Dear President Nellis, Provost Sayrs, and Dean Plassmann,

We write as president and president-elect of the Association for Women in Slavic Studies and on behalf of the entire executive committee of our association. For almost forty years, AWSS has been dedicated to the promotion of research and teaching on women and gender in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Eurasia and to the support of women scholars working in any field of Slavic and Eurasian Studies.

First, we wish to endorse the letter which was sent by the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL) and signed by the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) and the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR). These peak bodies in our field are comprised of scholars whose research and teaching are vital to American geopolitical interests and to the possibility of world peace.

As an organization that supports women scholars working in the field of Slavic and Eurasian Studies and scholars who research and teach on women and gender in these disciplines and regions, AWSS asserts that eliminating the Russian language, literature, and culture offerings at OU and the firing of the two professors of Russian diminish undergraduate education at Ohio University. These cuts deprive students learning about one of the most strategically important regions of the world through the eyes of Dr. Mila Shevchenko, Associate Professor of Instruction, and Tetyana Dovbnya, Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian, both of whom bring their lived experiences as Russian, Ukrainian, and post-Soviet women as well as their scholarly expertise into the classroom.

The actions that you have taken follow a national trend of devaluing humanities research and teaching by targeting literature and culture programs and departments. Academic prioritization in the name of cost cutting disproportionately targets women. Actions such as yours dismiss and devalue important, diverse voices in the academy, especially those faculty who teach in disciplines such as foreign languages, women’s and gender studies, area studies, critical race studies, and global studies.

We urge your university to consider the consequences of defunding the Russian program since the ramifications have a long-term detrimental impact on the study of foreign languages and literatures in the state of Ohio and beyond. Never has it been more imperative that students comprehend the world beyond American shores. To deprive OU students of the opportunity deeply and critically to understand foreign cultures and languages, including Russian, is to leave them unprepared for global citizenship in the 21st century.
Sincerely,

Dr. Paula Michaels, President and Professor of History, Monash University
Dr. Melissa Bokovoy, President-Elect, Professor of History, The University of New Mexico
Dr. Betsy Jones Hemenway, Past-President, Director of the Women's Studies/Gender Studies Loyola University Chicago and Senior Lecturer in History
Dr. Melissa K. Stockdale, Secretary, Professor of History, University of Oklahoma
Dr. Valerie Sperling, Clerk, Professor of Political Science, Clark University
Dr. Rochelle Ruthchild, Investment Officer, Professor Emerita of History, Vermont College
Dr. Barbara Allen, Associate Professor of History, La Salle University
Dr. Heather Coleman, Professor of History, University of Alberta
Dr. Siobhán Hearne, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Durham University
Dr. Hilde Hoogenboom, Associate Professor of Russian, Arizona State University
Dr. Sharon Kowalsky, Associate Professor of History, Texas A&M University-Commerce
Dr. Natalie McCauley, Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian Studies, University of Richmond
Dr. Elizabeth Skomp, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Stetson University
Dr. Laurie Stoff, Principal Lecturer and Honors Faculty Fellow, Arizona State University
Dr. Catherine Wanner, Professor of History, Pennsylvania State University