

February 21, 2017

To: David Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean
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From: Sabine Wilke, Professor
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Gary Handwerk, Professor
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Re: Department of Scandinavian Studies Review Committee Report

The Scandinavian Studies Review Committee was charged by the Graduate School to conduct a review of the Department of Scandinavian Studies under the direction of the Office of Academic Affairs and in coordination with the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs, the College of Arts & Sciences Dean's Office, and the Office of the Provost. Our job was to make recommendations about the status of the department's degree programs, to provide an independent assessment of the "health" of the unit and give advice on how it can be improved (see charge letter from November 30, 2016).

Enclosed is our report. All members of the review committee have read the report and are in agreement about its findings.

We recommend continuation of all of the department's degree programs with a subsequent review to be conducted in 10 years.

In response to our charge of providing an independent assessment of the unit and giving advice on how it can be improved, we will make a few suggestions below that encourage the unit to continue on its proven path of excellence and capitalize on its ability to embrace innovation by continuing the productive conversations they have been having about surviving in an institutional environment that is defined by activity-based budgeting and rapidly shifting enrollments across many fields. Given the institutional parameters of a change in student demographics (especially higher percentages of STEM majors and international students), a weakened foreign language requirement, and a strict policy for credit limitations, it has been and likely will continue to be extremely challenging to flourish as a unit that represents the lesser-taught languages and

cultures of the European North. To move forward, indeed grow, as a unit in such an environment, the Department will need to be very creative in envisioning new roles and opportunities. As a committee, we were extremely impressed with the leadership and the overall team spirit of a unit that has launched itself vigorously into these discussions. We are convinced that this Department will emerge from these conversations stronger and refreshed with a renewed vision that embraces College- and University-wide collaborations.

Summary of Process

The Review Committee met on Sunday, January 28, over dinner to discuss the agenda for the next two days and identify strategies for the collection of information in the various interviews.

We met with Department members and stakeholders on Monday and Tuesday, January 29 and 30. We first met with the Chair, Professor Andrew Nestingen, then with a group of graduate faculty consisting of Senior Lecturer Ia Dübois, Professor Terje Leiren, Associate Professor Guntis Schmidchens, and Professor Marianne Stecher. Subsequently, we spoke with a second group of graduate faculty including professor emerita Lotta Gavel Adams, Assistant Professor Olivia Gunn, and professor Christine Ingebritsen. We held separate sessions with the undergraduate program adviser, Ia Dübois, and the graduate program coordinator, Marianne Stecher. The afternoon was devoted to another round of group meetings, first the Adjuncts, Affiliates and other Stakeholders (including Adjunct Associate Professor Klaus Brandl from Germanics, Affiliate Associate Professor Katherine Hanson from Scandinavian, Affiliate Assistant Professor Heather MacLaughlin Garbes from Scandinavian, Affiliate Assistant Professor Aldis Purs from Scandinavian who joined us via Skype, Chief Executive Officer Eric Nelson from the Nordic Heritage Museum, and Professor Stig Tenold from the Norwegian School of Economics who is visiting UW this year), then the graduate students, and subsequently the lecturers and visiting lecturers (including part-time lecturer Lars Jenner, Visiting Lecturer of Latvian Iveta Grinberga, Visiting Lecturer of Danish Kristian Naesby, Visiting Lecturer of Finnish Ilmari Ivaska, and Visiting Lecturer of Lithuanian Egle Zurauskaite). We met individually with the language program coordinator, Ilmari Ivaska, before retreating to a working dinner to discuss our first day's findings. On the second day of the site visit we had breakfast with undergraduate students, met with the administrator Tina Swenson, the subject librarians Dan Mandeville and Michael Biggins, then again briefly with the Chair to clarify some open questions, before having an executive session to summarize and digest what we had heard over the two days and to strategize about presenting our findings to the university administrators in the exit meeting.

The Review Committee was greeted with a friendly and cooperative team at every step of the way, starting with an excellent analysis of the situation in the departmental self-study and various addenda and including prompt provision of additional information that we requested (on the endowments, a list of courses offered in the past two quarters including enrollment figures, information on faculty teaching load, the size and composition of the graduate applicant pool, and the size and composition of the last two search pools).

Findings

1. *Progress made and challenges overcome since the last departmental review (June 2006)*

The departmental review conducted in June 2006 identified a number of strengths and challenges and made a series of recommendations, some of them addressing systemic issues that are still relevant today. We will focus on the themes that still resonated in our interviews in the hope of being helpful to the department in addressing these issues effectively.

