



25 April 2017

To: David Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean
Graduate School

Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Graduate School

From: Andrew Nestingen, Chair
Scandinavian Studies

Re: Department of Scandinavian Studies Review Committee Report

Many thanks to the review committee of Professors Sabine Wilke, Gary Handwerk, Jason Lavery, and Tim Tangherlini for their work during the site visit and for their detailed, inspiring report relaying their findings and expert advice about the Department of Scandinavian Studies. The review sought to assess the quality of the department's research, teaching and service activities. It also sought to provide advice about means of improvement going forward. The main conclusion of the report is that since the last review the department has maintained a standard of excellence and growth, which provides a strong foundation for responding to emerging challenges. The committee recommends another review be conducted in 10 years. I am grateful for this finding. Equally important, I am thankful for the committee's identification of opportunities laid out in their report, and advice about how to address them.

Department faculty were gratified to note that strategic areas in which we have sought to build were recognized by the review committee for excellence. For instance, in the last two years, we have worked to vitalize the sense of shared intellectual purpose in the department, as a means of fostering research and enhancing teaching excellence. With more frequent conversation, we are trying to improve the exchange of ideas and heighten morale. The committee wrote that "cross-departmental collaboration" and a "vibrant academic community" were evident during the review (4). The department's research achievements have also made it a "beacon of Scandinavian studies in the English-speaking world" (4). We have also sought to increase the number of Student Credit Hours (SCH) taught by faculty since the previous ten-year review, striving to meet the goals set by the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). Faculty members each teach at least 750 SCH annually. The department has largely met that annual goal. "One of the most impressive departmental achievements has been raising its SCH total significantly, even as teaching FTE have declined and as other humanities departments have experienced declines" (4). Such research and teaching achievements are at the core of our mission, and it is good to confirm that we are performing well in these areas. There are a number of other areas in which the Scandinavian Studies Department is

performing well, but it is more important here to focus on areas of challenge and opportunity.

The committee identified several key challenges, which merit comment. First, since the last review, endowment support for the department has increased to \$8.1m, yet the endowments are spread across more than thirty accounts. The committee recommended consolidating “the various smaller endowments [to] utilize the proceeds in a much more targeted approach to, both to address pressing needs and to empower the Department in realizing its future vision” (4). I concur with the committee about this, and I have followed up on this point with our advancement officers. I have already begun discussing with them how to revise endowment agreements to make revenue available for more strategic uses along the lines suggested. At the same time, the review process has taught me how endowment revenues can be used to support certain needs, which also correlate with strategic departmental goals. For instance, endowment revenue can be used to add on to graduate support, and thus be used as a recruitment and retention tool. Further, we have already begun an effort to secure a new endowment supporting a graduate fellowship. The potential donor has previously given generously and also expressed support for this gift. There is a possibility that we can establish the fellowship.

A second salient issue was the department’s vision for the next ten years, and how it will guide strategic change. We know we want to be a vibrant intellectual community that researches and teaches about the Nordic and Baltic nations in a global context. Our discussions in preparation for the review, including a retreat in spring 2016, provided lots of input in fine-tuning this vision. We have identified key areas in which we need to implement strategic changes. In working to implement such changes, further articulating our vision will be a central part of our task. The two most important strategic changes are curriculum revisions in our undergraduate and graduate programs. We aim to rearticulate our intellectual vision and identity through the process of curriculum revision. What do we teach? Why do we teach it? What should students know when they earn a B.A.? What should they be able to research or teach, when they earn a Ph.D.? The answers to these questions are being undertaken by an ad hoc committee, whose report will guide the department in a retreat scheduled for 21 September, where we will work intensively on the revisions. Further, the revision will be the basis for outreach and recruitment of undergraduate majors, transfer students, as well as graduate students.

As a small and cohesive unit, we have built a tradition of excellence. We need to learn from what we have done well, and build on our tradition of excellence, where that is possible. Yet at the same time, there are barriers to positive change. The greatest of them, I learned through the Academic Review process, is the inertia of tradition. We have done things in certain ways for years. Even when one can think of better practices or alternative ways of doing things, creating the unity to overcome tradition, habit, and established expectation requires conviction, determination, and persistence. But with a

strong foundation of positive morale, and a belief that though small our department is producing citizens, leaders, and a new generation of Scandinavian and Baltic experts, we are eager to embrace the findings of the report, and use them to our advantage during the next years.

We can do these things, and do them well, but we also need the support of CAS and the UW. Because we are small, we are often affected disproportionately by changes, which larger units can more easily weather because of their critical mass. For example, the loss of one FTE through retirement in Old Norse in 2008 knocked out our entire medieval program. Likewise, we were able to search successfully in winter 2017, and hire our top candidate, thus ensuring the continuity of our Swedish program. With only 7 tenure-track FTEs, the loss or gain of just one FTE can strengthen or devastate the department's ability to fulfill its mission. Looking forward, we face the likely retirement of a full professor and a senior lecturer. We will continue to need help and understanding from the college and university, and the opportunity to search to fill these positions. We hope for a continuing commitment to department to sustain the excellence the committee's report makes clear is definitive of the UW Department of Scandinavian Studies.