

5 October 2010

President George M. Philip  
University at Albany, State University of New York  
1400 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12222

Dear President Philip:

We have just learned to our great dismay that you have issued a directive “to suspend all new admissions to five area programs—Classics, French, Italian, Russian, and Theatre.” According to a 1 October press release, this decision to eliminate BA, MA, and PhD programs was reached as a response to the state’s budget reduction.

At a time when preparing students for work in a global environment has become a mandate of higher education, it is shocking to discover that students at your university will no longer be able to enroll in programs designed to provide advanced learning in a number of languages. We know from press reports that in nations with expanding economies, such as China and India, higher education is a priority, and language learning is encouraged if not required. The European Community is committed to fostering multilingualism by having students fluent in three languages. By being shut out of advanced study in three European languages (advanced German courses already having been cut), students at SUNY Albany will be thwarted in the opportunity to be competitive with their peers from Asia and Europe. Monolingual and even bilingual American students are at a serious disadvantage in a multilingual world. Moreover, students at SUNY Albany will also receive an education inferior to what students on other American campuses get. Languages are the repository of past and present cultures, and as such are and should be the sine qua non of a university’s academic mission. The study of language plays a part in developing cognition, sharpening analytical abilities, and understanding sameness and differences of the human race; without in-depth study of languages and the liberal arts, institutions of higher learning can only call themselves technical or professional schools.

For your information, the Modern Language Association, our parent organization, has been conducting surveys in student enrollments in languages other than English in postsecondary institutions in the United States since 1958, and between 2002 and 2006 enrollments in languages other than English rose by 12.9%. Our 2009 survey, to be released in December, will also reflect increases at many institutions and nationally between 2006 and 2009.

Since 1983, SUNY Albany, through its University in the High School Program, has allowed students to earn college credits. This innovative program was conceived to give students a “‘bridging’ experience to college”; it was initiated in foreign languages and has now expanded to twenty-seven academic departments. In closing access to advanced study in classics, French, Italian, and Russian at SUNY

Albany, you also endanger the study of these languages in the high schools of the capital region. Language programs in secondary education serve as a pipeline for high-level competency attainment in college. It will take decades to revive language programs in secondary education once they have been dismantled. Your decision may well prevent the region's students from competing in the global economy for years to come.

In view of the extended impact the closing of the programs in languages will have for higher education in New York State, it is our hope that you will be willing to reconsider your decision. To sustain the educational mission of the university, there must be ways to share rescission across disciplinary fields and nonacademic programs.

Sincerely,



Dawn Bratsch-Prince, President



Nelly Furman, Director

cc. Provost Susan D. Phillips

Dean Edelgard Wulfert, College of Arts and Sciences

Professor Jean-François Brière, Chair of the Department of Languages Literatures and Cultures