



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

GERMANIC AND SLAVIC
LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES T 919.966.1642
426 DEY HALL F 919.962.3708
CAMPUS BOX 3160 gssl@unc.edu
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27599-3160 www.unc.edu/depts/gssl

April 5, 2024

Dear Chancellor Gilliam,

As you consider a termination of the Russian Program at UNC-G, we urge you to consider the following facts.

The U.S. government designates Russian as a language “critical” to national security. The Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) of the U.S. Department of Defense runs a National Security Education Program (NSEP) to ensure our country’s preparedness for military, geostrategic, and civilizational challenges posed by Russia. Russian continues to be the language of international communication in the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia, where they border Afghanistan and China. This is a region where China, Russia, and the US compete for influence; it is a region from which considerable threats to US national interests and global security originate.

A termination of the Russian Program at UNC-G will not merely deprive UNC-G students and ROTC cadets and midshipmen of scholarships, fellowships, professional opportunities, and competitive career advantages associated with their knowledge of Russia, its language, and the entire Russophone world including Central Asia. It will have a swift and irreversible detrimental effect on U.S. national security as fewer people will be in a position to make decisions informed by a contextual appreciation of the global culture shared by more than two hundred million speakers.

In these days of the obvious geopolitical importance of Russia, the value of the knowledge of Russian language, culture, and policy has become increasingly clear. Therefore, we were dismayed to hear that UNCG is terminating its thriving program in Russian language, literature, and culture. This move will damage the reputation of UNC-G at all levels. Supporting and fostering the existence of important cultural fields alongside equally significant STEM fields is essential. The decision to terminate Russian, therefore, makes this decision incomprehensible and will result in long-term consequences and damage to the institution and its powerful legacy – particularly as the first women's college established in the nation.

This is a time to enhance the study of Russian rather than to cut it: the US has repeatedly found itself behind the curve when specialists in this area are needed because it has not invested enough in training these specialists. The future well-being of the United States depends on enhancing our strategic knowledge about the societies of our competitors, of which Russia is prominently one. Surely you do not want to undermine American strategic resources by eliminating the teaching of a key language in your University.

We currently live at a time during which we so deeply need any and all insights into Russian language and culture. Specialists trained in the field of Russian are essential to our institutions. You have a terrific Russian language and culture program at UNC-G. We urge you to reconsider this decision.

Sincerely,

Priscilla Layne
Director of the Center for European Studies
Professor of German
Dept. of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

Inga Pollmann
Associate Professor
Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures
Department of English and Comparative Literature
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Richard Langston
Professor and Chair
Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Stanislav Shvabrin
Associate Professor
Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill