

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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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 November 1, 2017. The charge was to assess the quality of the undergraduate and graduate degree programs in the department and to provide its faculty with constructive suggestions for strengthening those programs. The questions we were tasked to investigate included:

- 1) Are they doing what they should be doing?
- 2) Are they doing it well?
- 3) How can they do things better?
- 4) How should the University assist them?

In our report, we will address these questions. The first section, Findings, will address numbers 1 and 2, Recommendations for the department will address 3, and Recommendations for the College and University will address 4.

Summary of the Process

The Review Committee consisted of four members, two internal and two external to the university: James J. Clauss, Professor, UW Department of Classics (Committee Chair), Carolyn Allen, Professor, UW Department of English, Yana Hashamova, Professor and Chair, Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures, The Ohio State University, and Justin Weir, Professor, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Harvard University.

The internal members of the Committee met on November 1 with Michael Shapiro, Divisional Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Katarzyna Dziwirek, Chair of Slavic Languages and Literature, Kevin O'Brien, Administrative Specialist, Graduate School and Wesley Henry, Associate Director, Graduate School; the external evaluators, Yana Hashamova and Justin Weir, also attended by way of conference call. The purpose of the meeting was to receive the charge, clarify the directives, and review questions to be addressed during the review process.

On April 16-17, the full Committee held its two-day site visit meetings with the following individuals and groups:

- Wesley Henry (Director, Academic Program Review)
- Katarzyna Dziwirek (Chair) and Michael Shapiro (Divisional Dean of Humanities)
- Associate and Full Professors: Gordana Crnković (Professor), Galya Diment (Professor), José Alaniz (Associate Professor), and Barbara Henry (Associate Professor); James West (Associate Professor) did not participate as he was teaching.
- Sasha Senderovich (Assistant Professor)
- Zoya Polack and Valentina Zaitseva (Senior Lecturers)
- Svetlana Abramova, Mary Childs, Krystyna Untersteiner (Part-Time Lecturers) and Michael Biggins (Affiliate Professor)
- Matt Ellet, Alex King, Nathan Marks, Veronica Muskheli, Will Zuercher (Graduate Students) and Oksana Zubchenko (Ukrainian Fulbright FLTA)
- Michele Aoki, Brian Reed, Nicolay Grachev, Claudia Jensen (Adjuncts and Affiliates)
- Staff members Chris Dawson-Ripley (Administrator/Graduate Program Coordinator), Gina Gould (Undergraduate Adviser), Gref Pflaumer (Workstudy Student)
- Administrator and Advancement Team: Chris Dawson-Ripley (Administrator/Graduate Program Coordinator) and Molly Purrington (Advancement)
- Bojan Belič (Principal Lecturer)
- Undergraduate Students
- Wesley Henry (Director, Academic Program Review), a second meeting in preparation for the exit discussions
- Exit Discussion 1: Katarzyna Dziwirek (Chair) and Chris Dawson-Ripley (Administrator/Graduate Program Coordinator)
- Exit Discussion 2 (Graduate School debriefing): Michael Shapiro (Divisional Dean of Humanities), Kima Cargill (Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Graduate School), Patricia Moy (Associate Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs), Michaelann Jundt (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs), Wesley Henry (Director, Academic Program Review), Alain Gowing (Professor, Classics, Graduate School)

Council Representative), Will McGuire (Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, UWT, Graduate School Council Representative)

Findings

We begin our report by noting that we were all delighted to have the opportunity to visit the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, which is a dynamic program, doing what it must during times that are unfavorable to humanistic studies and doing it with considerable verve and panache. Everyone with whom we spoke had high praise for the chair, Kat Dziwirek, and everyone described a collegial and supportive atmosphere, one always devoutly to be wished. Of particular note all of the non-tenure line faculty, part-time and full-time, expressed the feeling that they were included in the governance of the department and had no experience of being treated as second-class citizens. The faculty were all on the same page regarding the issues their department faces within the current budgetary crisis encountered by all humanities departments. The graduate students seemed generally pleased with the educational trajectories within their program (more under Recommendations). The undergraduates, who study Russian primarily, were positively ebullient in their love of, and engagement in, their language study and they spoke of their instructors with great enthusiasm. In short, over two days we were treated to a veritable Slavic love fest.

