February 23, 2004

TO: Betty Schmitz, Director, Curriculum Transformation Project, Arts and Sciences, Box 353765

FROM: Brigitte Prutti, Acting Chair, Department of Germanics, Box 353130

RE: Germanics Diversity Activities Appraisal

Below is a list of activities and efforts the Germanics department currently undertakes to encourage diversity in the following areas:

1. Student Access:

As far as student recruitment on the undergraduate level is concerned, we try to keep in close contact with local and regional high schools and we participate in various outreach events such as the upcoming World Languages Day which is supposed to foster an understanding of the significance of cross-cultural communication among potential college students from diverse backgrounds. We also try to create an open and inviting atmosphere via regular “Open House” events for all students who are already taking our courses or are potentially interested in our program and in study abroad options. We are very actively involved in promoting student exchanges and we have our own study abroad program (Spring in Vienna). We offer a major/minor in German Cultural Studies that allows for a very flexible combination with other fields. On the graduate level, we’ve tried to recruit minority applicants with the help of address lists by the Go-Map office, so far without success. In geographic terms, we are having a good mix of local, national and international students, including one graduate student from Africa – very rare in our field – who is also the recipient of one of our prestigious Max Kade fellowships this year. We pay close attention to the application data for indications of students’ backgrounds; this year, for example, we are offering one of our three Kade recruitment awards to a graduate applicant who is a former participant in the McNair program.

2. Relationships with external communities:

Over the past few years we’ve been strengthening our ties both to the local German community as well as to former alums. We have established a Germanics Advisory Board with an interesting mix of volunteers (teachers, academics, members of the German Heritage Society and the local business community etc.); with a generous grant
from the Max Kade Foundation we intend to establish a German language dorm plus German Cultural Center. It was supposed to open this coming fall already, but due to a major cost increase the need for additional fundraising arose and the whole project had to be postponed for a year. Last spring we hosted a three-day conference on the topic of “Generations” with the goal of strengthening and/or re-establishing significant academic ties. On this occasion we invited former students who are now active in the profession along with some former colleagues and several visiting scholars. The conference itself was co-organized by members of the department and one of our alumnae. We have significantly increased our outreach events and receptions on special occasions; for example, we are hosting a lunch for German high school teachers and TAs later this week.

3. Staff and Faculty:

We have an all-female staff and with regard to the composition of the faculty, we have a pretty good ratio of male/female members (7 to 5 and a female chair) and a mix of American/European backgrounds. We regularly host visiting scholars both from Europe and Asia and invite them to participate in our departmental colloquia. We have strong connections to other fields (Comparative Literature; European Studies) and we are in the process of building a so-called German Studies Faculty – i.e., informally strengthening our ties with interested faculty members in other units, cross-listing their courses, inviting them to talks and other social events etc. We have an offer pending for a tenure-track assistant professor position in 19th and/or 20th century German culture and literature with special emphasis in Jewish Studies. The new hire is supposed to assume leadership of the department’s ties to the Jewish Studies and build on the connections with other programs as well.

4. Curriculum and Research:

Our new colleague will teach both graduate and undergraduate courses in German-Jewish Studies, hence further expanding our current curriculum which we have already considerably broadened in the direction of cultural studies/visual culture with the hire of Eric Ames several years ago. The research project of the person we hope to hire concerns questions of ethnicity and sexuality; he is also prepared to offer courses in Queer Studies, thus enriching the emphasis on gender issues several of us already have in our research as well as teaching. We continue to have a strong tradition of intellectual history and Ideologiekritik (for example, Rick Gray’s new book is on the problematic tradition of German physiognomic thought since the Enlightenment), more recently also a focus on German colonialism and postcolonial theory plus an engagement in interdisciplinary endeavors (Sabine Wilke will be co-organizing a conference with Miriam Kahn in Anthropology in the spring of 2005). All of our language courses have a very strong history and culture component and in addition to linguistic proficiency we aim at developing cross-cultural literacy as well. Our more recent efforts in this direction include a course on contemporary German youth culture (developed and taught by TAs)
and an exciting multi-media language course (“Virtual Vienna”) for the second-year curriculum. Our undergraduates have benefited from the fresh perspectives offered by German DAAD professors from other disciplines (History, Sociology, Political Science); in addition to our regular curriculum, our graduate students also have a chance to take courses from distinguished German visiting professors each spring. Our general effort as a unit has been to diversify our curriculum in terms of content and method and to shift some resources from the graduate program toward expanding our undergraduate course offerings in English and strengthening our contribution to the College’s Humanities curriculum.

5. Climate:

We have been trying to build a sense of community among students, staff, and faculty through various academic and social events (conferences, colloquia, potlucks, holiday parties and other receptions, departmental graduation ceremony, performance of a German play by language students etc.) and we encourage a broad range of initiatives among our students. For example, some of our graduate students have been successfully organizing a very popular film series for some time now; they are also organizing their third annual student conference this year; the conference participation among our own students has also significantly increased in recent years etc. Our current Asian-American undergraduate representative has been doing a marvelous job in revitalizing the “German Club” this year. Our graduate students are represented on all major departmental committees, including faculty search committees. Last but not least I would like to add that our competent and friendly staff members at the main office are always concerned with maintaining a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere for everybody around.