

Report of the Academic Review Panel
on the
Department of German and Russian
Memorial University of Newfoundland

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Introduction

This review report of the Department of German and Russian, as part of the much more extensive academic program review process, is a collective effort and is based on the assessment of the review committee. It is designed to provide the Department with a summary of their current state of affairs, a statement of their present place within the university, the discipline and the larger community and to propose a template for their future academic planning in terms of the objectives of Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The review committee met first with Dr. Eddy Campbell, Vice President (Academic), Dr. David Graham, Dean of Arts and Dr. Chet Jablonski, Dean of Graduate Studies on the evening of February 9th. There we were informed, in general terms, of some of the challenges facing the Department of German and Russian. Specifically, we were told of the increasing disparity between junior and senior enrollments, the possibility of the Faculty of Arts language requirement being changed and its potential impact on language departments and the diminishing of the graduate program.

On February 11th and 12th, the review committee gathered on-site information. This included interviews with all faculty members in both German and Russian. Only Dr. John Buffinga was unavailable but he was later interviewed on March 1st. Additional interviews were conducted with their teaching assistant, their PAD and their contractual. We also interviewed two graduate students, a substantial group of undergraduate students and the administrative assistant for the department. As part of the on-site review, space, technology and research resources were also investigated. Dr. Richard Ilgner provided a brief tour of the departmental space. Dr. Karin Thomeier gave us an informative tour of the Audio and Multi-media Language labs and gave us a summary of the changes expected in the near future. Finally, we toured the QEII Library, focusing on the reference and periodical materials in German and Russian.

From the self-study and interviews, departmental strengths were obvious. The faculty of the Department of German and Russian appears to be very devoted to their discipline and to their students. Until this year they have taught six sections per year. With the regularization of the teaching load in the Faculty of Arts to five per year, faculty in the Department are having some difficulty fulfilling both the requirements of their major and minor programs as well as meeting the demands of the Arts faculty language requirement. This requirement is both a blessing and burden. It is a blessing in that it increases the departmental enrollment figures and may serve as a means of attracting students to the discipline. It is a burden in that it deploys faculty who might otherwise be teaching in the upper level courses and, thus, lengthens the cycle of course rotation. The Department should consider hiring per-course instructors to teach sections of these first-year courses so that regular faculty could teach the more specialized, senior courses.

The Department is justifiably proud of their very successful study abroad programs. Both the Heidelberg and the St Petersburg programs are well attended and were enthusiastically praised by the students in our interviews.

The members of the review committee were most impressed with the enthusiasm, and forthright nature of the undergraduate students who spoke with us. Their concern with their program bespoke not only their deep interest and enthusiasm but their comfort and security, knowing that their best interest was of primary concern with the faculty.

However, in the interviews, it shortly became obvious that there are serious problems within the Department, particularly the German section. Faculty members not only do not interact with each other – they actively avoid situations such as department meetings where interaction is necessary. There are underlying personal antagonisms which some of which appear to hinder if not stop completely, the flow of information within the section. These divisions have certainly affected the graduate students and must as well have filtered down to the undergraduate students. The review committee was deeply concerned with these longstanding, deep-seated, possibly irreparable personality conflicts and divisions. These differences must be settled, if the department and the program are to survive. Two possible means of addressing these would be to provide a facilitator to aid in this process. The Dean of Arts has indicated that he would be willing to do this. Another means by which the situation might be ameliorated would be through a new strong, neutral leadership. The review panel believes that the Department should seek permission to conduct an external search in order to hire, as head, an individual with strong leadership and interpersonal skills who has research interests that bridge both segments of the Department and who is an established scholar with some administrative experience. The search for this individual should be undertaken in September, 2005, with the appointment effective July, 2006, coinciding with the retirement of the current head.

Recommendation 1: The Department should search for and appoint an external, neutral head, with research interests in a bridging specialization and a solid record of research and administrative skills.

Recommendation 2: With the permission of the Dean of Arts, the Department should contract a facilitator to help to provide the means by which the Department of German and Russian can begin to heal and to reach a consensus regarding common goals.

Recommendation 3: The Department should consider hiring per-course instructors to teach sections of these first-year courses so that regular faculty could teach the more specialized, senior courses.

