

Response to the Review Committee Report for the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Washington,
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We would like to start by thanking the committee, chaired by Professor Terje Leiren, for their considerate and fair report, very helpful and constructive suggestions, as well as kind words. We truly appreciate all the work, time, and thought that went into evaluating our Self-Study, conducting on-site interviews, and writing the final document. Our special thanks go to our Slavic Studies colleagues, Katerina Clark of Yale and Steven Franks of Indiana, for traveling many miles in order to help us and the internal members of the committee to assess our academic programs and overall departmental health.

The clarity and objectivity of the report make our response very easy, and what you will find below is a point-by-point addressing of the issues raised by our colleagues. Before we get there, though, I would like to correct, for the benefit of the Graduate Council, a couple of minor omissions or inaccuracies.

In the “Summary of the Process,” the committee forgot to mention that they also interviewed our staff, whom we very much value: our Administrator, Susanna (Shosh) Westen, and our Program Coordinator, Phoebe Ambrosia. The name of one of our Lecturers is Bojan (not Bohan) Belić, and one of the languages he teaches is now called “Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian” (or “BCS”), as opposed to “Serbo-Croatian.” In “Findings,” there is a bit of a contradiction between the committee’s praising us for all the new, well-enrolled courses we are teaching — we introduce at least one new course annually — and the statement (on p. 4) that “the Department has been extremely cautious with new initiatives.” The report also attributes to me a statement that we have “no intention... to hire a linguist in the future” (p. 5). This must have been based on my response that if we had a new position, my own personal preference would be to hire someone who does Islamic Slavic literatures and cultures, but that, as we all know, new positions are unlikely in the next 2-3 years. I did not suggest that, were we allowed a new hire, a linguist would absolutely not be considered; plus it would obviously be not just the chair’s decision (whoever the chair is at the time) but that of the department as a whole.

What you see above are miniscule quibbles; what follows is our hearty agreement with the committee’s suggestions and what we are planning to do about improving our degree programs, and, in particular, our graduate studies. The numbers correspond to those in the Report.

Graduate Program in General (#2 - #5): We agree with — and find helpful — the review committee’s recommendations concerning our graduate program, and will restructure both our MA and Ph.D. Program with these recommendations in mind. During this academic year the department will also be examining its graduate curriculum in the context of a nationwide discussion of Slavic graduate programs that is taking place through one of our two professional associations, the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages. We will be considering a curricular organization in which Slavic graduate degree requirements can be satisfied with a mix of courses within the department and in other departments and programs whose offerings are relevant, including other modern European literatures and cultures, Classics, History, Philosophy, Music and Art History, and Linguistics. This would give our graduate students more consistent graduate-level training, a richer variety of options, and more flexible employment possibilities on graduation.

The discussion of how to change our graduate program had been, in fact, already underway in the Department even before the committee’s visit and report. At several faculty meetings earlier in the year we discussed plans for the increased separation of the literature, film and culture track from the linguistic one, how the MA and Ph.D. Programs might be reshaped so that students in one area would not be required to take courses in another area but would, instead, round up their education in their focus field with

appropriate courses offered in related departments. The Graduate faculty also plans to look at the list of faculty from other departments who have served on our graduate committees and see if we can engage them in an even closer relationship with our newly reshaped graduate program. For example, if Slavic can guarantee that it will have a certain number of graduate students every year who will be required to take a certain course in another department for our own graduate prerequisites, that guarantee can help this other department ensure that the course in question is indeed taught every year. In short, instead of requiring students to acquire a very broad-based and more traditional Slavic graduate training in which everyone is asked to take everything, the department will move in the direction of separate tracks, and these tracks will strengthen themselves with the courses and faculty from the other departments, thus opening up our graduate program much more to interaction with other departments, giving a better opportunity to our graduate students to fully utilize the resources not only within the department but also within the College and indeed the University as a whole.

Linguistic Track (#1): In response to the committee's recommendation about closer cooperation with the Department of Linguistics (**#1**), our Linguistics faculty met with Julia Herschensohn, the chair of Linguistics, in December, to discuss how our two programs could benefit from each other's offerings. We have the preliminary outline for possible collaboration, but there are still wrinkles that need to be ironed out. Given how many of our graduate students in Linguistics are interested in Pedagogy, we are particularly looking forward to the Department of Linguistics' establishing an MA Certificate in Language Teaching Pedagogy, something that had been discussed at the Humanities Chairs Retreat last summer and which met with great enthusiasm by all L&L chairs present there.

Undergraduate Program (#6 and #9): We do presently have a faculty undergraduate advisor —Katarzyna Dziwirek — but her specialty is not in Russian, where most of our majors are. We did not want our two Assistant Professors who teach Russian and Russian Literature — José Alaniz and Barbara Henry — to assume more duties before their tenure and promotion year (which is this year). Next year, however, either one of them will be ready to replace Katarzyna in that capacity. This summer we plan to offer, for the first time during a summer session, a course for Russian "heritage students," which will be taught by our Senior Lecturer, Zoya Polack.

Staff (#7): We welcome the committee's recommendation for "the addition of a minimum 25% FTE for staff support," and there is a real need for that, given our demands in undergraduate advising and outreach. Being realistic, however, about the grim economic reality we are all facing in the next couple of years, we would consider ourselves lucky if we could simply stand pat for now...

Outreach (#8): One of our Ph.D. students, Nika Egorova, has volunteered to spearhead graduate students' outreach efforts in the Russian community, which somehow lags behind that of other local Slavic ethnic communities in terms of their support of the department. This Spring we will reconvene the Department's Advisory Board, and discuss with them further strategies to capitalize on "the existing goodwill" out there,

which is even more essential in these difficult budgetary times. Given the size of the department, and how overworked everyone is in the primary tasks of teaching, advising, research, and service on many departmental committees, it would be difficult to appoint a single faculty member to assume the liaison duties with the Board, so, at least for now, it will probably remain one of the chair's (oh so numerous!) duties.

In closing, we would like again to thank the committee for their very useful and stimulating suggestions which, as we hope this response shows, we have taken very much to heart. We do intend to continue being "a jewel" in the UW crown, and doing everything in our power to serve our students, the College, the University, and the profession to the best of our abilities, while remaining each other's friends and helpful colleagues.

Sincerely,

Galya Diment
Chair, Professor