

**Review Committee Report for the
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures**

submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Washington
October 27, 2008

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TO: Gerald Baldasty
Interim Vice Provost and Dean
The Graduate School
University of Washington
G-1 Communications Bldg
Box 353770
Seattle, WA 98195-3770

James Antony
Associate Dean (Academic Programs)
The Graduate School
University of Washington
G-1 Communications Bldg
Box 353770
Seattle, WA 98195-3770

RE: Review Committee Report for the
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Committee Charge

The Program Review Committee for the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures was established and charged on April 9, 2008. The charge was to assess the academic and educational quality of the department. The Graduate School provided guidelines with questions for the Committee to consider, including: the quality of the department's degree programs and the teaching faculty; the effectiveness of the department's system of governance; the faculty's overall vision for the future; the articulation and effectiveness of the department's degree programs as well as their strengths and challenges; and, finally, to make specific recommendations regarding the continuation of the degree programs offered by the department.

Summary of the Process

The Review Committee consisted of five members, three internal and two external to the university: Terje Leiren, Professor, Scandinavian Studies; James Felak, Associate Professor, History; Ellen Kaisse, Professor, Linguistics; Katerina Clark, Professor, Comparative Literature and Slavic Languages and Literatures at Yale University; and Steven Franks, Professor, Slavic Languages and Literatures and Linguistics at Indiana University.

The internal members of the Committee met on April 9 with Graduate School Interim Associate Dean for Academic Programs Thomas Gething, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs John Sahr, College of Arts and Sciences Divisional Dean for Arts and Humanities Robert Stacey, Academic Program Specialist in the Graduate School David Canfield-Budde, and James Antony, incoming Associate Dean for Academic Programs in the Graduate School. The purpose of the meeting was to receive the charge, clarify the directives, and review questions to be addressed during the review process.

- On May 15 and 16, the full Committee held its two-day site visit meetings with the faculty, staff and students in the department. We also met with three Advisory Board members representing the Slavic communities and with several local alumni. Those interviewed included: Full-time Faculty (Galya Diment, Professor and Chair; James Augerot, Professor; James West, Associate Professor; Katarzyna Dziwirek, Associate Professor; Gordana Crnković, Associate Professor; Barbara Henry, Assistant Professor; José Alaniz, Assistant Professor; Zoya Polack, Senior Lecturer; Bohan Belic, Lecturer; Jaroslava Soldanova, Lecturer; Valentina Zaitseva, Lecturer); Adjunct/Affiliate Faculty (Michael Biggins, Slavic Librarian and Affiliate Professor; Laada Bilaniuk, Adjunct Associate Professor, Anthropology; Barbara Citko, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Linguistics; Claudia Jensen, Affiliate Lecturer; Guntis Smidchens, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Baltic and Scandinavian Studies); Visiting Faculty (Artur Grabowski, Visiting Lecturer-Polish; Maria Rewakowicz, Visiting Lecturer-Ukrainian); Unit Directors (Paul Aoki, Director, Language Learning Center; Stephen Hanson, Professor, Political Science; Director, REECAS); Graduate Students (Mary Childs, Lena Doubivko, Candice McDougall, Irene McManman, Dan Newton, Alsu Shakirova, Cheryl Stephenson, Tim Wellman); Undergraduate Students (Jacob Barr, Heather Caturia, Sarah Cunningham, Tatiana Franzen.); Department Advisory Board Members (Krystyna Untersteiner, Mara Pitkethly, Mary Sherhart); and Local Department Alumni (Harlan Adams, David Miles, Marilyn Hoogen Sizer).

The Graduate School debriefing (exit interview) was held from 2:30 to 5:00 pm on May 16 with James Soto Antony, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs leading the sessions. Representatives from the Provost's office, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs, the Graduate School, and the Chair of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures also attended.