The Department of German and Russian offers high-quality general education courses in German and Russian Languages, Literatures and Cultures and should strive to provide multi-faceted liberal arts programs to its majors and minors. The Department's mission should be to expose students to two languages that are amongst the most influential in the world and represent cultures that have pivotal influence on the world's past and present. Both programs should aim to provide an international cultural education and serve the

objective to meet the expanding needs of the province. Towards this goal, the Department should continue to maintain an active Summer Study Abroad Programs to provide enhanced language instruction and cultural immersion in Germany and Russia.

The Department should strive towards dynamic and collaborative relationships between its two constituent groups, German and Russian, and to enhance quality and achieve efficiency by offering courses common to both programs. The cultural history of Germany and Russia in the European context and their renewed cooperation in the modern world offer many opportunities for the creation of cross-program courses. Such opportunities will be realized in the process of future faculty renewal that will emphasize strong interest in German and Russian to foster synergies that will benefit both programs and will energize scholarly activities.

Within this university, this department is not alone in its small size. Therefore, it does face some of the same difficulties with respect to covering undergraduate and graduate program requirements adequately. However, the committee believes that, despite some restructuring of the undergraduate program in the recent past, the German section of the department in particular, is lacking a clear idea of what aspects of German culture and language they wish to highlight and, therefore lack a sense of direction. Along with other divisions discussed above, this has resulted in a number of administrative decisions relating to workload, courses which have not always been consistent and equitable. To address this, all members of the German faculty need to convene for discussions which will result in a long-term strategic plan which will include what departmental strengths they wish to emphasize, continue and build upon. This would then make decisions on any present and future hires easier as goals would have already been decided. Likewise, other administrative decisions would be guided by the strategic plan. The committee is confident that research potential and external funding would also improve in an environment where shared departmental goals exist.

Recommendation 4: The Department should discuss and decide upon a departmental strategic plan.

Undergraduate Programs in German and Russian

As noted above, the Department has some obvious and justifiable strengths in their undergraduate programs. However, in the German section, the review committee noticed an imbalance between student enrollments in lower- and upper-year courses. Naturally, language departments attract larger numbers of students in first and second year. MUN follows the accepted trend of many language departments across the country in offering as many sections of introductory courses as possible. Of the 706 German enrolments reported for 2004-2005, 443 were in first year, 147 in second, and a total of 140 in all upper-level courses. In other words, there were 590 enrollments in first- and second year compared to 140 in third- and fourth. On the Russian side, the numbers are more balanced: 112 in first, 52 in second for a total of 164 in lower-level courses, and 125 in third and fourth year (plus the cross-listed 3005 with 31 students).

The review committee was told that MUN is presently reviewing its language requirement. If a decision were made to abandon this requirement, the consequence for the German section would quite likely be drastic. But not only in light of such possible threats, the course offerings for students, and in particular for program students enrolled as Minors or Majors, should be reconsidered. Some questions that the Department might want to discuss: how many of the lower-level students continue? What is the value of deploying most of its resources to first-year instruction and how does this compare to resource deployment in other, comparable disciplines?

High enrollment courses are necessary for the continuing success of the Department and its total number of students. Within that context, the committee suggests that the Department might want to consider and discuss deploying teaching resources (faculty and other) to offer high-enrollment courses at the upper-levels. Present numbers seem to indicate that only a very small number of lower-level students decide to become program students (there are a total of only 9 student enrollments on fourth-year level). Attractive upper-level courses could make up for the 'lost' lower-level enrollments and make the program more attractive and increase the number of program students.

The review committee was told by a number of students that they would appreciate a more challenging course content in lower-level language courses. If the Department wishes to strengthen its number of program students, a more rigorous preparation for upper-level language and other studies will be required. At the same time, the Department should also consider broader offerings in first and second year without exclusively focusing on language, i.e. grammar courses. Introductions to culture studies in the first year, for example, might attract a large number of students and would give the grammar students a broader introduction to the field. If the requirements in the grammar courses will be increased, an introductory conversation course might also be appropriate.