Before turning to the present state of the department, first we would like to underscore several of the developments Slavic has overseen since the last ten-year report that we found particularly noteworthy.

- Assistant Professor Sasha Senderovich was hired 50% in Slavic and 50% in the Jackson School (Jewish Studies), which, combined with two other Slavic faculty members, Galya Diment and Barbara Henry, gives the UW a strong center of Russian Jewish studies nationally.
- The Advisory Board was reconstituted and is very active.
- Slavic now offers two undergraduate tracks: (1) Slavic Languages and Literatures specializing in Russian Language and Literature and (2) Slavic Languages and Literatures with a specialization in Eastern European Languages, Literature, and Culture. They also offer three minors: Minor in Russian Language, Minor in Slavic Languages, and Minor in Russian and Slavic Literatures.
- They are in the process of creating a professionalized terminal MA and a streamlined 5-year PhD program will go into effect in the coming year.

Secondly, we would like to describe the fiscal environment in which the Slavic Languages and Literatures department does its best to survive, before turning to how well they are doing (questions 1 and 2). As everyone in academia knows, humanities departments have lost considerable numbers of students within the past decade. We discussed these with the current divisional dean, the chair and the tenured faculty. The circumstances at the UW are various: the effects of the recession of 2008, the State's decision to reduce tuition without backfilling the loss of revenue, the decision that effectively abolishes the need to study language, the lack of any state subsidy for the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), anxiety over Return on Investment that has parents and advisors pushing students into STEM majors not to mention

societal/governmental pressures in this direction, and a strict application of the 180-210 credit graduation policy that gives the impression that double majoring is no longer possible.

An issue that CAS has little control over is TA salaries, which have risen exponentially since the establishment of a graduate student union. Unfortunately, the pool for TAs support has not risen so that the number of TAs allotted to departments has been reduced, which consequently reduces the number of graduate students in the programs. The future of graduate education within the Humanities in particular is at risk and, concomitantly, the status of the UW as a Tier 1 university across the board.

Finally, for decades before the installation of ABB and before the current budgetary crisis, humanities departments were subsidizing the College of Engineering and Computer Science programs, for instance, among the areas of greatest academic interest today, because faculty were cheap and SCHs were plentiful. It is disappointing, to say the least, that the humanities and humanistic social sciences (e.g., History and Philosophy) are now the target of bean counting when they provided so many beans for our sisters and brothers across the university in the past. As the incoming Divisional Dean noted, this does not seem fair.

Based on our various conversations, we felt it incumbent upon us to lay out in some detail this very challenging environment so as to better understand Slavic's remarkable response to it. First of all, Slavic has expanded their large general educational classes, moving beyond the traditional boundaries of their discipline by including courses that feature film, the arts, gender and contemporary society (Gordana Crnković, Galya Diment, Barbara Henry). Other instructors have committed to planning future additions to such classes (José Alaniz and Sasha Senderovich). While these courses, current and future, may not per se alleviate departmental deficits, they are critical steps toward greater outreach that have the possibility of increasing student interest in language study. Moreover, as in other successful language and literature departments, this rich presentation of Slavic art and literature serves to counteract the narrow view of culture becoming more common in nationalist discourse around the world. In particular, Russia and Eastern Europe have recently reemerged as a particularly volatile region of the world which demands greater study and understanding. Slavic departments are poised to serve national and international interests as they did during the first Cold War.

What makes the UW's Slavic program rare among comparable programs nationwide is that it is in fact a genuine Slavic Language and Literature Program. That is, in addition to Russian, students can study Ukrainian, Polish, Slovenian, and Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian (BCMS); sad to say, they are no longer able to offer Czech since the retirement of their lecturer, Jaroslava Soldanova. What makes the offerings of Slavic truly noteworthy is that they have managed to teach a diversity of language courses within a very limited budget.

