February 5, 2004

Betty Schmitz, Ph.D., Director
Center for Curriculum Transformation
123 Communications Building
Box 353765

Dear Betty,

I’m writing to give you a summary of our efforts toward diversity in the Linguistics Department. One aspect of the mission of the Linguistics Department is “to prepare all of our students to function as active and concerned citizens in every public arena in which language plays a role. This might involve debates over the value of bilingual education programs, issues such as ‘Ebonics’ and the intrinsic nature of nonstandard dialects, and the controversy over whether language can or should be purged of sexist words and expressions.” Our department is then, conscious of issues of diversity and actively exploring those issues in courses and research. For example, Areal Linguistics, taught by Prof. Sharon Hargus, introduces students to Native American languages by looking at three northwest language families, and Linguistics 411 covers Native Languages and Language Families of Washington State. Prof. Alicia Wassink, who draws on her personal heritage of Jamaican and African-American roots, regularly teaches a course on Pidgins and Creoles. She also covers a range of topics related to diversity in her courses on sociolinguistics. Both faculty members do research in these specializations and thus disseminate their ideas broadly in the academic community, as well as to the general public. Adjunct professors Laada Bilaniuk (Anthropology) and Katarzyna Dziwirek (Slavic) teach courses cross-listed in Linguistics on language, gender and other sociocultural issues.

One of our graduates who serves on our advisory board, Dr. Alice Taff, has contributed to the Department in various capacities to further the preservation of endangered languages. In the two past academic years she offered a course on Endangered Languages in which she not only covered the content topic, but also trained the students in preservation methodology. Dr. Taff and Professor Wright also gained grant support from the University of London to record a range of spontaneous speech of Alaskan endangered languages. Finally, Dr. Taff engaged support for a Breath of Life workshop facilitated in September 2003. She garnered monetary and in kind support from the University, as well
as several days of volunteer time from faculty members and alumni who are experts in language preservation.

50% of our faculty are women, and 55% of our graduate students are. One of our faculty members is African-American. We continue our efforts to hire additional faculty and to recruit graduate students who represent minority groups.

Sincerely,

Julia Herschensohn
Professor and Chair