Receiving a degree in German or Russian should always include a certain number of course hours beyond language/grammar studies. Attractive literature, film, and culture courses would not only broaden the intellectual horizon of German and Russian students

but would quite likely also attract students from other disciplines. The rich cultures of Germany and Russia lend themselves to a wide array of such courses and they could be cross-listed with various other disciplines. At the moment, a Major student in German is only required to take first and second year language courses, no others are specified in the Calendar (p. 178). The only upper-level required course for a Russian major is RUSS 3010.

The committee noticed an established expertise in translation and translation studies in the Department. A course on the theory and methods of translations might be attractive and might interest other language departments.

The review committee was very impressed by the exchange programs offered by both sections of the Department. All students we spoke to said that they see these exchanges as an integral part of their studies and the ones who already went on one (or more than one) were very positive about the outcome. Many students felt prepared for these exchanges but there is an opportunity to increase students' cultural awareness before going abroad. Closer ties with the Language Lab might help here. In particular, the committee would propose that the wide expertise of the Director of the Language Lab should be utilized, both as a consultant and as an instructor.

The Department presently offers the degrees of Language and Literature Major, Language and Literature Minor, and German and Russian Studies Minor. With the limited teaching resources available in both sections, and in particular in Russian, it might be advisable to reconsider the degrees offered and consolidate and streamline the program to offer a Minor and Major in German and Russian respectively. By abandoning the (artificial) distinction between literature and culture, and by offering appropriate courses, the program could be strengthened and a broader pool of students could be attracted. At the same time, to further expand the ties between the two units, the requirements for degrees in both sections should be scrutinized and consolidated.

In light of the present small faculty numbers and possible changes in how the language requirement will be addressed, the committee recommends:

Recommendation 5: The Department should review the degree programs and their requirements. This should include:

- a. **Developing first-year culture courses which might attract significant enrollment.**
- b. **Assuring a balance between grammar and credit conversation courses starting early in the program.**
- c. **Increasing the comprehensive nature and intellectual rigor of lower-level courses.**
- d. **Integrating literature, film, and culture studies into the program by requiring students to take such courses.**
- e. **Offering translation studies courses.**
- f. **Establishing a requirement for a minimum number of courses at the 3000 and 4000 level.**

- g. Strengthening the program by expanding online presence and establish closer links with the Language Lab.**
- h. Maintaining and expanding the practice of cross-listing courses with other departments.**

Graduate Program in German

The review committee has deep concerns about the graduate program in German. Although the Self-Study reports a growing program, conclusions from our interviews as well as a review of the departmental regulations for the M.A. in the University calendar present a less positive view. There are no first year students presently in the program and of the four students currently registered for the M.A., only two are in residence in St. John's. This does not suggest a growing, vibrant program. Comments from interviews suggested that the lack of strong research interests among the faculty presents an intellectual environment not necessarily attractive to prospective graduate applicants. Their strongest undergraduate majors are often recommended to apply to other universities.

The program itself has some distinct weak areas. Most notably, there does not appear to be a serious concerted design to the graduate program supported by all members of the department. There needs to be focus and communication among faculty to revitalize this program. The calendar regulations for an M.A. in German state only that a student must complete five courses plus a thesis. There are no required courses and there is not even a theory course expected. This points to a lack of focus, structure, and/or direction for the program itself. Although it was noted in the Self-Study that the loss of one faculty member in the unit has contributed to a reduction in graduate courses offered, it is the opinion of the committee that there must be some expectations and structure to a graduate program to make it successful. Once the structure is in place it is often easier for the faculty to arrange for the program requirements to be available. With such laissez-faire requirements as is presented for German, it is then up to individual faculty members whether they will or won't offer individual courses. In such circumstances a program can begin to disintegrate.

A second problem viewed by the committee is that many of the graduate courses have been "piggy-backed" on undergraduate courses. While this is a practice followed in many departments within the university, there are two things in German which raised some alarms to the committee: 1) although this practice is used in a limited way in most academic units, in German, for some graduate students, their courses have consisted largely and, in some cases, almost exclusively of such piggy-backed work. The amount of "extra work" required of graduate students to bring the content up to graduate level

appeared limited. 2) Furthermore, while “piggy-backing” is generally limited to 4th year undergraduate courses, in German it appears that this practice included 3rd and even some 2nd year courses. This is not indicative of a well-thought-out program and is not fair to the graduate students wishing to raise their level of knowledge or expertise. Although limited faculty complement may again be raised as a reason for this, it argues more for a lack of structure to the program itself.