To sum up, the department is responding strategically to its shrinking budget and new reality in the Humanities by serving more undergraduate students, and with laudable determination. Slavic is also focused on growing its outreach to heritage communities; undergraduate satisfaction with the program is very strong; the graduate students, divided between interest in literature and linguistics, are happy with their program (more on this below) and the forthcoming slimmer program will prove to be critical in a situation in which students can expect only three years of

support. Morale is remarkably high despite all of the issues the department faces. The outside reviewers noted that the faculty are known to be productive and well respected colleagues in key areas of research in the field. Slavic L&L is more than a department; it is an academic community dedicated to teaching, research and service of their disciplinary and university missions.

Recommendations

Our impression of the health of the department is very positive, especially within increasingly narrower parameters for creativity. After reading the various reports and self-studies and following two days of intensive interviews we offer the following recommendations (question 3).

Undergraduate Program

There has been a significant decline in the number of Slavic Department majors in the last ten years. We do not see a decline here that is out of step with what is going on in other humanities programs and in many other universities. Indeed, given how often students choose national language and literature programs after having enrolled in language courses, Slavic has done well to retain as many majors as it has in the face of declining language enrollments. Nevertheless, we see opportunities for the Department to build on its strengths and visibility by way of large literature and culture courses. While we believe in strong language skills, we think the Department's requirement of 4 years of foreign language for majors is no longer in step with many programs around the country. The Department should review requirements at other institutions and consider revising this requirement to allow for students to take additional courses in adjacent fields instead of advanced language courses.

We appreciate the continued efforts of the Department to focus on undergraduate courses and enrollments, particularly those that are cross-listed with other departments. It is clear that the Slavic Department is generating successful courses that serve the curriculum well and generate high enrollments (see p. 17 of their self-study). Given the concerns of the Slavic Department and other humanities departments about costing more money than they generate, we are eager to remind the administration that with such a small department one retirement and/or a couple of new high enrollment courses can substantially alter the numbers. Therefore we recommend that Slavic continue to revise the undergraduate curriculum in order to create more general education courses that generate student credit hours, given the college's acute awareness of deficit spending in the Humanities departments.

As many noted, the local Polish and Slovenian communities have been providing enthusiastic support for the instruction of their languages and cultures. There has not been, however, much interest shown by a sizeable local Russian community. One approach toward outreach suggested was a commitment to teach courses for heritage students. More specifically, the Slavic department now has a strong, seemingly unique, cohort that focuses on Russian-Jewish literature and culture. In addition to possible community outreach, here is a strength that might draw undergraduate and graduate students to the department. CAS might even consider providing seed money for developing such classes.

Interest in Slavic language and culture exists both in the Jackson School (REECAS) and in the Slavic Department. We recommend that leadership and faculty in both units consider closer ties to create strength in interdisciplinary interest and in numbers. Should the Slavic Department reduce its language requirements slightly, it might consider accepting a few Jackson School courses as part of its requirements for majors. Perhaps as this connection develops, a dual position might be generated to enhance the collaboration.

Work in advancement in the areas of Polish and Slovenian has been remarkable and the department merits praise for this. The desire to create an endowed chair in Polish seems premature, however. We feel it might be difficult to attract a distinguished professor when there is not critical mass for a graduate program. So we recommend considering the creation of several graduate fellowships that will attract students as an intermediate step. A vibrant Polish graduate program along with an eventual professorship in Polish will help to insure its teaching in the years to come.

Language Program

We feel the Slavic Department language program is doing the best it can given the current conditions for language learning at the University of Washington. Although University administrators meeting with the review committee described several relevant complexities that have accompanied declining enrollments in foreign language courses (detailed above), we believe that declines in Slavic language courses are overwhelmingly attributable to the University's change in foreign language requirements. Slavic language enrollments at other universities in the country, especially in Russian, have held steady over the last decade in programs where language requirements have been steady. The University of Washington Slavic Department teaches excellent courses, has high student evaluation scores and enthusiastic faculty. Foreign languages provide highly relevant, practical, career-enabling, and transferable skills in today's market. Changes in foreign language requirements at the University of Washington may have solved some problems, but at a very steep cost for the Slavic program. We thus recommend that College and University revisit its policies regarding language learning requirements for admission and graduation.

