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Open Letter to Members of the Nordic Council re NSU

It has come to my attention that the Nordic Summer University will no longer receive funding from the Nordic Council. In my capacity as head of the Department of Northern European Studies at Humboldt University in Berlin, I must express my concern and surprise regarding this decision.

Our Northern European Department is one of the largest Scandinavian Studies departments outside the Nordic countries and has recently initiated collaboration with the NSU regarding various current and future projects. For this reason I as well as my staff are greatly concerned that if NSU loses its funding, promising future activities will be discontinued. We are extremely puzzled by the decision of the Nordic Council of Ministers. According to us the NSU represents a series of qualities connected to a Nordic ethos and working methods that we appreciate as being both rewarding and profitable. These characteristics are particularly valuable regarding the continued development and renewal of Scandinavian Studies programs, a question that university humanities departments are presently facing internationally.

I had the pleasure of experiencing these qualities myself in July 2014 when I was invited as a keynote speaker to the summer session in Iceland. With no prior knowledge about the NSU, it was very enriching to observe and take part in new modes of learning and working in practice. At the Department of Northern European Studies we had already on a smaller scale experimented with some of these forms, and for that reason it has become a priority to continue our collaboration with the NSU. In light of the information that the NSU will cease to exist by the year 2016 and that some of our most important academic and pedagogic collaborations will thereby disappear, I write this letter of appeal to politicians in the Nordic countries.

In the fall of 2014 we have already initiated collaboration with participants from the NSU in connection to a so-called *Oberseminar* (seminar for advanced BA and MA students and PhD

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candidates) that I conduct, and this collaboration is continuing into the spring of 2015. In addition, a more formalized collaboration is planned for the spring of 2016 concerning the development of new forms of research and learning practices - the kind that have taken place for years in the NSU.

The future of NSU is of great interest to us. Its long tradition of creating stimulating academic exchanges on many, often transversal levels of knowledge, its development of networks amongst people and universities in the Nordic region as well as its practice of involvement owing to Nordic Folk High Schools, activates and stimulates a much needed innovation in our field and learning environment.

It would be a great loss and an incomprehensible decision to close down the NSU, an organization that to us represents a viable model for the actual and much needed revitalization of academic disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. This comprises both academic practices and future connections between universities and surrounding societies, since the work that is taking place in the NSU, due to its specific Nordic perspective, serves as an example and a role model for upcoming developments within the academic world in general. It is counter-productive to remove support for the NSU, which should rather be awarded a key role in current developments where a Nordic tradition, in continuous regeneration is of great value to the surrounding countries as well as globally.

Stefanie v. Schumbein