A smaller but still significant concern is that the Department has not been availing itself of all the financial support which is available for their graduate students. Although one student is presently hired and paid on a per course basis for the teaching of introductory course sections, there is also funding available through the Dean of Arts Office for Graduate Assistantships. Any funding which can be added to fellowship baseline funding can be helpful in attracting and maintaining students within the program.

This committee therefore makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 6: In conjunction with and until the recommendations concerning the goals of the Department and the undergraduate program are concluded, the committee recommends that the graduate program be put on hiatus.

Recommendation 7: During this period and as part of the reevaluation of departmental goals, that the German section restructure their requirements and regulations for the graduate program. Included in this might be a decision to offer the graduate degree within certain temporal parameters. For example, since the faculty now in German mainly address aspects of study in 20th century German, that this be the targeted area. As well, the committee strongly recommends that consideration be given for at least one required course and that that be directed toward a method and theory course.

Recommendation 8: As part of the requirements, a graduate student should also have to present a thesis proposal in an open forum to the Department and for departmental approval. If this is not required, thesis research becomes a goal strictly between the student and the supervisor and can become too narrow.

Recommendation 9: Once the program restarts, a graduate officer should be named within the Department.

Scholarship

A scholar of foreign culture always faces a dilemma: which language to use? If a Canadian scholar publishes in English and/or French, a monograph brings immediate but short-lived satisfaction because of the inevitable limitations of readership. If, on the other hand, the scholarship is undertaken in language of research and published in foreign journals or with publishers from other countries, it is not always afforded the recognition of scholarship undertaken in English and published in Canada or the United States.

The German section of the Department of German and Russian Studies at MUN consists of four tenured members and one term-appointed instructor. Based on the information submitted to the Committee, the members cover a wide spectrum of scholarship and interests. The quantity and quality of scholarship is quite comparable to a number of similar-sized universities in Canada.

The German section's contributions consist of articles and book reviews in national and international journals, books, and contributions to reference works, as well as presentations and attendance at conferences. Work undertaken for Canada's Association of University Teachers of German is widely appreciated and has helped to further German studies all across Canada. Members are respected and known in their fields. In addition to literary scholarship, the Department also has members who are involved in the broad field of German cultural studies. As in other comparable departments, film courses, for example, have proven to be very popular. There is also expertise in translation studies and in language teaching methodology and CALL.

Continued efforts to publish in well-known journals and to disseminate research at conferences will be required to strengthen the expertise necessary to maintain and expand the graduate course offerings.

The Russian section of the Department of German and Russian at MUN consists of two faculty members. As scholars, they specialize in Silver Age literature (1880-1939) and disseminate their research in the following professional manner. They produce and publish books and articles in reputable refereed press and journals, put out book reviews, and translate into English works of well known writers. They are visible and active participants in national and international conferences. The group's productivity is outstanding. In the past 10 years they contributed to Memorial's credit close to twenty refereed articles, eight research monographs (one of which is in print, and another is under consideration), a textbook and a good number of book reviews that cover publications in many areas. It is important to note that both members of the group are highly productive and in many ways complement each other. The quality of the group's scholarship is very high. At least four books are very well known and are based on unique historic material. Articles are published in top Canadian and prestigious Russian academic journals where acceptance standards are very high. Again, standards of quality are uniform within the group.

The group would certainly benefit from a graduate program that would naturally encourage both group members to seek external funding to support graduate students. There is no doubt that their level of scholarship is high enough to be at par with the best in SSHRC competitions. This activity has already started and should be strongly encouraged. Mounting a graduate program would require at least two more faculty member in the Russian group. Judging by the number of undergraduate students the program attracts, there would be considerable interest in the Masters program.

Recommendation 10: The Department should ensure that new hires, in particular, should have time to establish a scholarly record. Therefore, extra-to-load teaching should be kept to a minimum.

Recommendation 11: Current members of the Department should be encouraged and supported in the pursuit of their scholarly interests and in the dissemination of their research.

