Diversity Activities Report (February 2004)
Department of Comparative Literature

Our department has very little in the way of formal diversity activities, that is, activities in which we engage where this is the primary goal. But we do, by the nature of our discipline and department, have a programmatic commitment to diversity, particularly international diversity, that manifests itself in almost every area of our departmental operations. In particular, our department has moved in the last 6-8 years from a focus almost exclusively upon European literatures to a more broadly global orientation, with this shift reflected in our courses, our faculty hiring priorities and our student recruitment. This internationalized perspective has been made a core objective for our still relatively new undergraduate track in cinema studies as well. I will provide some brief details about how this commitment affects those areas mentioned in your request.

1) Student Access: The primary area of student access that we actually oversee and monitor is graduate admissions (with no cap on majors, admission to the undergraduate tracks in literary or cinema studies is non-competitive). Each year, our graduate studies committee ranks applications with considerable attention to assuring a broadly diverse group of entering students, and we use our limited number of TAships (our primary means of departmental support) to help make this possible. This year, for instance, we have students from Iran, Turkey, Italy, China, France, Bulgaria, Lithuania and elsewhere in our program, over 60% of them female.

2) Our primary ongoing departmental outreach activity is the Texts and Teachers program, which links UW-taught courses with parallel versions of the same course in local high schools. Originally set up in collaboration with two suburban high schools, we have focused more recently on building connections with Seattle Public high schools, beginning with Roosevelt HS. The curriculum of these courses is intended to help those high school classes diversify their course content, both in international terms and by increasing the mix of American ethnic literature included in the courses.

3) Our faculty hiring priorities over the last few years have consciously aimed to increase the global breadth of areas our faculty cover and, equally important, to create linkages among those different areas. Our most recent additions have been two faculty members dealing with Chinese literature and film and with Latin American literary and cultural studies. Our current faculty search was explicitly targeted toward hiring someone who does significant work in non-European, non-US film. Staff hiring tends to reflect (albeit informally) the same priorities; we currently have one German native, one French-speaking US citizen, and one Japanese-American fluent in Japanese among our four staff members. These linguistic competencies are crucial in helping maintain the international openness of our departmental activities.

4) Our faculty are a particularly disparate group in terms of the range of their teaching and scholarly activities. Perhaps the biggest institutional change over the last decade has been the revision of our core undergraduate literature courses. We designed and have
gradually been able to offer on a regular basis each in a set of four, dealing with European literature, literature of the Americas, Asian literatures and literatures of emerging nations. While Sandra Chait was directly the Program on Africa, we used departmental funds to help support her position by having her teach a course annually in African literature. We continue to explore possibilities for offering more and more diverse core courses, as in ongoing discussions with the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization to cross-list courses with them. Likewise, our cinema studies track requires students to take at least one course in a national cinema linked to the foreign language that they are studying to fulfill their departmental language requirement.

5) We have no specific activities related to diversity climate in our department.

Gary Handwerk, Chair
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