The last 10-year review complimented the department for overcoming significant challenges with regard to promotions, strengthening its area studies profile, creating new study options, adding Baltic Studies to its offerings, creating a Finnish major, strengthening community relations, establishing a new publication series with UW Press, and offering model instruction and TA training.

The strengths of the Department were seen in its unique configuration of programs (its breadth and its combination of language/literature and areas studies emphases), its strong research profile, its community outreach and connectivity with Scandinavian institutions, its remarkable collegiality, excellent teaching, and spectacular fund-raising successes. All of these strengths remain visible today; the Department is doing a stellar job of maintaining excellence in its core areas even as it has adapted creatively to a rapidly shifting budgetary and institutional environment.

The challenges identified in the last report included the maintenance of a carefully achieved equilibrium of programs, some space and facility problems, a lack of graduate fellowships, uneven elementary language enrollments, a lack of TAs for large lecture courses, and a lack of curricular and demographic diversity in certain respects.

In its recommendations, the 2006 review committee called on the College to try to help raise enrollments in elementary language classes by devising a registration system that notifies students who are turned away from certain popular languages and directs them towards openings in less-commonly taught languages. As far as we know, there was no follow-up. Another suggestion was to require a third-year level language course for area studies majors. Given the current climate, adopting such a requirement would be unwise. In the absence of a College-wide pool of TA quarters that could be deployed to help with largely enrolled lecture courses, we encourage the Department to find creative ways of reallocating internal resources to effectively address its teaching mission.

2. *Continued strengths*

Over the last ten years, the Department was able to successfully build on one of its remarkable strengths by attaining spectacular endowment successes (growth from \$2.2 million to \$8.1 million). This success puts the Department in an enviable position in some ways, even in difficult times. The present moment offers an occasion to think strategically about how to make the most effective use of the proceeds from these accounts and to align endowment spending more closely with the Department's teaching and research mission. This growth provides one measure of how the Department's extraordinary involvement with the community has been strengthened—an institutional model that should be seen as source of pride.

Faculty and graduate students continue to build high-level research profiles that make this Department the beacon of Scandinavian studies in the English-speaking world. Few departments in the humanities can boast the sort of linguistic and disciplinary range that makes this unit so unusual.

The newest area of the department, Baltic Studies, has been solidified over the last ten years and is now an integral part of a new identity for the Nordic region that is less focused on national differences and more inclusive of regional collaborations.

One of the most impressive departmental achievements has been raising its student credit hour total significantly even as teaching FTE have declined and as other humanities departments have experienced declines. We were deeply impressed by the core faculty's commitment to their shared teaching enterprise, their willingness to develop new courses attractive to a wide range of students, and their persistence in maintaining high learning goals as they have done so.

Over the last decade, the Department has been able to sustain a vibrant academic community in which all members participate. A well-defined network of colloquia, informal events and mentoring relationships creates significant ongoing cross-departmental collaboration. In addition, many of its members have embraced a real entrepreneurial spirit in a climate that fosters individual initiative. Students at all levels feel well supported. This collegial spirit and high morale is remarkable and should be a source of tremendous pride.

Although many details remain to be worked out, the current leadership has a clear-eyed vision for the Department's future that is supported by all members.

3. Opportunities for reevaluating old practices and having new conversations

We have identified five areas in which we feel that a reevaluation of traditional practices and holding new conversations might be helpful for articulating a renewed vision for the future.

Endowments:

Our recommendation is to consolidate the various different smaller endowments and utilize the proceeds in a much more targeted approach, both to address pressing needs and to empower the Department in realizing its future vision. Both the Chair and the faculty members need to recognize how flexibly some of these funds can be used.

Ideas for what could be done with these funds range from graduate recruitment stipends to dissertation fellowship quarters, indirect recovery of administrative costs, adjustment of staff FTE, or even an increase in instructional FTE. In the case of rewriting the language of the endowments, legal counsel may be necessary. Otherwise, perhaps donors might be approached and asked to agree on less restrictive uses of these funds while at the same time being given the opportunity to deepen their commitment. Undoubtedly, the College's advancement staff might be able to provide concrete assistance for this process.

