

ASSOCIATION OF LITERARY SCHOLARS, CRITICS, AND WRITERS

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9 November 2010

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Susan Wolfson
Princeton University

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

VICE-PRESIDENT

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Saint Michael's College

Dear President Philip,

SECRETARY

Lee Oser
College of the Holy Cross

I write on behalf of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics and Writers—an international association devoted to literature, scholarship, critical work, teaching, and education in all things literary, including the classical languages and the literary dimensions of other arts, such as theater, cinema, and dance. These devotions have fueled our dismay at your recent decision to eliminate the programs in French, German, Italian, Russian, classical languages, and theater at SUNY Albany.

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Such programs, in our view, are the heart, soul, and brains of nineteenth-century European culture and an enduring heritage into the twenty-first century. Not to support these programs at a leading university such as yours bodes a sad diminution of the intellectual vitality of the humanities not only at SUNY Albany and for students in the State of New York, but also nationally, in relation to the wonderful resources that public universities represent to large portions of our population, and for which SUNY has long been a shining beacon.

We recognize that hard times require hard decisions. Yet, overall, the humanities are very cost-effective, requiring no laboratories, stadiums, high-paid coaches, and expensive athletic scholarships. Moreover, with Albany so close to New York City, it seems particularly unfortunate not to maintain the theater and language programs that are enriched by their happy proximity to this internationally vital site.

Even in these economically difficult times, terminating advanced study in classical languages, French, German, Italian, Russian, and theater would pose a serious compromise to your great research university's long-standing commitment to the best in education and scholarship and its prestige as a cultural force. And more's the pity, as the language and literature programs that you have slated for termination are so important both to the

development of an informed, cosmopolitan citizenry, and to SUNY Albany's continuing prominence in twenty-first century global culture.

In your own career at SUNY Albany, where you earned a BA and MA in history in the years when SUNY Albany was coming into national prominence, the richness of the very programs you propose to cut was surely a vital resource for your own education. Consider the immediate consequence on your present undergraduates. If your students are to compete successfully for admission to top graduate programs, in New York and elsewhere, they will need a foundation in modern and classical languages. And if the best, ablest high school students would be discouraged by the slated diminishment from considering an education at SUNY Albany, the quality of your undergraduate student body may well decline. The vitiating effect of all these losses on other programs on your campus—not only in the humanities but also in the social sciences—will soon be felt, too.

We urge you to reconsider and reverse this most lamentable decision. Should you do so, you may be assured of our support and admiration.

Yours sincerely,

Susan J. Wolfson

President, Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers,
2010

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cc: Russell Berman, President, Modern Language Association of
America, 2011
Rosemary Feal, Executive Director, Modern Language
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