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COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

BOX 354338

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**To: David Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School  
Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean of the Graduate School**

**From: The Faculty of the Department of Comparative Literature**

**Subject: Response to Review Committee Report and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

We are grateful for the considerable time and effort that went into the committee's work in reviewing and evaluating our Department and its many programs. The Department is looking forward to responding productively to matters raised by the report, and begins to do so with this document.

A number of the report's recommendations, as the committee was aware, represent initiatives already under way in the department, while others clearly derive from suggestions raised in the committee discussions with our faculty and students and with colleagues in other units of the College of Arts and Sciences.

To respond to the major comments and recommendations, we will group them in a couple of useful categories.

### **Undergraduate Programs**

We are heartened by the endorsement the report gives to our plans to establish a stand-alone **major in Cinema and Media Studies**, and to our intention to investigate the possibility of redesigning components of our undergraduate literature major in **collaboration with the developing 'modular' Humanities major**.

Both of these matters are in active discussion, by the Cinema Studies faculty in the first instance, and by the presence of three members of our faculty (Gordana Crnković, Gary Handwerk, and Mícheál Vaughan) on the College's committee developing the new Humanities major. Some possible 'modules' for that major (if it is brought forward and approved) are already being considered (e.g., textual studies). And even if the modular degree does not come into being, we may develop a couple of departmental minors.

Our faculty has had some preliminary talk about **lowering (or removing) the foreign language requirement from our existing literature ‘track’ for the Comparative Literature major**, and reserving that requirement for our **Honors** candidates. Our inclination at the moment is not to make any precipitate change in the literature ‘track,’ but rather to pursue more actively the recommendation the committee made concerning **an integrated track for the major which combines requirements in literature and cinema/media**. We envision this track drawing majors into our department, and providing a template for the proposed ‘modular’ Humanities major. Gateway and capstone courses can then ensure that the resulting major, in fact, integrates the study of the two constituent modules of the new major. We think that refining a proposal for a Comparative Literature ‘module’ for this new integrated major will provide an excellent occasion to undertake what the report highlighted as ‘the great programmatic question’: namely, ‘determining a rationale for comparative literary studies.

## Graduate Programs

A number of our achievements over the last decade were in the area of graduate studies. We have, for example, successfully inaugurated a doctoral certificate in Cinema and Media Studies, which is attracting students from a number of UW departments.

In recent years, we have enrolled and supported what may be the most internationally diverse graduate student body in the Humanities. And many of those students have been winning awards and fellowships: e.g., one of our students was honored for the best MA thesis last year (recognition which was followed by the Presidential Medal of the American Comparative Literature Association); one of our students received the Dean’s Medal last year, and two of the last three MLQ dissertation Fellowships went to doctoral candidates in our department.

The recommendation to **terminate the ‘certificate’ in Theory and Criticism** is one we mentioned in our self-study and having received the endorsement of the Review Committee we will proceed to take the necessary steps to effect this change. Recognizing the important role of theory and criticism courses already play in our own doctoral, as well as undergraduate, curriculum, and in those of other departments in the Humanities and elsewhere, we agree that the visibility of our defined doctoral program in Theory and Criticism has accomplished—at least in good part—the goal that lay behind its foundation in the first place. We are happy to declare victory, and direct our energies toward other goals.

The recommendation that we develop a **first-quarter proseminar** for incoming graduate students in our department will be addressed by our Graduate Studies Committee. We had sponsored such a proseminar in the past, but have not done so in the last few years. For the coming year, we will use for this purpose the already-scheduled AQ Practicum (C LIT 599), which was this year inaugurated, and offered, on a quarterly basis, by our current Graduate Program Director (Leroy Searle). Our expectation is that we will reinstitute the full five-credit proseminar for graduate students beginning their studies in AQ 2014.

The concerns about our graduate advising and supervision, and about the professional job-preparation of our students were, frankly, unexpected. It may be too easy to dismiss the complaints you heard as the ordinary anxieties of graduate students, heightened by the extraordinary budgetary and technological pressures being experienced by many higher education institutions in the last few years, and which have particularly affected hiring patterns in many programs in the Humanities. But we will be inspired by your comments to make increased efforts to guide our doctoral students toward being competitive for tenure-track appointments at liberal arts colleges (and better). We also will continue, given the realities of the current market, to encourage them to look seriously at postdoctoral fellowships, and other multi-year appointments, which will offer them temporary platforms from which to launch successful, longer-term academic careers.