Generational shift:

This is a very different Department from the one that was reviewed ten years ago. A new generation of scholars has begun to arrive and to be promoted into leadership positions. The Department made a great hire last year in Norwegian and is currently in the process of filling another position in Swedish. We encourage the Department to take this series of hires as an opportunity to rethink its self-understanding—specifically, less along national lines and directed more toward a regionally based Nordic/Baltic perspective.

Along with such a broader pan-Scandinavian self-understanding of the discipline, it is imperative that greater emphasis be placed on looking outward in terms of initiatives and programs across campus, i.e., that the Department even more actively seek out places for broadly international linkages. In particular, a broader vision across the humanities division could usefully be adopted when framing requests for resources and identifying priorities for future hiring, be that for a position in Old Norse or any other area. Individual hires need also to be understood as serving multiple purposes both internal to the Department and outwardly integrative with the university. Future hiring will have to be done with the division at large in mind, seeking to attract new faculty who are not only experts in their respective fields, but also able to develop and teach foundational courses in the humanities and/or interdisciplinary courses.

We encourage the Department to re-evaluate its governance procedures and take a critical look at its committee structure. What is the minimum amount of committee structure that the unit needs to operate effectively? Given how well the Department functions as a committee of the whole on many issues, how many permanently standing committees do they need?

With the upcoming potential retirement of the faculty member who currently serves as undergraduate adviser, a looming issue with advising needs to be solved. For a Department such as this one, active ongoing advising of their students (many of them double majors or doing cross-disciplinary work) is inevitably labor-intensive. If no one faculty member is willing to take on this task, some alternative mechanism will have to be developed.

Undergraduates:

The Department continues to deliver outstanding teaching with consistently high teaching evaluations and personal mentoring of students. Its undergraduate students value the small college feeling, a situation that is especially critical for STEM students and double majors who often find themselves in anonymous large lecture courses. Those students were eloquent about the value of their experiences in this department to their overall intellectual and personal development. All in all, the value of the student experience in Scandinavian is very high.

Some of the undergraduates with whom we talked mentioned that they would appreciate assistance with translating the learning goals gathered in the Department's undergraduate courses into career-preparation skills in a number of different areas. Perhaps the Department can reach out to former students, track alumni more strategically, and utilize their expertise in creating career opportunities for its current students. The value of formal proficiency testing in languages

was mentioned in that context as well as a desirable practice to institute (perhaps with the department helping to cover testing fees from its endowments).

These and other issues relating to undergraduates might be best addressed in a systematic review of the undergraduate program. How can the major be made more flexible in a climate of shrinking student interest? Is there a place for efficiencies that can be built into a more common pan-Scandinavian pathway (language trailers, for example)? Perhaps a capstone experience or some other project-driven and more flexible activity could be selected as an alternative to the senior essay for some students? On the other end of the spectrum: how could the Department involve more students in undergraduate research? How could the Department provide more opportunities for career internships?

The issue of recruitment into language courses and the major came up repeatedly. The Department is well aware of the need for improvement in that area and has shown creativity in recoding its first-year language courses in the hope that this might attract more students. A more systematic use of the services of UW's First-Year Programs and study abroad opportunities (Discovery Seminars, Exploration, Faculty-led Programs, etc.) might yield higher numbers. It is encouraging to see that the College is now beginning to study the causes for this recent trend with the appointment of a Language Enrollment task-force. We hope that the concrete outcomes of this process will aid the Department in devising new strategies in the future.

Recruitment into the major is hindered severely by the university's 210 credit-maximum for graduation. The review committee is convinced that the enforcement of this rule is ill advised, as such enforcement creates very real institutional disincentives for double majoring and exploring the breadth of programs the university has to offer. While we understand that pressures from the legislators are real, the university nevertheless needs to find a better balance for handling these pressures while still providing the excellent academic experience it promises to its students. Students are paying more now for their education than ever before and it is paramount that the university still offer a quality education that is worth the money. About two-thirds of the undergraduate students with whom we spoke were double majors, an extraordinarily talented group of individuals who saw their multi-dimensional educations as the biggest benefit of their UW experience.

Diversity recruitment is also on the Department's radar. We would like to commend them on forming a diversity committee, on adding the diversity requirement to course offerings where appropriate and devising new courses to satisfy this requirement, thus making research and course content on race, class, and gender available to its students, and on taking diversity seriously in their hiring practices. But, in the end, diversity applicants have to be in the pool and this Department's pool is likely to continue to be limited in specific ways. We encourage the Department to approach diversity as a process that needs to reach out to students at the lower level and build up its numbers over time. Perhaps the Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity can be of help in that regard.

