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RE: Department of Scandinavian Studies Review Committee Report

The committee charged by the Graduate School with conducting a review of the Scandinavian Studies Department has now completed its site visit (April 23 and 24, 2006) and deliberated on its findings. Enclosed is our report. All members of the committee have read this report and in agreement about the conclusions. The external reviewers may send you additional letters as well. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail at [naosok@u.washington.edu](mailto:naosok@u.washington.edu) or by phone at (206)-543-7145.

## DEPARTMENT OF SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

### Summary of the Process

The Review Committee consisted of Professors Naomi Sokoloff (Chair), Albert Sbragia, and James West of the University of Washington, along with Michael F. Metcalf, Professor and Executive Director of the Croft Institute for International Studies at the University of Mississippi, and Rose-Marie Oster, Professor of Germanic Studies at the University of Maryland.

We met Sunday evening April 23 to review the agenda for the next few days and to consider strategies for the collection of information. On Monday and Tuesday, April 24 and 25, the committee conducted interviews with departmental and university personnel. We spoke first with the Chair, Professor Terje Leiren, then with the Administrator, Katherine McDermott, and subsequently with Dean David Hodge and Divisional Dean Ellen Kaisse. We held separate sessions with each of the following faculty members: Professor Lotta Gavel Adams, Associate Professor Patricia Conroy, Associate Professor and Graduate Program Coordinator Marianne Stecher-Hansen; Associate Professor Jan Sjavik; Assistant Professor Andrew Nestingen; Senior Lecturer Klaus Brandl; Senior Lecturer Ia Dubois; Senior Lecturer Guntis Smidchens; and Affiliate Assistant Professor Katherine Hanson. In a group session we spoke with Visiting Lecturers Iveta Grinberga, Karolina Kuisma, and Jan Nielsen. Over lunch we met with a dozen undergraduate majors; at another group session we heard from graduate students. In addition, we spoke individually with Librarian Emeritus A. Gerald Anderson, who served for many years as a Scandinavian specialist in the UW library system, and we spoke with two members of the Advisory Board: David Endicott and Irena Blekys. Associate Professor Christine Ingebritsen was out of town during the interview process. Accordingly, we arranged for a telephone interview with her at a later date. We also took into consideration one e-mail message received from a graduate student unable to attend an interview in person. As part of our site visit the Review Committee also took a tour of the Department's facilities on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Raitt Hall as well as TA offices in the basement of that building. The Review Committee had several occasions to meet in executive session, both Monday evening over dinner and mid-day Tuesday. Before the Tuesday session we spoke again with Terje Leiren to follow up on matters that arose over the course of the interviews and the site visit. Tuesday concluded with an exit interview that included representatives of the Graduate School, as well as Deans Hodge and Kaisse.

The Review Committee met with cooperation at every stage of this process. We were aided by an excellent departmental report compiled by Professor Leiren, as well as several addenda he provided upon our request (including a list of courses taught from 2000-2006, and a statement of department's governance structures).

## Findings

### 1. History relevant to present status

The Department has made great strides since the last review in 1994-95. The report from that time concluded that “The Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature” finds itself in a difficult and challenging period of its history.” A number of impressive advances have come about in the past decade under the leadership of Terje Leiren, who was warmly praised by all those we interviewed. Here are some of the significant accomplishments we observed:

- a. Reflecting its commitment to and investment in the development of cross-disciplinary area studies, the Department has changed its name to Scandinavian Studies.
- b. Scandinavian has had significant success with tenure and promotion cases. At the time of the 1995 report there were no full professors on the faculty, and that state of affairs necessitated the establishment of a Standing Committee to oversee the Department. Since then three Associate Professors have been promoted to Full Professor and the Standing Committee is no longer operative. Two Assistant Professors have been promoted to Associate Professor with tenure, and one more is coming up for consideration in Autumn 2006. In addition, a Lecturer position has been converted to a tenure-track Assistant Professor line and successfully filled.
- c. Supplementing the faculty and filling out the curriculum, several new visiting lecturer positions further add to the strength of the Department.
- d. The addition of Baltic Studies has been a shrewd move with positive results. Initially this program was supported by state funds, but now more and more of the funding involved comes from private sources and from the UW’s federally funded TITLE VI center, REECAS.
- e. The addition of a Finnish major has beneficially shaped curriculum development.
- f. The number of majors has increased since 1995, from approximately 50 to approximately 80.
- g. New overseas study options, including Discovery Seminars, have enriched the departmental curriculum. Generous funding for study abroad presents UW students with invaluable opportunities for overseas work.
- h. The Scandinavian Department has greatly strengthened community relations and carried out splendid development work, including partnerships with governments in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. The UW Libraries have been beneficiaries of the development activity, receiving very sizable donations (on the

order of \$250,000). The biggest collection of Latvian books outside of Latvia is now housed at UW.