As the numbers of graduate students with specific interests in Cinema and Media studies grows in coming years, and as those with more ‘bookish’ interests more and more embrace films as another vibrant genre of ‘literary’ art, it will become possible to **stabilize the appointment of TAs to assist in Cinema Studies courses**. Indeed, at the present time, an increasing number of our TA assignments are to such courses, and we are submitting for approval a new course (C LIT 241? Writing about Film/Cinema) that will stand alongside our current C LIT 240 (Writing about Literature). In this new course, doctoral students specializing in Cinema and Media will be able to develop and offer their own writing-intensive courses.

## **Faculty**

It will come as no surprise that we welcome the recommendation that the roster of departmental faculty be enlarged. We have markedly expanded our cohort of adjunct faculty in the last decade, and for a number of years have been pursuing opportunities to identify colleagues in other departments who might reasonably be included as voting members of our department (preferably with at least partial funding of their appointments residing in our budget). Recent budgetary uncertainties and the needs of our sister departments may have constrained advances in this area. But if budgets improve, there may bring with them a greater willingness in other departments to allow some reallocation of their faculty’s effort to Comparative Literature.

Some of the obvious candidates for addition to our faculty are already listed among our adjunct faculty; others are not. As we reconsider our expectations for colleagues in unfunded, partially funded, and adjunct appointments, we are gathering nominations from the faculty, which will be vetted by our Executive Committee, and we will approach these colleagues and their chairs, about possible next steps. With the planned articulation of our expectations for faculty in less-than-full-time appointments in the department, we also intend to review the list of adjunct colleagues. Finally, decisions about expanding our faculty will take into practical account our developing plans for reforms in our undergraduate programs and in any consequent curricular revisions. We will strive to ensure that all our faculty will continue to sustain all of our newly designed programs, especially if one of our goals is to lead the way in the development of a modular Humanities major.

Not all of the expansion to our faculty numbers depends on these considerations, important as they may be. The promised authorization to search for a new Assistant Professor will allow us address our immediate needs in cinema and media studies, with (as the committee recommends) “a person whose work occupies the intersection of literary and cinematic studies, and who will exemplify the common ground among the department’s distinct segments.” However, the committee’s characterization of this promised position as one that “has been allocated... in **new media** (games, programming, digital culture)” is not strictly accurate. ‘New media’ is among the possibilities for the position we submitted to the College deans last summer, but the promised search was at that point described in general as one for an assistant professor in cinema (and media) studies. In view of the review committee’s report and other changes in the department, determining the exact description to be used in that search will be high on our agenda for Spring faculty meetings.

## Department

The report gives the impression that ours is a department in which one wing (literature) appears less well defined, and unified, in its aims and goals. That may be in part, no doubt, an accurate assessment, given the history behind those appointments, but it also reflects the reality that the faculty in literature (even after the retirement during the last decade of nearly a dozen senior colleagues) remains broadly varied in terms of their historical, theoretical, and critical range of interests and expertise, running from medieval Europe to Twentieth-century Latin America and Asia. There may be no obvious commonality apparent at the surface, and the underlying unities may appear dissipated by their individual investments in, for instance, transhistorical and translinguistic theory and criticism, textual studies, and literary analysis. Unlike the faculty in Cinema Studies, they were not faculty newly recruited to the University of Washington by our Department; most of the full-time colleagues in literary studies came to Comparative Literature as tenured faculty in other units of the University, as is indeed true of their colleagues in literature and theory who hold partial appointments in the Department. The changes to our faculty over the last decade no doubt require significant adjustment to the definitions of our degree programs, and we are well on our way toward making those adjustments, as the review committee's recommendations indicate.

