

September 30, 2005

Dr. Suzanne Ortega
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
Box 353770

Dear Vice Provost Ortega:

I am writing to you to transmit the response of the Department of Asian Languages and Literature to the report (dated June 2, 2005) of the review committee for the Department of Asian Languages and Literature. This response represents a synthesis of the sense of the Department concerning the report, as based upon 2 lengthy discussions held at meetings in June and September, written comments from faculty members, staff surveys and interviews, and my own observations and judgment in my capacity as Chair.

Although, as is inevitable with a report such this one, there are suggestions and statements in the report with which some members disagree or to which they take exception, the overwhelming sense of the Department is that the review report is a balanced and fair account of the current state of the Department of Asian Languages and Literature. The Department wishes to express its appreciation both to the internal members of the committee (Professors Diment, Hargus, and Hamilton) and the distinguished group of external evaluators (Professors Aklujkar, McGloin, and Lin) for the thoughtful and balanced portrayal it paints of the Department and for the way it relates the current state of the Department to broad national trends in the teaching of Asian languages and literatures. The Department is extremely gratified by the committee's summary statement in which the Department of Asian Languages and Literature is said to be "undoubtedly, in the first tier of Asian L&L departments, both in terms of the scope of its offerings...and quality of scholarship..." The Department is pleased by the committee's recognition of the Department's quality and high standing. But it also accepts the legitimacy of the committee's description of areas where the Department could be doing a better job, not just in situations where additional resources are needed, but also in some situations where the Department could be doing a more effective job without additional resources. Overall, the committee's report does an excellent job of describing the complexity of the Department of Asian Languages and Literature, the stresses and strains that it is experiencing, the range and nature of its interactions with diverse units on campus, and the growing and changing nature of its clientele.

It is the consensus of the Department that in responding to the committee's report it would be neither productive nor helpful to respond in a point by point manner to each recommendation given in the report. Rather, the Department wishes to describe the efforts that it has already taken, or will be taking shortly, to address concerns raised in the report. Some of the most important areas where the Department has noted concerns and already taken action are as follows:

(1) Strengthening internal governance in the Department. There is widespread recognition in the Department that, given the age distribution of its faculty, the future of the Department lies with its strong cadre of young faculty. With the approval and assistance of the Dean, a summer salary stipend has been obtained for the post of Associate Chair. This post will be given to younger faculty, once they have obtained tenure, to serve as a de facto apprenticeship in departmental administration and governance. One major administrative task, namely the superintending of the increasing complex matter of TA/RA rules and regulations in an era of TA/RA unionization, has been assigned to the Associate Chair. For the initial year, a senior professor, Collett Cox, who has previously served as TA Coordinator for the

Department and who is knowledgeable in the TA/RA related matters, is serving as Associate Chair, and will assist in setting up procedures and protocols concerning student service appointments. The committee structure of the Department has been reorganized and strengthened, with an attempt made to distribute the service load as equitably as possible.

(2) Hiring Needs. The Department is pleased that the committee strongly supports the Department's desire to request authorization to conduct searches for tenure line positions in (a) Japanese/Korean linguistics, (b) Tibetan, and (c) medieval Chinese literature. It continues to believe that these three positions represent the highest staffing priorities for the Department. The Department did, in fact, submit requests for these positions, but is disappointed that the College was unable to authorize for AY 2005-06 a search for any of them. The Department notes that there is a fourth tenure-line position, for which it makes sense to request authorization in the near future, namely a tenure-line position in some aspect of Southeast Asian language and literature that connects intellectually and programmatically with areas in which the AL&L already has strength. Two obvious areas that would fit this description are Southeast Asian Buddhism and Southeast Asian linguistics. The Chair has, in his discussions with administrators in the Southeast Asia Program in JSIS, explored the possible seed funding for such a position in a future Center grant.

(3) Concerns about staff. There is a general understanding in the Department that the current organizational structure of the support staff is antiquated and does not well serve the needs of the Department as a whole. With the support of the Dean, over the summer the Department hired a human resources consultant, Ms. Deborah Seaman, who was recommended by the University Consulting Alliance, to advise the Department on the possible reconfiguration of the support staff. As part of her study, Ms. Seaman conducted extensive interviews and surveys on the staff, faculty, and past and present department chairs. Her preliminary findings strongly support the review committee's observation that the support staff as a whole is overstretched. In particular, the review points to the acute need to separate the undergraduate advisor position from that dealing with graduate student services. Ms. Seaman has recommended the creation of a new .5 undergraduate advisor position, in conjunction with a partial redistribution of some assignments for the existing staff so as to enable it to spend more time with other tasks (e.g. writing and dissemination of newsletters, support of development activities, tech support) that are currently not receiving enough attention.

(4) Strengthening Undergraduate Majors. The Department recognizes that it needs to address concerns about such matters as the distribution of majors across the various constituent programs in the Department, administrative roadblocks to the successful completion of majors, and alleviating the scarcity of upper-division course offerings in non-language courses. To that end it has already begun, at the request of the Chinese faculty, a year-long internal review of the entire Chinese language program, with the intention of strengthening the major, eliminating bottlenecks, and increasing the degree of coordination between the discrete levels of instruction. Several programs in the Department have revised their majors within the last year, and substantial thought and effort has been directed towards the use of the Department's webpage to communicate better with current and potential majors.