Findings

The Review Committee found that the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures is vibrant and growing with a strong sense of collegiality among the faculty, students and staff. Although there are still traces of the trauma associated with its near elimination in the 1990s, the Department is very different today. While emphasizing scholarship and

teaching, the Department has been extremely cautious with new initiatives, always emphasizing adequate enrollment numbers.

The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures has built a robust and successful language program, especially in First-year Russian, which has the largest Russian language enrollment of any university in the country. Similarly, literature, culture and film courses have been developed and show outstanding student appeal and growing enrollment numbers. Part of the growing appeal of Russian language studies is also related to the issue of heritage speakers and how the Department can adequately serve the needs of this community.

The Department has established and supports excellent connections with other relevant departments and units across campus, especially the Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies program (REECAS). In addition, Slavic cooperates in various ways with Comparative Literature, the Jackson School, Linguistics, Political Science, History, Anthropology, Scandinavian Studies and the Language Learning Center.

Within the context of teaching several languages (Russian, Georgian, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Serbo-Croatian, Ukrainian) and related culture courses, the Department prides itself on a diversity that bridges a greater “Slavic diversity” and contributes significantly to the UW as well. Teaching and research in the department include disability studies, gender issues, and a religious diversity that crosses between Islamic, Jewish, and Orthodox Christian cultures.

The Department does a brilliant job in utilizing its limited resources. It has demonstrated imaginative development in cooperation with several foundations, such as by bringing in Visiting Lecturers to supplement its departmental resources. Currently, two such are in the Department: Maria Rewakowicz, a Shevchenko Society Fellow specializing in Ukrainian literature and culture; and Artur Grabowski, a Kosciuszko Foundation and Fulbright Foundation Fellow in Polish literature and culture. In addition, the Slavics faculty is increasingly participating in establishing Discovery and Exploration seminars.

The Committee found that there has been significant change and development in the undergraduate program since the 1996 review. In addition to its language program, growth is evident in cultural studies. In addition to its established professors, the Department has been fortunate to recruit recently two energetic and ambitious representatives of the new generation of Slavists, Barbara Henry and José Alaniz. Enrollments in undergraduate literature courses are healthy and the Department has been resourceful in meeting recommendations from the previous review that it restructure its offerings for the new times. The new faculty members are particularly to be commended for the new courses they have introduced. Another excellent feature of the undergraduate literature offerings is the variety of courses available in non-Russian Slavic languages. Department Chair and Professor Galya Diment is justified in saying that: “We take pride in our undergraduate program and our teaching.”

The Graduate program, damaged as a result of the threatened elimination, has not received the same enrollment boost that is evident in the undergraduate program, but by several measures, it has recovered and is gaining strength. The students praise the program, and job placement figures since the 1996 review suggest increasing national stature. The UW Libraries resources for Slavic are excellent with over 450,000 volumes.

The Review Committee was impressed by the professional level of interest in Slavic Linguistics among the graduate students: of the thirteen (13) students currently active in the department, eight (8) have declared linguistics as their area of concentration. This statistic is particularly striking in light of the recommendation in the 1996 review to “sacrifice some presence in Slavic linguistics in favor of increased attention to non-Russian Slavic culture and language pedagogy” and Professor Karl Kramer’s January 28, 1997, letter to Dean Johnson explaining the new curriculum. After careful self-study, the decision was reached “to change the emphases of the department from language, literature, and linguistics to language, literature, and culture.” While the Department has clearly retooled in the direction of cultural aspects of language and strengthened its language pedagogy component, graduate students have since the reorganization nonetheless been regularly recruited in linguistics. Graduate student interest in linguistics still remains very high. Most of this energy, however, is at the MA level; the last Ph.D. in Slavic Linguistics was awarded in 2004 and, at present, none of the students planning to defend dissertations in 2008-09 are in linguistics.