- i. The Department has established a new publication series with UW Press; this endeavor has excellent potential, and one volume has already appeared.
- j. The Department has addressed the concerns raised in 1995 regarding TA preparation and training. Scandinavian is now a model for instruction in the field of foreign language pedagogy.
- k. The recent hire of a new administrator is helping the Department meet the demands of its expanded programs and community outreach. The Department has also gained some tech support, shared with other humanities departments.

All of these steps forward have helped Scandinavian stay on the cutting edge in its field. Accordingly, the Department has maintained its national and international reputation as one of the premier programs in the U.S.

## 2. Strengths

The program continues to enjoy high prestige, stemming from top-notch research, excellence in teaching, and community engagement. Some specifics:

- a. The Department is notable for its unique configuration of programs: it offers a diversity of languages and literatures, combining these with a cross-disciplinary area studies approach that draws together students with interests in humanities, political science, geography, forestry, and more. Adding to the unusual breadth of the curriculum is the Baltic Studies component, which anticipated and coincides with U.S. Government rethinking (specifically, in the Department of State) about the importance of treating Baltic countries in the same context as the Scandinavian countries.
- b. Graduate student productivity is nationally recognized. Placement of new PhDs has been very successful; in addition, many MA and PhD students present their work at national meetings such as the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies.
- c. Indicative of the Department's high profile is recognition by Scandinavian institutions and governments. The faculty has earned a number of special awards and honors.
- d. In recent years the mentoring of graduate students and faculty has resulted not just in the promotions mentioned above, but also in an atmosphere of cooperativeness and mutual respect. There was a strong consensus among those interviewed by the

Review Committee that, with Terje Leiren at the helm, remarkable collegiality and cordiality have flourished in recent years.

- e. The Department takes exceptional care with language instruction. The pedagogy specialist, Klaus Brandl, is responsible not just for training departmental TAs (serving as TA Coordinator), but also for offering courses to many of the humanities language TAs on campus. Students have been pleased with their training in this area; innovative use of technology in pedagogy is one of the Department's fortes.
- f. Partnerships with the community beyond campus have resulted in spectacular fund-raising successes and with a variety of other benefits, such as the establishment of internships for undergraduate and graduate students and employment for alumni.
- g. Altogether, the Department accomplishes a great deal, despite its small size and the multiple languages, literatures, and cultures that it represents. In many ways Scandinavian is over-performing – that is, the faculty is devoted to their teaching and other academic duties above and beyond the call of duty.

### 3. Challenges

- a. The Department relies on a carefully achieved equilibrium. While that is working quite well at present, the departure of any one faculty member could upset this delicate balance. Indications are that things will be stable in the coming few years, but when change does occur -- whether through retirement, faculty decisions to pursue new career directions, or other reasons -- it will be crucial to restore personnel and maintain positions that are vacated.
- b. The Department struggles with inadequate space for faculty and TA offices. Space is the one issue that all of those interviewed consistently identified as needing urgent attention. The main problem is that a number of inside offices have less than appropriate ventilation and no windows. Furthermore, a number of visiting lecturers share a single windowless office, and TAs have been concentrated in three cramped rooms (two of them windowless) in the basement of Raitt.
- c. As noted in the departmental self-study, the lack of sufficient graduate fellowships presents an obstacle to recruitment. UW routinely loses some of its top applicants in Scandinavian Studies to UC Berkeley and to the University of Wisconsin, because those institutions are able to provide more funding to incoming students.
- d. Enrollments in the less-commonly-taught languages are not high. While this is true nation-wide, and while outstanding enrollments in large lecture courses

counterbalance this under-enrollment in the UW Scandinavian Studies Department, it would still be beneficial to raise the number of students in elementary language classes. The Department makes efforts to reach prospective students (for instance, through a majors fair in the HUB and through World Languages Day), but new recruitment strategies for language courses could make a significant, positive difference.