Faculty and Staff

With the limited resources available in the Department, in particular in the Russian section with only two Faculty Members, the need to teach extra-to-load courses seems to be an established fact of academic life for some members. Although the committee finds the efforts made highly commendable, extreme teaching loads will have personal effects and will also influence research productivity. A review of the programs and a strategic plan should be discussed and implemented as soon as possible to counteract the uneven and heavy distribution of teaching loads.

Until the Department comes together in this type of plan, the committee believes that there is an unhealthy atmosphere creating a potential for making decisions which are not always fair and equitable. We therefore recommend that, until such time as a plan is in place and faculty members increase, that there should be external representative on some of the sensitive committees such as Promotion and Tenure. We also strongly support the university policy of providing mentors for new faculty and recommend that this is followed or any new departmental hires.

Recommendation 12: The Department should review the practice of extra-to-load teaching in the Department.

Recommendation 13: The Department should appoint an external representative to sensitive committees such as Promotion and Tenure.

The review committee was impressed by the number of students taught by a relatively small number of faculty and in particular, by the very high number of program students in the Russian section. A continuation of this successful program can only be guaranteed by regularizing an additional position. In light of our other recommendations to broaden the program, such a new tenure-track position should mainly be utilized in the Russian section where the present members cannot continue to work at such a demanding pace. In order to unite the two sections and to strengthen the Department as a whole, the committee recommends hiring a scholar who has strong interdisciplinary interests and who could teach literature and culture courses of interest to both sections. This person could also play an integral part in the establishment of a Russian Honours program and potentially an MA in Russian. This, in turn, would strongly benefit German and Russian

insofar as courses on Literary Theory and Methods of Research, for example, could easily be offered for both sections.

Recommendation 14: The Department should strengthen the programs by hiring a tenure-track member for the Russian section but who can teach cultural courses in both areas.

Community Service

The review committee would like to commend the Department of German and Russian on the quality and extent of their service to the community, given their workload. Their enrichment courses for junior high students, their visits to local schools, and their substantial contribution as consultants and translators for both governmental and non-governmental bodies all benefit the community at large and raise the profile of both the department and the University.

The unit is not, however, adequately informing students within their disciplines of the opportunities for advanced study or the professional and academic publications and organizations central to their study. We suggest that career orientation be provided to inform students of the availability of scholarships and work opportunities both at home and abroad.

University Citizenship

Members of both the German and Russian segments of the Department are active in committee work on all levels within the University. They are working to increase interdepartmental relationships by means of cross-listed courses, by active participation in the M. Phil program and by their involvement in the Centre for International Business Studies. It would, however, be to their advantage, both in terms of their academic strength and of their university profile, if they worked toward improving and increasing interdepartmental relationships with more cross-listed courses, building on the foundation they have already established.

University Support and Resource Allocation

Like all departments with the University, the Department of German and Russian would like to see budget increases but the department is managing quite well under the current financial restraints. The Department is adequately staffed but the lack of communication within the Department has resulted in some diminishing of administrative effectiveness. Further, the review committee feels it is imperative that the aged computer currently used by the administrative assistant, Louise Webb, be replaced with one which allows, among other things, access to the Cyrillic alphabet which is imperative for the work of the Russian section.

The reduction in library support is a threat to this and all other departments and should be reviewed and ameliorated. Library resources should be available to support the specializations of new hires and program developments and changes. It appears that the financial support given to the two sections of the Department is unbalanced and inequitable given current enrollments and programs and should be reviewed.

Recommendation 15: The Department should purchase of new computer adequate to the demands of a multi-language, multi-alphabet academic department.

Summary of Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The Department should search for and appoint an external, neutral head, with research interests in a bridging specialization and a solid record of research and administrative skills.

Recommendation 2: With the permission of the Dean of Arts, the Department should contract a facilitator to help to provide the means by which the Department of German and Russian can begin to heal and to reach a consensus regarding common goals.

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- d. Integrating literature, film, and culture studies into the program by requiring students to take such courses.
- e. Offering translation studies courses.
- f. Establishing a requirement for a minimum number of courses at the 3000 and 4000 level.
- g. Strengthening the program by expanding its online presence and establishing closer links with the Language Lab.
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