While departmental efforts to serve these students are praiseworthy, it does not seem to us that adequate resources currently exist within the department to maintain a doctoral program in Slavic Linguistics. The two tenured linguists, Dziwirek and Augerot, are engaged in an impressive, if not overwhelming, variety of teaching and service activities that make it impossible for them to offer more than one graduate course annually. Most of what is taught seems to be the traditional survey fare of comparative historical Slavic by Augerot; indeed, Dziwirek has not taught a graduate seminar since her first few years at the UW. Neither of the two junior faculty members is a linguist, nor was any intention expressed by the chair to hire a linguist in the future, so that once Augerot retires, it is likely that the traditional model will not be viable.

Professor Kramer’s response to the 1996 review is telling. It defined a carefully conceived plan, much of which has been admirably implemented and has enabled the Department to rise again to prominence, particularly in the area of undergraduate education. However, austerity came at a price and graduate courses were sacrificed in the name of enrollments. While current faculty resources will allow literature and culture programs to spring back, once perceived pressure to assign faculty to low level and/or high enrollment classes is alleviated, the same is not true of linguistics. The issue the Department now faces is thus to decide on the vision for the future of Slavic linguistics at the UW.

Recommendations

The Review Committee has identified several challenges facing the Department and recommends ways in which these challenges might be met. The Department should consider:

1) the elimination of a stand-alone Ph.D. degree in Slavic Linguistics and making use of courses outside the Department, particularly in the Department of Linguistics, to buttress the MA program;

2) adding more flexibility to the MA program by eliminating or reducing linguistics requirements for students in the literature track and literature requirements for students in the linguistics track; by increasing the number of electives; by adding courses taken outside the Department (in Linguistics, in Comparative Literature, in Film Studies, etc.) to the list of approved electives; and by requiring some courses outside the Department for the degree. For the MA in Slavic Literature, we recommend that the Department consider replacing the 10 required credits of linguistics courses with 5 credits of required courses in critical theory/literary theory and 5 credits of electives from a list that includes courses taken outside the Department;

3) adding more structure to the Ph.D. program by completing curriculum reforms, including requiring courses taken outside the Department, such as a Comparative Literature course in Critical Theory;

4) providing more graduate courses for the Department's graduate students, while receiving assurances from the College and University Administration that the Department will not be penalized for teaching smaller enrollment graduate courses;

5) encouraging junior faculty to teach at least one graduate-level seminar at least every other year;

6) appointing a faculty member to serve as Director of Undergraduate Studies in order to provide added coordination to the undergraduate program, especially languages.

7) strongly advocating for the addition of a minimum 25% FTE for staff support. The Review Committee is convinced that undergraduate advising duties and growing outreach and development activities require increased staff support.

8) strengthening outreach, in particular relations with the local ethnic communities by taking advantage of the existing goodwill and reconvening the Department's Advisory Board and appointing a faculty member as official liaison with the Board, working to devise ways to increase graduate and undergraduate student involvement in outreach activities; and

9) continuing to develop ways to better serve "heritage students."

Conclusions

The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures is a jewel which after having been tarnished by the prospect of elimination in the 1990s has regained much of its former luster for the University of Washington. The Department has worked hard over the past decade to develop an undergraduate program that reflects breadth and depth while supporting majors in the department as well as providing valuable service courses to other units and departments across campus. This is a department that has produced impressive results from few and scarce resources, even more impressive when one looks at where it was in 1995. The Department requires support and investment from the College and the University's upper administration, especially critical as it reinvests in, and further develops, its graduate program. The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures is an important part of the University of Washington and deserves strong support as it continues to build on its impressive record of teaching, scholarship and service. The Review Committee has been greatly impressed with the dedication of the faculty, staff and students of the Department. It should be supported in its efforts to develop its vision for the twenty-first century. The Review Committee is pleased to recommend that the next program review take place in ten years.

Sincerely yours,

Terje I. Leiren, Professor
Scandinavian Studies
University of Washington
(Committee Chair)

Ellen M. Kaisse, Professor
Linguistics
University of Washington

James R. Felak, Associate Professor
History
University of Washington