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IV-D. Initial Report of Graduate Student Representative to Internal Review Committee

Dear Hal,

Below you will see my report on the Slavic Review. Sorry to get it to you after so long. It has been an extremely busy quarter for me and I wasn't aware that drafts of your report were circulating until I received my Graduate Council agenda packet yesterday. While you have obviously already written your report, I thought it would be useful to have mine for your records.

With regards to your report, I strongly agree with your conclusions. I have a few comments, however, that I wanted to offer. I'm not sure as to how the receivership would work if approved. Some consideration should be given, however, as to how to protect students when they are most subject to faculty power abuses: namely in exams, letters of recommendation, job placement assistance etc. Secondly, there needs to be some clearer means of facilitating redress for students who have *already* been the victims of faculty abuse. This would involve the referral of complaints to appropriate Senate disciplinary bodies for further investigation and possible action. It also involves consideration as to what, if anything, can be done to "make whole" those who have been abused. I understand that these are difficult issues and that they may well fall outside of the purview of the review's mandate. But they are issues that the review report could suggest that the "receiver" take on as a means of bringing healing to the department and building student confidence in the new regime. I realize that shutting down admissions and placing the department in receivership are very significant actions. In order for it to work from the perspective of the students, however, there needs to be a strong sense that the changes are not cosmetic and that departmental faculty can really be held accountable for promoting student welfare and actively helping students to progress. Accountability involves both redress of past wrongs and strong safeguards at the points where students are most vulnerable.

Unfortunately, I cannot make tomorrow's meeting as I'll be out of town. Thus, I won't be able to make any of these points in person. But I hope you will consider them as you revise your draft and/or devise a mandate for the "receiver." I will also see if Luisa can distribute copies of this memo so that the issues mentioned above might be considered during the Council's discussion.

I hope that you find this helpful.

Best,
Mark

To:
Harold Martinson
Chair, Slavic Languages and Literatures Review Team

Dear Hal,

From the information I have seen, the graduate program in the Slavic Languages and Literatures Department has significant problems. The comments on the student questionnaires are quite alarming with their accounts of physical and verbal abuse of students by faculty members. From the questionnaires and the accounts of the two students who provided me with extensive written comments, there are huge problems with student morale. The reasons for the morale problem are many. The main reasons appear to be the aforementioned faculty abuse, tolerance of the abuse by other departmental faculty, the lack of a clear and consistent articulation of expectations especially with regard to exams, grossly inadequate coordination between course and exam requirements, hostility toward contemporary theoretical approaches resulting in an almost complete “blackout” of such approaches in courses, exams, etc., the separation of linguistics faculty into rival camps that are extremely hostile to each other and to students working with members of the rival camp, and funding that is inadequate and awarded through a process that is far from transparent. Taken together, these problems present a very disturbing portrait of the department. It is important to consider the cumulative effect of these conditions as they create an atmosphere of disempowerment for graduate students where it is difficult for them to expect that they have any effective recourse if they feel that they are being treated unfairly.

Indeed, it is not difficult to understand that students in such a situation might simply adopt a survival approach of saying nothing and just weathering things as best they can. I mention this because both the written and oral student comments showed an extremely high level of anxiety about the possibility of attribution and faculty retaliation. Exacerbating this anxiety was the information students had gotten from Murphy Hall that the confidentiality of their comments could not be guaranteed. A number of students also expressed concern about whether comments made to the review team might also get back to Slavic faculty. A student suggested to me that many students would not talk to me and purposely avoided the review visit out of fear that departmental faculty might attribute any negative comments about the department to them. The student offered this suggestion as a reason for why I might not hear a lot of information

directly from other students that would echo the comments that student had made. I certainly did not immediately or unthinkingly accept that argument. I obviously realized the problems with automatically interpreting others' silence as tacit agreement. After hearing the same observation from another student, reviewing the survey comments and discussing the issue extensively with the student who originally made the comment, however, I find it very plausible that many other students than approached me directly share the concerns articulated above. Without question, the survey comments echo the concerns about faculty abuse of students that lay at the heart of the more extensive individual critiques I heard.

Having said that, I must note that the students at the large group meeting did not mention any major problems except for funding and the lack of clear guidelines for exams. A number of students said that their concerns were represented in a document that they had circulated to the review committee. Not having received a copy, however, I cannot comment on the document or whether it corroborates or challenges the views mentioned above. In addition, a number of students said that they wanted to reserve their comments for individual meetings they were having with the review committee. Again, I have no idea what the students said in these individual meetings and what light they shed on the issues mentioned above. The number of students requesting individual meetings and their reluctance to speak in front of the whole group seemed atypical of the reviews for which I have served as the student representative.