In this regard, the University at large should consider creating a certificate or citation that acknowledges advanced language proficiency in a foreign language. Many students in STEM programs, Public Affairs, Public Health, International Studies, Business etc., programs outside the Humanities in general, value and need foreign language studies. A certificate acknowledges their skills and achievements, supports humanities language courses, but doesn't alter the shape of admissions policies the way a change to foreign language requirements would, should the current policies remain in place. Different from a Minor, a certificate program would focus exclusively on proficiency in one of the languages in support of another career direction. In fact, the humanities departments offering modern languages might consider a similar program. One could consult similar programs, for example, at Harvard ([Citations in a Foreign Language](#)), Stanford ([Proficiency in a Foreign Language Notation](#)) or Carnegie Mellon ([Foreign Language and Culture Certificate Program](#)). In addition to a certificate or citation, we encourage language departments at the University to consider creating an individualized language teaching program. Individualized programs offer self-paced, mastery-based language learning courses with variable

credits designed to mirror the content of courses offered in the classroom. Based on student autonomy and flexible scheduling, individualized instruction provides significant opportunities to students to pursue double majors. For more details, one can examine the Ohio State University's [Individualized Language Learning Center](#).

While some students participate in foreign study programs, there does not seem to be a systematic departmental policy that encourages students from the general education courses to pursue region-related study abroad programs or majors to enhance their language learning abroad; this was the impression students seemed to convey during our interviews. Study abroad experience often leads to increased interest in taking more courses in the field. We thus recommend that Slavic work with IPE in encouraging more student participation in foreign study programs. In particular, we see the value of creating sample roadmaps for students that would depict when they could study abroad and how that would fit into their plan of study.

Graduate Program

In the last review, it was recommended that the MA and PhD programs move away from a focus on linguistics. From our conversation with graduate students, half of the students continue to lean toward a specialty in linguistics. Given the current and future direction of the field, this area of interest has very few career opportunities. We recommend that faculty and advisors inform future graduate students entering the program that linguistics will not likely serve realistic career goals.

Faculty and Staff

Amidst the grand chorus of Slavic satisfaction and unanimity, we occasionally heard a stray note of tension regarding equity in teaching; not all faculty currently teach the demanding large classes that contribute to student outreach. Efforts seem to be in motion to address this concern. Nevertheless we recommend the chair intervene as necessary to ensure that all faculty contribute as equally as is possible.

On an unrelated note, Assistant Professor Sasha Senderovich holds a joint position in the Jackson School and in Slavic L&L, which means that he is subject to two different cultures involving tenure and promotion (Social Sciences and Humanities). It is critical that, as he proceeds, the expectations he has that he will be evaluated as a humanist be confirmed as soon as possible.

How can CAS or the University assist Slavic Language and Literature

Clearly there are no funds available to backfill Slavic's deficit or to add permanent TAs or new faculty positions. In a context in which there are no new funds, if the UW is committed to maintaining its status as a world-class educational institution where the Humanities are not demoted to providing general education classes for all other students, where the Humanities rather expand our knowledge and understanding of the human condition through engaged research, teaching and service, it must find ways of supporting humanistic disciplines in word and deed. Most publications regarding UW research lauds work in STEM, Computer Science, Public Health etc. The UW needs to let the State of Washington know better how the Humanities

serve the State and its citizens. Secondly, the study of language, a key component in the lifeblood of the Humanities, needs to be more aggressively supported and developed. Certificate programs are a start, especially as they underscore the practical value of studying language and would have clearly defined outcomes. While CAS is not in a position at present to return to offering more entry and intermediate language courses, future plans should incorporate an expansion in language programs as part of a truly liberal education (question 4).

Final Recommendation

Possible recommendations offered by the charge letter include: suspension of student entry into one or more of the department's degree programs; continuing status with a subsequent review in ten years; continuing status with a shorter period for the next review.

We hereby and enthusiastically opt for the second recommendation: **continuing status with a subsequent review in ten years**. The UW is fortunate to have an academic community that has shown astonishing determination and resiliency in the face of significant obstacles.