(5) Relationship of Asian L&L to JSIS and the area studies programs. The Department recognizes that the relationship between the Department and the various area studies programs housed in JSIS needs to be as strong as possible, particularly given that the success of many Center applications (East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, International Studies) is heavily dependent upon the strength of language offerings, and requires close cooperation between the JSIS and AL&L. In preparation for the coming round of Center applications, the Chair has met over the summer with the Directors and administrators of each of the relevant Language and Area Centers in JSIS, as well as with the administrators of the Global Business Center in the UW Business School. Proposed budgets concerning language staffing and support have

been vetted in the Department and alterations suggested. A series of regular meetings between JSIS administrators and relevant AL&L faculty and staff is being planned.

(6) Professional Enhancement for Lecturers. Given that fully one half of the Department's faculty members are now lecturers and senior-lecturers, it is not surprising that concerns have been expressed about professional training, career trajectory, and course load parity for non-tenure line faculty members. The Department recognizes the importance of enabling these faculty members to attend conferences, get professional training, and be given the opportunity to be promoted to those ranks at the University that are open to them. This quarter, the Department will inaugurate a language pedagogy workshop, to be organized by lecturers, at which issues of common concern to language instructors will be discussed. In addition, discussions have been held with Center Directors about using Center funds to enable language lecturers to receive advanced training in such areas as oral proficiency testing, interactive teaching, and the use of technology.

There are, of course, many issues of concern to the Department, which because of shortage of resources, whether financial or of space, elude easy solution. Such matters include: the status and viability of degrees programs in Korean given the low staffing level of the program; the status of Southeast Asian languages (including Tagalog/Filipino) in the absence of tenure-line faculty; the lack of multi-year graduate fellowships (which limits the Department's ability to attract graduate students); the desirability of creating language program coordinators to oversee the first through fourth-year language programs in Chinese and Japanese; the extent to which it is possible to "multi-track" language curricula in various Asian languages in response to changing clientele; the status of Summer Quarter intensive language programs and the extent to which their curricula can be successfully integrated into those for the academic year; and the need for sending more undergraduate majors abroad for advanced language training, while simultaneously insuring that the language training received abroad dovetails effectively with that received at the UW. Equally vexing are issues that do not stem from inadequacy of funds or space, but arise from the intrinsic complexity and heterogeneity of the Department. The most important of these is the question of how possible it might be to forge a sense of a single departmental sensibility or identity that transcends the divides that arise from an array of geographic, linguistic, cultural, and linguistic factors. None of these issues will be easy to solve. But it is nevertheless essential that the Department continue to deal with them forthrightly.

In closing this response to the committee's report, I would like to note that a department of Asian languages and literatures such as our own faces many complex challenges. I would be remiss were I to fail to point out that the University of Washington has, within its College of Arts and Sciences, separate departments of Classics, Germanics, Romance Languages and Literature (partitioned into French/Italian and Spanish/Portuguese), Scandinavian Studies, and Slavic Languages and Literatures in order to deal with the languages and cultures of Europe. The purview of AL&L, which deals with the languages, literatures and cultures of fully 40% of the world's population, is as large as that of these other departments combined. The establishment of a single department for Asian languages and literature is in many ways a reflection of a late 1960s world view. At that time, demand for instruction in Asian languages and literature was much less than it is now and the clientele for this instruction was much less diverse. Yet in the early 1970s the Department had a roster of approximately 20 tenure-line faculty (including two in Korean, and one each in Tibetan, Thai, and Tamil). It now has fourteen tenure-line faculty and fourteen language teaching lecturers, and provides coverage of ten languages, namely Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Bengali, Sanskrit, Urdu, Thai, Vietnamese, and Indonesian. It supports three distinct Language and Area Centers, and has relations with the International Studies Center and Global Business Center. The Department feels that it is being pulled in too many directions and fears an erosion of its scholarly core. It agrees fully with the statement made at the beginning of the committee report that "there is a general and unfortunate tendency on this campus and everywhere to treat language and literature programs as largely "service" departments for teaching beginning and intermediate

language courses.” The Department takes pride that, as noted by the committee, “the intellectual and academic gravitas and rigor that are exhibited in the research of Asian L&L senior faculty compare supremely well with any top department at UW.” But it worries about a phenomenon that I refer to as “Berlitzification,” namely the process whereby a language program becomes bereft of intellectual content through an overly narrow focus on language learning as simply a process of skill acquisition. The Department believes that language learning involves acquiring many different skills, to be sure. But the acquisition of skills must go hand and hand with the acquisition of a broader intellectual and cultural competence, in which knowledge of culture, civilization, and history all play a role. During the last few years, the Department has embarked upon a discussion on what it means to teach Asian language as the university or college level, and how what it does differs from what takes place in a purely commercial environment. In effect, the Department has begun to ask itself wherein lies the “value added” that it, as a distinguished unit at a major research university, provides to the teaching of Asian languages, literatures, and civilizations. This is the question that the Department will need to struggle with and answer in the years to come. The committee’s report has provided the Department with a useful template for carrying out this process. For this, the Department is extremely grateful.

Sincerely yours,

Michael C. Shapiro
Chair

APPENDIX

Although it is not the Department’s wish to comment directly on each point raised in the report, it does wish to respond to a small number of statements in the report that are factually in error and need be corrected.

Page 2, first full paragraph. The position in Korean literature in AL&L is entirely paid for with UW funds. The fundraising campaign referred to was for a position in Korean history, not in language and literature.

Page 11. The report states that “the burden of teaching large undergraduate courses...seems to fall disproportionately on the junior faculty.” Of the large lecture classes (with more than fifty students), all but one have been taught by tenured faculty (Cox, Pauwels, Shapiro). The confusion stems from the fact that the courses taught by these faculty members are outside of the Department (e.g., Relig 202, Relig 352, Relig 354, Humanities 101).