- e. The staffing of large lecture courses has reached crisis proportions, here as in other Humanities departments at UW. Because of a lack of sufficient TAships, faculty members have taken on tremendous instructional burdens (such as teaching a course with over 250 students, aided only by one TA). They have done so fairly cheerfully, but the situation nonetheless merits rectification.
- f. The Department is already diverse in that its curriculum covers multiple cultures. A number of courses also already address issues of multiculturalism in Scandinavia and the Baltics, a region whose population is undergoing significant demographic shifts (as is true elsewhere in Europe). The Review Committee believes that this is an aspect of Northern European life that UW students know too little about, and so additional, concerted effort to bring knowledge of these matters to our student body could help broaden the audience for the Department's courses far beyond heritage students. Higher visibility for courses, research, and conferences that deal with the region's ethnic minorities might attract more diverse students.

#### 4. Recommendations

The Review Committee has identified several specific actions that could strengthen what is already a very good, hard-working, and enterprising department:

- a. We urge the administration to look into ways to ease the space constraints. At a minimum, open up the hallway windows above the transoms for the inside offices on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Raitt so as to improve circulation. If possible, relocate the TAs to more hospitable offices and retain the best basement room (the one with a window) to relieve the congestion for Lecturers and/or Visiting Lecturers.
- b. In order to raise enrollments in elementary language classes, find a way to redirect students from more-commonly-taught to less-commonly-taught languages. Every year many students are turned away from certain languages (some 200-300 a year are denied entry to Italian, and many more are denied entry to Spanish). If those students can be notified that LCTLs are available, that would be of benefit both to them and to departments such as Scandinavian that have openings. The College could perhaps be of real assistance in this matter by reworking the registration process -- for instance, by introducing on-line modifications that would alert students to alternative classes if they are denied entry to a language in high demand.

- c. We urge the Department to consider requiring a third year level language course (that is, one of the advanced text classes) for students majoring in area studies. The Review Committee believes that this requirement would impart important skills to students while also reinforcing *esprit de corps* (for example, by bringing together students who have been away, studying abroad, and students who have remained here on campus). Additional enrollment would also create a critical mass, which is a key factor in sustaining the highest quality discussions and most productive class dynamics. This curricular change would be good for students, good for the faculty, and good for the overall intellectual enterprise of the Department.
- d. Find ways to engage Central Development more in fundraising. For example, the Department has ambitious plans to go national in its efforts. Central Development staff could help in making contacts with individuals at far distances.
- e. Identify potential affiliate faculty overseas, especially in the Baltic countries, to serve on MA and PhD committees. In a small department that covers a lot of territory, this step would help guarantee ample faculty expertise for a variety of areas of graduate study.
- f. The need for more TAs in the large lecture courses is pressing. Ideally, support would come from the college. In addition, the Department might reconsider the deployment of current TAs and Visiting Lecturers, so as to free up TAs now and then from language courses and assign them to serve instead in large enrollment lecture classes. For instance, Visiting Lecturers who teach low-enrollment classes might occasionally be asked to teach a higher number of classes. Another possible scenario could draw on a “Language Across the Curriculum” model: during one quarter of the academic year, a TA might teach a trailer class (a one-hour section using the target foreign language) in conjunction with a film course taught in English by a faculty member. This arrangement could also leave time for the same TA or another TA to assist with a language course on a part-time basis (that is, both courses could demand a 25% TA appointment). It is our impression that the Department is open to suggestions in this regard. One of the strengths of the Scandinavian faculty is their ability to rethink and take innovative approaches. The suggested re-organization of TAs might work out well for them. We also suggest that the department approach the Center for West European Studies for additional TAs and instructional funding, in particular for trailer classes.

## Conclusions

Scandinavian Studies at UW is thriving. The Department has overcome a number of adversities since the last 10-year report. This is a small department that covers many bases, with a devoted faculty and appreciative, enthusiastic students. It has moved from

marginality to strength in pioneering an area studies approach within the Humanities division of UW.

We encourage the University to help Scandinavian continue to build strength -- for example, by helping to raise funds for an endowed chair. Ideally, should more resources become available to the Department from the University, high priority would be to appoint additional tenure-track faculty members in Swedish or in Norwegian.

Above all, it is important to keep nurturing the outstanding community relationships and the partnerships with foreign governments that Scandinavian Studies has developed. The supporters who have built up endowments and other kinds of contributions have made strong commitments to the department, which implies that UW should be committed to them and to continuation of the positive interactions that have been established till now. The Advisory Board and other friends of the department have invested heavily – both in financial terms and in terms of time, effort and moral support. Therefore it is our strong recommendation that UW should also keep supporting the Department; it is important not to shift the burden of support onto private sources, but to build on the strong foundations that have been laid through joint university-community endeavors.

cc. Michael Metcalf  
Rose-Marie Oster