Graduate students:

Graduate students in this Department feel well supported: “I thrive in this kind of environment,” was one response we heard in our meeting with them, a sentiment that was clearly widely shared. They described the Department as an egalitarian unit with collegial relations among faculty and graduate students. The graduate students feel well advised on their research, they cherish opportunities for dry-runs of professional presentations, and they successfully apply to national competitions and scholarships thanks to the faculty who mentor them closely.

The TAs are also well-supported in their teaching mission. We commend the Department on having found a creative solution to the departure of Dr. Klaus Brandl in 2008; however, eventually a more sustainable solution to the issue of TA coordination needs to be found. They are currently relying on a visiting lecturer from Finland who has a scholarly interest in second language acquisition.

We recommend that the recruitment package extended to incoming graduate students include multi-year TA offers and be supplemented by endowment funds. Visible progress was made in the last few years as the Department revised and intensified its recruiting strategies in thoughtful ways.

Rethinking the graduate program and providing adjustments where needed is also an exciting opportunity. From an intellectual standpoint, a broader pan-Scandinavian orientation might be considered as a goal. From a practical perspective, some greater benchmarking, especially for the dissertation-writing phase, might be helpful to monitor student progress. It is encouraging to see that the College is now encouraging small units to consider the model of a consortium for graduate training in forming a task force to look into the issue. At this point, it is too early to see where the division is heading with this, but we encourage the Department to keep an open mind and find ways of contributing to a common purpose in graduate training.

The review committee, along with the College leadership, is extremely concerned with the issue of rapidly disappearing TA lines and its impact on the quality of instruction. We believe that the Division and the College as a whole will not be able to maintain the instructional quality it promises to students and parents if it allows further erosion of instructional resources. The Department has shown a real commitment to teaching writing, even in its larger courses. This commitment is in danger when faculty members are not given the TA support they need to handle well-devised, challenging student assignments.

One solution might be to consider the redistribution of TA resources and use a more hybrid approach to TA training that mixes language teaching and assisting in large lecture courses. Such a model would, however, leave basic language courses uncovered. Perhaps the Department should consider utilizing lecturers in beginning language teaching and paying for this out of the endowments. Lecturer teaching load is another area that could be reviewed and where instructional needs could be addressed more effectively, especially in beginning language courses with low enrollment.

Other

The office is stretched thin in terms of FTE. One idea recommended by the staff and certainly worth considering would be to reclassify the 0.5 staff position, paying for this change with endowment funds.

An endowment surcharge may be utilized to pay for a staffing upgrade to 1.0 FTE or for the reclassification mentioned above.

The issue from the previous review with space came up again in our review. We encourage the Department to address this issue creatively. Ideally, all graduate students should be housed on the third floor of Raitt.

4. Conclusions

From these five areas, two themes emerge as the most pressing issues. One has to do with a broader vision for the field and a more sustained articulation of how the Department can contribute to divisional instructional needs. The other concerns a plan about how to spend its funds. Both of these are opportunities to showcase the health of the unit and highlight why Scandinavian studies matters in a global world.

One of the questions in our charge letter asked how the College and the University can assist the Department in achieving these goals. The Department is well along already in its internal discussions of the challenges that it faces. With respect to the relationship between the unit and the division, perhaps a clearer articulation of the College's and University's thinking about strategies for addressing the pressures from the outside might aid individual units in their struggle to react to institutional changes. Greater coordination among units facilitated by the College leadership might result in a more sustained divisional and College-level approach to the most pressing issues such as language enrollments, the erosion of instructional resources, developing a divisional approach to foundational humanities courses, shared components of graduate training, etc. The other theme also needs to be addressed first with a conversation about strategic goals to be held in the unit, but the implementation of endowment consolidation and restructuring might be an area where the College and the University could provide some real practical help.

All in all, even though this review comes at a time of crisis where the College and the Division of the Humanities are battling major budgetary and historical forces at a national and local level, the Department of Scandinavian Studies has shown that it is capable of thinking responsively and creatively, contributing its own ideas to the solution of these massive problems. We congratulate them to such forward thinking and hope that the next ten years see them continuing their efforts to try out new ideas and to map a path towards excellence.