that although IPNMES is recognized as being severely constrained by resources, very few if any additional resources can be expected from the central administration. Specifically it is proposed that the program undertake its own fundraising or that the Middle East Center provide resources to the program to recruit students. To recommend the reliance on soft money to ensure the viability of programmatic recruitment in any degree-granting unit sanctioned by the University of Washington is irresponsible and dangerous. Furthermore it is unrealistic to expect that faculty will suppress their primary commitments to fundraising in their home department in favor of the IPNMES program .

Third, the proposal of the committee in regard to a program already overly dependent on voluntary contributions by faculty proposes to resolve the problem by creating yet another committee for them to serve on without any reward. At the insistence of the NELC chair, recruitment and review committees of the program already must have equal numbers of NELC and non-NELC faculty. It has proven nearly impossible to get the 6 tenured NELC faculty to serve on both sets of committees as well as their home committees, and only a minority attend the annual meetings of the faculty. On the contrary, the NELC faculty, as the report points out, perceive themselves not to be part of a program in which they have demanded to play a central institutional role.

The deep institutional problem here is that IPNMES does well what the social science departments ought to do and have recently done with some success. I note in passing that two recent Ph.D.'s from the Department of Political Science engaged in Middle East studies have been offered tenure track positions, one at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. On the other hand, lacking a sense of ownership, the NELC faculty have withdrawn from the program and generally declined to participate in making it viable from their point of view.

I therefore make the following recommendations.

- 1) The program should be renewed for five years. At the end of that time it should either be eliminated or transferred to NELC. There is no reason to duplicate in IPNMES what the social science disciplines do and there is no reason to refrain from allowing NELC to undertake a Ph.D. exam if the faculty there wish it.
- 2) I have resigned as IPNMES chair in accord with the committee recommendations. The next chair should be from NELC. The NELC faculty have identified Scott Noegel as a potential chair. Given that I believe the program should either be eliminated or transferred, appointing Professor Noegel chair seems a logical step.
- 3) The chair of the program should receive two weeks of salary. This is the standard remuneration for the graduate advisor in a Ph.D. granting department.
- 4) IPNMES will stay the same size. Students presently in it will have the option of earning an interdisciplinary Ph.D. or a NELC Ph.D. for the next ten years.
- 5) NELC has begun to attract external resources for the teaching of Turkish, Persian and Arabic. These resources should be used to attract students. In addition, once here students can apply for FLAS support through the Middle East Center.
- 6) Core methodology courses will be irrelevant.

- 7) It is almost impossible to attract faculty to meetings and committees in the program at present. A steering committee is an unreasonable burden and will be irrelevant under my proposal.
- 8) A discussion of area studies is more suitable to the Jackson School if it is necessary. Generally however these discussions should occur within disciplinary units.
- 9) An expansion of the NELC offerings in English might be a good idea. Alternatively perhaps the Jackson School should consider offering an introductory course on the modern Middle East. Parenthetically I note that I already teach one such course for 150 students a year as well as a course on the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- 10) No core course is necessary.

I have one last comment on the committee proposals. I believe it is outside the purview of a committee established to review one program to make recommendations about the operation of another program. Although the NELC 10-year review comments on the Ph.D. program set this as a precedent, I think it is a bad one. This is especially so because NELC and the Ph.D. program are not even within the same institutional framework. NELC is part of the College of Arts and Sciences while the Ph.D. program is constituted within the Graduate School. I therefore believe that the recommendation by the committee about how to conduct the work of the Middle East Center and the Middle East Studies program was both out of place and profoundly wrong. It has never been the practice of JSIS to separate these functions for any program and I see no reason why they should be separated now in regard to Middle East Studies. The program comprises only about a dozen M.A. students all of whom are, by definition, in the social sciences. I have no intention to resign as head of either the Center or the program in JSIS.

Yours truly,

s/s Ellis Goldberg  
Professor of Political Science  
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c: Gail Dubrow, Associate Dean, Academic Programs, The Graduate School  
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