

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 tenure-track 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 author-

ized 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 full-time 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-