Although I have listed the main problems above, I would like to offer a few particularly striking examples to illustrate my concerns. It is important, however, to view these as symptoms of the larger underlying problems of a lack of respect for students and a lack of a mechanism for holding faculty accountable; the examples themselves are not the problems and cannot be simply solved by recommending that the faculty no longer abuse students. Some of the most notorious examples include a faculty member requiring a student *on a class handout* to do five times as many presentations as any of the other students in a class and on at least two occasions throwing chairs at students. In terms of exams, students reported facing grossly disparate exams and hearing that some faculty feel capable of determining whether or not they are going to pass or fail a student before she/he has even taken the exam. One student reported being asked questions in an exam that no one in the field had yet been able to solve. In terms of fostering professional development, students reported that they were actually *discouraged* by faculty from publishing or giving conference papers. Students also report that they are strongly discouraged from intellectually engaging with developments in related disciplines. This seems particularly problematic for linguistics students. According to the students I heard from, they are prevented from taking even basic linguistics classes as well as being discouraged from familiarizing themselves with the latest theoretical debates in the field. The result is that many students' initial progress is slowed considerably and that most students are not even sufficiently conversant with contemporary linguistics theory to articulate a position on it. Commenting on the former point, one student described the situation as "trying to do quantum mechanics without ever having

studied calculus.” The opacity of funding procedures is certainly a problem and one not unique to Slavic. Even more troubling however were the reports I heard of a pregnant student being defunded because it was expected that she would take a leave of absence and another female student being told that her funding was not a priority because she was married and it was assumed that her husband could adequately support her. Reflecting the other side of this sexist coin, I was told that a male student about to have a child was informed that his funding would be increased so as to help him meet his new financial obligations.

While a certain amount of attrition is inevitable in every graduate program, I heard from students that attrition in Slavic seemed to them to be particularly high. I have neither the time nor the resources to investigate this thoroughly and see how Slavic’s attrition rate compares to the rest of the university and to other Humanities departments. That needs to be examined. I strongly recommend an analysis of Slavic’s attrition rate and placement rate in comparison to the rest of UCLA, to other Humanities departments and the Slavic departments at other universities. Also, as students reported seeing their colleagues leaving the department because of faculty harassment, I recommend an analysis of exit interviews of students who have left Slavic before completing their doctorate. Even more important, however, is the issue of interviewing these former students now. While this is unorthodox and is obviously not going to yield a particularly happy assessment of the department, it has to be looked into. If students are feeling hounded out of the department, the review team needs to know that and address it.

I am under no illusion that my information gathering has been as exhaustive or comprehensive as is necessary to justify the radical reform of the department that my preliminary information suggests is necessary. I am confident, however, that the information gleaned from students is more than sufficient to justify a much more far-reaching investigation of the department than is typical of most 8-year reviews. This would include an audit of the handling of graduate student support funds. Clearly, there are deeply engrained problems in the Slavic department that cannot be solved simply through the recommendations typical of 8-year reviews. In addition to significant curricular reform regarding exam preparation, the department needs ongoing oversight over the faculty and strong student protections. The current Slavic faculty has shown itself to be incapable of providing even the most basic elements of a supportive and collegial environment and of disciplining faculty members who abuse students. The review team should thus consider referring student complaints to appropriate Senate disciplinary committees for further investigation.

Given this situation, it is not an overstatement to suggest that the credibility of the Academic Senate and the UCLA administrative structure is at stake with this review. If the Senate and the administration are serious about protecting and advancing student welfare and maintaining the intellectual credibility of the program, neither can allow the situation to continue as it is. While

concerns about collegiality and faculty members' academic freedom certainly need to be considered in this process, the welfare and academic freedom of the graduate students in the program are obviously no less important. Indeed, one might say that the Senate has an even greater duty to protect the welfare and academic freedom of the students because students are in a particularly vulnerable position and the Senate review process claims the moral and intellectual authority of an unbiased and thorough evaluation of academic programs. This situation may raise some thorny questions about accountability in the university. If the only way to hold faculty members accountable in such circumstances is to have students file formal charges, the university and the Senate are not adequately discharging their responsibility to the students. In addition, the university and the Senate are missing an opportunity to resolve problems more expeditiously and perhaps with less legal liability.

As I understand the review process, it is designed to unearth problems and provide constructive criticism to departments and programs. It also serves as a means of providing outside perspective and assistance for any whom might feel the internal power structure of a department or program prevents them from getting fair treatment. As such, the review process serves a crucial role in maintaining the credibility of programs and the university as a whole. This review of Slavic Languages and Literatures clearly reveals significant problems. Further investigation is needed to determine the full extent of the problems and the appropriate solutions. In this regard, the situation in this department may not be entirely amenable to the normal review process. If more resources, time, and different procedures need to be drawn upon to fully appreciate the situation and the possible methods of resolution, however, the Senate must work vigorously to ensure that happens. Such investigation and ameliorative action needs to occur as quickly as possible.

Please do not hesitate to call upon me if I can be of any further assistance in this matter.

Respectfully yours,

Mark Quigley
Graduate Student Representative

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