Comparative Literature departments are inherently interdisciplinary, drawing faculty from many different units; a restrictive curriculum violates their purpose. That being said, we agree that it is time to focus our efforts and programs more than they have been historically. No department, least of all perhaps a department of Comparative Literature (or of Comparative Cinema, Literature, and Textual Studies), can hope to be all things to all people, and it is, finally, the existing faculty which define the department and its aims, rather than the reverse. We are committed to articulating more clearly and coherently the aims and goals of the constituent programs of our department, and by doing so will firmly lay the groundwork for better defining those programs and the work of our (expanded) faculty. In this way, we should be able to achieve a better coordinated effort by the two 'wings' of the department and sustain a more even and well-directed flight toward 'a sense of a common mission and shared future.' And we will be in a better position to assess where the future of the department should be moving as we anticipate the kinds of impact retirements and realignments of effort will require for our undergraduate curriculum and our mentoring and training of graduate students.

As our self-study reported, we have already been discussing for more than a year the possibility of **renaming our Department** to recognize the evolution of its constituent programs and degrees and the research interests of our faculty. The version recommended by the committee has not won immediate support, but we appreciate the underlying rationale for that new title, and share the committee's desire to have the department's name reflect more accurately the substance and aims of our curriculum and programs of study.

While we have not formally used the title of **Associate Chair** for the Director of Cinema Studies, we have (at least in part) provided resources to support the Director's efforts to coordinate the undergraduate and graduate programs in Cinema and Media Studies. In view of the energies required to develop the revised undergraduate major, it makes eminent sense to provide some additional resources to permit the Director to carry out these duties and to make the Cinema Studies Program a central node for curricular planning and coordination across the College.

We have been discussing with the College for a number of years the need for adequate **classroom facilities** to serve our (and others') cinema studies courses. We hope the report's giving prominence to that, and to the need for **TA office space**, will lead to improvements in our physical resources for the department's programs.

## Conclusion

Finally, it would be inappropriate to let this response end without adverting to what many on the faculty believe are aspects of the report's criticisms and recommendations that reveal misunderstandings of, or some lack of appreciation for, already existing positive features of our department's life and activity. These may be the result of gaps left in our self-study, or may be the result of the committee's according to individual, anecdotal comments disproportionate weight, and what in the minds of some of our colleagues seemed a recurrent emphasis on 'discomfort' and 'frustration.'

We were surprised, also, that the report had little by way of general assessment of the department's achievements during the recent decade, or of the awards and faculty positions our graduate students have earned. Aside from some generalities about improved 'morale' and 'national stature' in the opening paragraphs, the bulk of the report suggested that the pointed recommendations were the result of their assessment of those 'frustrations,' when (in fact) most of them reflect initiatives already being undertaken by the department, and discussed in our self-study. All the reasons for the perceived 'uneven development' and 'competition for scarce resources' cannot, of course, be said to rest on the shoulders of the department as a whole—or the literature faculty's lack of a recent thought about their 'collective mission.' The College and the University must take some responsibility for the reduced, and declining, role of the humanities here at UW. In the past five years, Comparative Literature has not been allowed to search for a single faculty member, either to replace retiring faculty or to expand our growing program in Cinema and Media Studies. In addition, we have (because of uncertain budgets, admittedly) faced uncertainty about our ability to fund the graduate students whom we have attracted to our department by extending them multi-year teaching assistantships, which is practically the only way we have to support our students.

Blaming the victims for their condition may be an easy option when the lack of institutional investment and educational vision must bear considerable responsibility. The faculty in the department (and in other Humanities departments) may have been comfortable with, and therefore complicit in, this changing educational environment. But the issues that this report foregrounds are neither unique to, nor dependent upon, the current constitution of the Department of Comparative Literature.

We are pleased that the committee has recommended continuing status for our degree and certificate programs. As a department in transition, we also believe that a report to the Deans of developments over the next five years is an excellent idea: it will inform you, and it will help keep us focused. As a department that is harmonious, with good enrollments in many courses, with nationally prominent faculty in both wings of the department, a leading and profitable academic journal, and graduate career placement records that are considerably more successful than the impression given by the report, we look forward to having the opportunity in five years of describing in detail our considerable progress and accomplishments in all the areas identified in the review committee's recommendations.