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TO: Gabriel E. Gallardo, Ph.D.
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FROM: Terje I. Leiren, Chair
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RE: Diversity Activities Appraisal

The Department of Scandinavian Studies was established by an act of the State Legislature of Washington in 1909. With an emphasis on the languages and cultures of the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, the department added a Baltic studies program in 1994 that included the languages and cultures of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Originally a department which centered on the languages and literatures of the Nordic nations, since the 1980s, the department has reformed itself so that it also includes a major area studies component with a diverse curriculum and an interdisciplinary focus.

The Department of Scandinavian Studies offers undergraduate majors in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Scandinavian Area Studies. Approximately half the majors are enlisted as Area Studies. An undergraduate area studies student builds the major on strong language proficiency of one of the Scandinavian / Nordic languages, but then adds courses in the politics, cultures and history of the region. Most majors acquire a reading knowledge of one or more Scandinavian language beyond their core language in the process of doing their undergraduate course work. Graduate students also have the option of concentrating on area studies or literature, in addition to interdisciplinary work in course offered by other departments. Our graduate students typically include interdisciplinary work in Comparative Literature’s Critical Theory and Film programs, the Jackson School’s International Studies program, and the Departments of History, Political Science, and Women’s Studies.

Within the broad definition of diversity, the Department of Scandinavian Studies plays an active part in support of the University’s overall mission to support diversity as an institutional priority.
As a relatively small department with a regional focus on the cultures and languages of eight northern European countries and the subsequent diaspora of Scandinavians in the nineteenth century, the curriculum and research, has a broad multi-cultural reach and interest. The Scandinavian countries were among the first, and are still among the most successful, to legislate gender equality and sexual diversity in their societies. In many of our courses, this is a major element of the curriculum with such courses as “Women in Scandinavian Society,” “Folk Belief and World View,” “Swedish Women Writers,” and “Sexuality in Scandinavia: Myth and Reality.” The multi-cultural aspects of modern Scandinavia, including the recent immigration from third and fourth world countries, are integral parts of such courses as “Introduction to Scandinavian Culture,” and “Scandinavian Immigration in History and Literature.”

With the exception of requiring that majors learn one of the Scandinavian or Baltic languages, the Department of Scandinavian Studies has an open access policy in its classes. Most courses are taught in English with no linguistic prerequisites making them available to the student body in general.

As a result of successful fund raising in recent years, the Department has established several endowed funds for undergraduate and graduate student support. These are open broadly to any student with Scandinavian courses as part of their curriculum, whether majors, minors, or simply students including courses with Scandinavian content. One of the “scholarships” supports tuition and another is specifically earmarked for student travel to Scandinavia. In this way, students have access to opportunities for an international experience that they might not otherwise afford. Other scholarship funds are directed generally for students of Danish, Norwegian, or Swedish, and can be used for any purpose the students themselves wish and are based on applications detailing specific projects and indicating likelihood of success.

The faculty of the Department of Scandinavian Studies has always had a diverse character. We currently have seven tenure-track positions. The faculty also consists of three full time lecturers. Finally, we have two visiting lecturer positions supported partially by the University and partially by the Ministries of Education in Denmark and Finland respectively.

Finally, a brief word about the climate in the Department in support of diversity. It is my impression that the faculty, staff, and students find a supportive environment with regard to matters of diversity.