

Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

October 18, 2010

George Philip, President
University Hall, Room 302
University at Albany
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12222

Dear President Philip:

I am writing to you as President of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies. The ASEEEES, which has nearly 3000 members, is the largest American organization of scholars, educators and other specialists in Slavic, East European and Eurasian studies. Our members range from experts on language and literature, to historians, political scientists, economists, anthropologists, sociologists, and specialists on international relations.

We are very concerned by SUNY Albany's proposed closure of its foreign language programs, including Russian. I am writing now to try to convince you that reversal of these decisions would be in the best interest of your university and in the national interest of the United States.

As you know, Russian studies have long had an important place in American higher education. Their importance is undiminished and in some ways greater than ever today. Recognizing the importance of the largest country in the world, still a nuclear super power and with growing political and economic influence and key interests that both complement and clash with our own, the US Department of State and the Department of Defense officially consider Russian to be a "critical needs" language. They have long provided grants for graduate study in Russian, but they have now begun to fund Russian studies for undergraduates and even secondary school students. Much more is at issue, however, than national security. In a globalized world Americans intersect with Russia far more than they did during the Cold War. And for these interactions we need specialists and professionals, who have an awareness of Russia that these undergraduate offerings make possible. Just as medical doctors need undergraduate courses in mathematics and the natural sciences, so lawyers, business people, diplomats and others who will have dealings with Russia need at least a first level of understanding of this important country, an understanding that is dramatically advanced by even an elementary knowledge of Russian language.

At SUNY Albany, as in most other colleges and universities, the Russian program is a small one. But it opens doors to other departments by providing the language training students need to study Russian and Eurasian history, culture, politics, foreign policy, and economics. In that sense Russian courses both teach Russian language and familiarize

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students with Russian culture and society. Furthermore, the closure of the Albany Russian program means there will be no Russian major anywhere in the SUNY system, which is a most regrettable fact for the students in the state of New York, which has such a large Russian heritage population.

We all understand that these are difficult financial times, but such closure would do irreparable damage to SUNY Albany's national and international reputation as a leader in higher education and weaken your students' ability to be successful in the 21st century world. I strongly ask you reconsider your decision.

Sincerely yours,

Mark von Hagen
President, ASEES
Professor, History & Director, School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies,
Arizona State University

cc: Susan D. Phillips
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs
Edelgard Wulfert
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences