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Dear Department Members:

I'm writing to clarify my position and intentions as Dean of Arts in the matter of a merger of the Department of East Asian Studies and the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies.

As you are aware, as of August 7, 2019 we have established administrative support for each department under the purview of a single Assistant Chair Administration, effectively shifting reporting structures from Arts West to an administrative unit that will now serve both departments. This change in reporting structure is designed to relieve Arts West of an unsustainable administrative burden, and my understanding is that this change has been successfully adopted and is proceeding in a manner that will continue to serve well the needs of students, staff, and faculty members. As we adjust to this new situation, my executive is prepared to assist both departments with any issues that arise as a result of the ongoing transition.

The administrative alignment of MLCS and EAS made sense in part because of similar modes of pedagogical delivery in the areas of language studies, area studies, and cultural studies. At the same time, those similarities now invite collaborative design of a merger of the two departments. There are many sound pedagogical, academic, and strategic reasons to give this serious exploration. Let me also be clear: from the Faculty's perspective there are no cost-savings associated with a merger of the two departments, yet I am convinced that this is the right path to follow. With that in mind, I am asking members of both departments to explore the terms of coming together with the hope that we can collectively arrive at a workable and generally acceptable way forward. Your department chairs have been asked to support an open and inclusive conversation on this matter and my expectation is that they will, by the conclusion of the Fall Term, return to me a set of recommendations for achieving the goal of a merger by July 1, 2020.

A combined department will afford students more opportunities for learning across languages and cultural fields in the context of comparative studies in a more diverse arena of global languages, cultures, and regions. The two departments are intellectually well-matched (consider that there are area studies experts, linguists, translators, language teachers, and cultural studies scholars on both counts), and I would expect researchers and teachers to create a shared community of practice and discover enriching opportunities for research and pedagogical collaboration. A merger might also afford opportunities to develop Islamic Studies and South Asian Studies, two areas that have yet to find a nurturing home in the Faculty of Arts. MLCS is currently developing modes of online course delivery that will support classroom activities--such initiatives might be expanded into the areas of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese language instruction. EAS has yet to develop a doctoral program; MLCS has one in place that could accommodate an expanded mandate. I'll also say that I've never been entirely comfortable with a geographic division that strikes me as a remnant of colonialist attitudes--European and "modern" languages on the one hand, the exoticized and somehow differently foreign languages (what, "ancient," perhaps?) of the East, on the other.

These are just a few of the opportunities that stand to benefit both departments in research and pedagogical terms. Furthermore, I believe that in difficult financial times, there is strength in numbers--a larger department affords more fiscal resilience and flexibility in the deployment of strained resources; a larger department is also

less likely to suffer from a shortage of people to support executive functions and can help to resolve issues with faculty service workloads. Graduate funding at the faculty level is currently dependent on mechanisms that take into account enrolments, majors, research funding, and graduate student fellowships--each department stands, in this equation, to benefit from the other's strengths. (It's worth noting here, by way of example, that EAS has about half the number of enrolments enjoyed by MLCS, and while both undergraduate programs have been in decline over the past five years, they bring roughly the same number of majors to the table. Graduate student to faculty ratios are about the same in the two departments; MLCS has roughly three times as many grads and faculty members. Both departments are under-performing in research dollar expenditures, but together they make an impressive total in absolute dollars.) Budget modelling at the University level, meanwhile, means the Faculty will rely in coming years on robust and strong departments able to support the Faculty's performance across research and teaching success--together the two departments are considerably stronger from that vantage point.

Please know that my interest in this initiative does not stem from any devaluation of the work of researchers and teachers in either department, nor is it to undermine the work both departments have done in re-envisioning their undergraduate programs. On the contrary, I see this as a way to ensure the future visibility and vitality of area studies, cultural studies, applied linguistics, and language instruction the Faculty of Arts. I see this as the coming together of equal partners, and I would like to give voice to everyone involved so as to ensure that any terms of merger are roundly beneficial. I recognize that some of you will greet this initiative with the concern and even trepidation we direct to any instance of change, but I will say here that I am committed to ensuring that everyone continues to thrive in whatever new context we determine, and I will remain sensitive to the needs of all stakeholders in this process--students, staff, faculty, administrators, external partners, and community supporters. I look forward, then, to our continued discussion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Lesley Cormack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lesley" being more prominent than the last name "Cormack".

Lesley Cormack  
Dean, Faculty of Arts