## Department of

## Asian Studies

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Fall 2006

## **Dear Alumni and Friends**

I present to you my second annual "report card" in the form of a "newsy letter." Dr. Larry Kessler, who had edited our newsletter for several years, has handed the torch to me. I appreciate Larry's distinguished service and will continue to rely upon his wisdom and guidance in other functions. I very much appreciate your feedback on how we can best reach out and keep you updated.

As featured in the picture, the Department of Asian Studies has recently moved to the newly-renovated building of New West. For the first time since I arrived on campus in 1993, we finally have a place of our own with all faculty and staff housed in the same building. New West is the last building constructed before the Civil War, a historic structure centrally located on our beautiful campus and facing the majestic Memorial Hall across Cameron Ave. The Dialectic Society, the other permanent tenant in New West, continues to own the large auditorium on the third floor. I have heard remarks that it is quite symbolic for Asian Studies to settle in "new west." I do not make much of the symbolism. For the time being, the Department does not offer a graduate program and thus is unranked nationally. If anything, Asian Studies as a department is still just a toddler on campus and has a long way to go before it can reach the kind of national and international prominence enjoyed by our counterparts at many of Carolina's peer institutions. And for that purpose, we must continue to nurture our roots in the rich soil of academic excellence in the Carolina tradition.

Believe it or not, New West is already crowded as we move in. With the twenty-seven office rooms, large and small, the building houses about twenty permanent full-time faculty and staff members, plus nearly as many temporary instructors,

teaching assistants, and visiting scholars. The largest change in the past year came to our South Asian programs. Assistant Professors Allison Busch and Shantanu Phukan, both in Hindi-Urdu languages and literatures, resigned to teach at other institutions. At the same time, Dr. Shaheen Parveen joined the faculty in fall 2005. Dr. Afroz Taj, who started our Hindi-Urdu program in 1995 but took a tenuretrack position at NC State University in 1998, has accepted an appointment at UNC as Associate Professor to begin this fall. I regret the loss of Allison and Shantanu but feel blessed to have Afroz and Shaheen. Meanwhile, the NC Consortium for South Asian Studies, jointly sponsored with Duke and NCSU, has consolidated the Bengali and Tamil programs, now being offered through teleconference to the three consortium institutions. With the rise of India and the South Asian subcontinent as a whole in international affairs, it is our intention to launch a new B.A. Concentration in Hindi-Urdu languages and South Asian Cultures.

The same can be said of our planned Concentration in Arab Cultures. Demand for Arabic has gone up beyond our capacity in the past few years. As of the time I am preparing this report in early September, there are more than 130 students registered in the first three years of Arabic courses, including some 80 in the first-year class. Among many factors that have contributed to its rapid growth, Mr. Nasser Isleem is chiefly responsible for recruiting students and sustaining their interest. Nasser recently received a Student Undergraduate Teaching Award—a rare honor that came in the second year of his full-time appointment at UNC. The popular demand for Arabic at the lower levels naturally calls for further growth at the advanced levels. The Department is authorized to search for a new full-time lecturer to meet the growing demand. That will enable Drs. Sahar Amer and Nadia Yaqub to develop and teach more advanced language courses as well as content courses in English in Arabic cultures. The time for an Arabic concentration has arrived.



New West

Equally dramatic is the growth in our Chinese program, which has over 300 students enrolled in all levels, including 170 in Elementary Chinese I this semester. Ms. Yi Zhou, who had previously taught Chinese language for three years on a part-time basis, began to teach full-time last year. Her fulltime position is funded for the first three years by a generous gift from an alumna and longtime supporter, and we are very grateful for that. The dramatic growth of demand, however, calls for continued support. And we are working on a few initiatives aimed especially to enhance the quality of student experience and provide more opportunities in undergraduate research and internship in China.

Our Japanese program has also seen steady growth. A significant segment of American students enrolled in our Japanese courses are attracted to the language and culture of Japan because they grew up attuned to various forms of Japanese popular culture. While it makes sense that students interested in pursuing careers in business and econom-

ics learn an Asian language, the noted shift of interest in popular culture is indicative that instruction of Japanese language and culture in the United States is becoming "mainstreamed," in a way similar to major European languages that attract a plurality of student interest beyond practical reasons. As teachers we treat our students equally regardless of their motives to learn. But in our hearts we know that those who learn for the joy of learning tend to have a sustained interest and higher rate of success.

Since my arrival at Chapel Hill, I have noted several attempts on campus to develop a Korean program. Beginning this year, the Department has launched first-year Korean, supported by a gift from the Korean American Student Association on campus. We are working hard to raise more funds to develop a sustainable program. Thanks to support from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Center for Jewish Studies, our Modern Hebrew program has expanded to offer a three-year curriculum, with plans for a minor in Modern Hebrew. I also expect the Persian program to grow, as already reflected in the enrollment of 26 students in the first-year class this semester. As the way

things work here, we must "prove" to the administration the need for permanent state funding for these minor language programs. That normally occurs only until after we have offered these languages for a few years to demonstrate that there is indeed sufficient and sustainable student demand. And I am optimistic about their future.

As UNC is a major research university, the academic reputation of the Department hinges on the professional accomplishments of our faculty as well as on the quality of our programs and instruction. For this past year I am very proud to report that our faculty research has gained some national and international prominence. Their achievements are too many to list here. Among the most noted in scholarship are two books: Topic Chains in Chinese—A Discourse Analysis and Applications in Language Teaching (Muenchen, Germany: Lincom Europa), authored by Dr. Wendan Li, and Kannani and Document of Flames: Two Japanese Colonial Novels (Duke University Press), edited and translated by Dr. Mark Driscoll. In addition, a few edited or co-edited volumes of essay collections have been published, respectively, by Drs. Kevin Hewison and

Jan Bardsley. All published books are listed on the department website for your information.

Dr. Steve Levine retired at the end of last academic year after more than three decades of a distinguished professional career as a scholar and teacher of Chinese politics and history. Although he was with the Department for only two years, Dr. Levine made a major contribution to Carolina over the decades in a variety of important functions, including serving as Interim Director for the Carolina Asia Center from 2001 to 2004.

Yes, we would like to hear from you and say "welcome back!" Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any question or request, and let us know if you come to Chapel Hill for a visit.

Sincerely yours,

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## Make a Gift to Asian Studies

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Please send your contribution to: The UNC-Chapel Hill Development Office, P.O. Box 309, Chapel Hill NC 27514-0309.