



Interdepartmental Correspondence

June 18, 1998

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From: Richard Gray, Chair
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Re: Response to the Report of the Department of Germanics Review Committee

The faculty of the Department of Germanics met on 10 June 1998 to discuss the report of the departmental Review Committee. The departmental undergraduate and graduate student representatives also attended the meeting.

In general, the Department is heartened and encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive tone of the Committee's report. We are pleased that our innovations have been recognized and that the Committee finds little to add in the way of concrete proposals. We would like to address each of the Committee's suggestions in the order of the importance they have for us.

1. Faculty size.

We concur with the view of the Committee that, at a minimum, Germanics must retain its current level of faculty positions and that Gunter Hertling must be replaced after his impending retirement. Moreover, if we are to be in a position to respond to other curricular suggestions made by the Committee, we will require an additional faculty position. We hope that the College of Arts and Sciences will take this recommendation to heart and commit the necessary funding to the Department to ensure its future viability. We believe the national standing of our graduate program, the innovative character of our German language courses, and our record of contributing to other units and programs on campus justify investment in the Department. We are one of the leading humanities programs at the University, and at a time of fiscal limitations it makes good sense to invest in existing strengths. The Department's strong track record in faculty hiring, specifically mentioned by the extramural members of the Review Committee, also augurs well for our wise use of any allocated resources for new faculty.

2. Establishment of a departmental "Visiting Committee"

We view this as one of the most helpful suggestions made by the Committee, and we intend to pursue the establishment of such a committee with the Development Office of the College of Arts and Sciences in fall quarter. The institution of such a group will greatly assist the Department in its outreach and development efforts.

3. Continuation of our Involvement with European Studies, Film Studies, Comparative Literature, Linguistics.

Germanics perceives its disciplinary interchange with other units on campus as crucial to its mission. This has traditionally been the case in the past and will continue to be true in the future. It should be clear, however, that the degree of our participation is limited by the resources of the Department, in particular by our current faculty size. In addition to European Studies, Cinema Studies, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics, Germanics faculty actively participate with several other units and programs: we contribute to the Ph.D. program in Theory and Criticism, we teach joint undergraduate courses with Jewish Studies and Comparative History of Ideas, we are seeking, with the cooperation of Jewish Studies, to initiate a Summer Institute for Yiddish Language and Culture, and we participate in the graduate Textual Studies Program. Without increased faculty, expanding these already extensive commitments to interdisciplinary programs would force us to make compromises in our graduate program and our undergraduate majors. These latter remain the focal point of our departmental self-definition.

4. Continuation of our Involvement with the Business School for the Business German track.

We hope not only to continue this relationship, but deepen it. The expansion of the Business German track is one of the central aims articulated in our self-study. Over the course of the year we have begun cooperating with a private, non-profit agency in the Seattle area in order to secure internships abroad for our students in the Business German track.

5. Establishment of an RA-ship for advanced graduate students.

This recommendation is coherent with our pressing need for enhanced graduate student support, as articulated in our self-study, but in our opinion this solution is not ideal because it would offer too little too late. Our crucial need is for recruitment funds and fellowship awards, along with travel funds to bring prospective students to campus. Multi-year fellowships could possibly be structured so that students could elect to postpone a year of fellowship support until later in their studies; but the simple addition of a rotating RA-ship would not go very far in addressing our needs. The question of greater graduate student support from the Graduate School and other areas of the campus, including enhanced travel funds for students to go to conferences, dissertation-writing quarters, additional dissertation fellowships, etc., is still a fundamental issue that requires more discussion and attention.

6. Institution of a Translator Certification Program.

While we agree with the wisdom of implementing such a program, we also recognize that it is not possible to do so with the limited resources the Department currently has. Diversification has clearly not been a problem in our Department, but we do not want to water down our existing programs by falling into the trap of over-diversification. A translator certification program could best be launched on the basis of a multi-unit initiative, perhaps in conjunction with an applied linguistics program, something that has been discussed on campus for some time now. Germanics would happily participate in and contribute to such a program, assuming we received additional resources to staff the necessary courses.

7. Trailer Courses Attached to the European Studies Offerings.

Germanics is eager to launch such trailer courses, assuming that funding would come from the Center for West European Studies. The Department is unable to staff such courses through its allotment of TA quarters from the College of Arts and Sciences. Two problems have to be surmounted before such trailer courses can be viable. First, these courses are notorious for having low enrollments; that would have to be accepted as a condition of such classes. Second, while our graduate students clearly have the language skills to teach trailer courses, they do not always have the disciplinary expertise in history, political science, or other fields that such classes require.

The report also contains several detailed recommendations about additions or revisions to the current curriculum. These suggestions will be directed to the appropriate departmental curriculum committees next autumn quarter for discussion and appropriate action.

In addition to responding to the Committee's specific recommendations, we wish to address one of the persistent themes of their report: the issue of declining enrollments in German. We do not want to reiterate the arguments we made in our self-study in this regard, except to stress that the relative stability of enrollments over the past ten years among German majors, as well as in the German language program at UW, must be seen against the backdrop of declining enrollments in German nationwide. In that context, stability takes on a different meaning and affirms the strategies the Department has pursued in recent years to prevent dramatic slippage. Our current outreach programs with high schools throughout the State and our emerging plans for K-8 articulation represent fundamental strategies for securing the future of German studies at the University and in Washington State. We hope these efforts will receive support from the University administration. Beyond that, we would be happy to meet early next year with Fred Campbell, the Dean for Undergraduate Education, and/or representatives from his office to develop a plan for expanding the contributions of Germanics in the general undergraduate curriculum.

The Department is exceedingly grateful to the members of the Committee for the time and effort they have invested in their review. We especially appreciate the support they have shown for the Department, the praise they have given to our programs, and the recognition they have expressed for our discipline and its significance in the future. At the same time, we feel it is necessary to point out that some of the comments in the report are both indelicate and indiscreet. Paramount here is the remark, attributed specifically to the graduate coordinator, that our graduate students are "probably not the very best available." It should have been clear to the Committee that such a remark, cited in a report of this sort and taken wholly out of context, could not help but wound, especially when graduate students have access to the document in question. Moreover, when the person to whom the remark is attributed is clearly identified by administrative office, such an indiscretion has the potential of being truly inflammatory. This has indeed been the case for Germanics. It is ironic that an overwhelmingly positive report unwittingly elicited such dissatisfaction and strife within the Department. To avoid such problems in the future, perhaps such reports should be reviewed and edited by someone in the Graduate School before they are sent on to departments for dissemination and response.

With regard to this statement about our graduate students, the faculty of the Department would like to set the record straight. We firmly believe that our best graduate students are every bit as good as graduate students in any German department in the country. If we do not have as many students of this caliber as might be found in the departments with whom we compete, then that has to do with the limited number and comparative modesty of the financial support packages we can offer, not with the scholarly or intellectual quality of the program or of our students. The comparative data about graduate student support that is contained in our self-study makes the nature of the problem perfectly clear. We want to conclude our response by emphasizing the pride we as faculty have in the abilities, skills, dedication, and hard work of our graduate students.