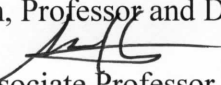


University of Washington Department of Comparative Literature
Conclusions and Recommendations of the Review Committee

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Richard Karpen, Professor and Director, UW School of Music (Review Committee
Chair) 

Brian Reed, Associate Professor, UW Department of English

Patrice Petro, Vice Provost for International Education, Professor of English and Film
Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Haun Saussy, University Professor, Department of Comparative Literature, University of
Chicago

Departmental Culture and Mission:

The review committee spent two days, February 7-8, 2013, meeting and talking with people associated in one way or another with the Department of Comparative Literature. The department's self-study was admirably detailed and helped the review committee get an initial orientation to people, curriculum, and issues of concern. In the course of our visit, we encountered a small department where morale has improved in recent years, but where frustrations are endemic. In response, we propose changes that may foster a sense of common mission and shared future, aimed at removing some sources of discomfort with the status quo.

The department maintains undergraduate tracks in Comparative Literature and Cinema Studies and, in addition to a MA/Ph.D. program, a Graduate Certificate in Cinema & Media Studies and two PhD options: Theory and Criticism and Textual Studies. The recently appointed chair has given serious study to understanding his colleagues' desires and charting a future course for the department. The department has achieved national stature in theory, textual studies, and cinema studies through its distinguished faculty and publications; among its graduates are prominent members of the profession. Despite these accomplishments, we heard evidence of frustration, if not disquiet. As the department's self-study recognized, the majority of faculty in the department are advanced in their careers and status because hiring did not occur for many years, leaving the department ranks thin at the mid-career level. At the same time, the Cinema Studies emphasis has grown. The result has been uneven development, a proliferation of workload in certain areas (notably Cinema Studies) while others are deserted, and a feeling of inevitable competition for scarce resources. Our programmatic suggestions below are intended to relieve these pressures to some degree and steer the department toward planning its future rather than just desperately maintaining the presently existing programs.

Our conversations with faculty members, staff and students in the department revealed a divergence in visions of the department's future. The group of colleagues whose primary focus is Cinema Studies teaches the greatest number of large undergraduate courses and see themselves as trying to keep up with an ever-expanding field; the colleagues in Literary Studies direct the majority of students in the graduate program and have seen their world hold steady, if not shrink. In addition, the Cinema

Studies group had a clear sense of where they wanted to go, while the faculty in literary studies had not spent much time recently thinking about their collective mission.

To a considerable extent, the faculty primarily engaged in Literary Studies and the faculty primarily engaged in Cinema Studies see themselves as working in distinct areas. At times in our conversations the possibility was evoked of Cinema Studies becoming a separate administrative unit. Nonetheless, we do not think that it would be wise or intellectually advisable to set Cinema Studies on its own path at this time. Rather, we recommend **creating a distinct undergraduate major in Cinema Studies** within the present department and taking certain other steps with the objective of **making this unit the campus hub** for historical and theoretical scholarship on cinema and media.

Consideration should be given to **renaming the department**. We suggest “The Department of World Literature, Cinema, and Media” as a more accurate reflection of the likely future path the department is to take. Such a title reflects the strengths and potential strengths of the faculty: this is a department that takes seriously its mission of thinking about literature and culture in a global framework, based on close analysis of documents in their original languages (or media). These properties do not absolutely distinguish Comparative Literature from other units in the Humanities, but overall the mission of other departments has been set by geographic or linguistic range or by emphasis on language acquisition, and their relation to media is different. However it develops in the future, Comparative Literature should continue to play the role of complement (and gadfly) to national-language departments, area studies, generative arts programs, and visual studies. Recent practice confirms this. Even as it has added a new area of study (cinema) to its undergraduate and graduate programs, this department has not lost sight of its multinational, multilingual origins. The chairs of other Humanities departments unanimously recognized the value of the cross-disciplinary, international work that is done here: a new name would make these strengths more recognizable.

With its unusual demographics and clustering of interests, the department would benefit from additional hiring. Of course, every department hopes to expand. We understand that a position has been allocated for next year (2013/14) in **new media** (games, programming, digital culture). The guiding principle in this search should be to find 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.

We also believe that such devices as partial lines and adjunct appointments should be used to **enlarge the department’s roster**, adding to the intellectual diversity of the enterprise and winning allies. Members of other departments who work with literature or film in a way that is consistent with Comparative Literature’s distinct approach should be invited to take part in the reconfigured department. This may be done at little or no cost, by trading existing partial lines or anticipating retirements.

The core faculty of Cinema Studies presented the committee with a document that included a list of current UW faculty who they would like to see join their program formally through such joint appointments or adjunct positions. While the humanities department chairs were unequivocal in their support of the continuation of the Comparative Literature Department, the Cinema Studies faculty felt that it was more difficult now than ever to arrive at agreements with the other Humanities units for release time for faculty to teach within the Cinema Studies area. On the literature side of the Department there was nothing as specific as a list of potential faculty or even general

ideas about areas of expertise that they would like to bring into their curricula – a symptom of the aforementioned need to think more about their collective mission. In light of the strong words of support for both the literature and the cinema areas from the humanities chairs, we recommend that the chairs and the faculty in the humanities be asked to participate in developing a new vision of the literature area that would include commitments of time from faculty in their units in order to renew and sustain the literature area of the Comparative Literature Department.

At the same time, the faculty already present should be encouraged to **devise courses and major tracks that integrate the two major emphases of the department**, literary or textual studies and studies of cinema and media. The task of reflecting on what these areas have in common should result in more intellectual community and a renewed justification for the literary disciplines that currently attract fewer undergraduates and majors. “Theory” has long been a common ground for textual and visual disciplines, now joined by the digital realm. The existing emphasis on theory and criticism could be reshaped as a set of courses that ask the question, “How do we learn to read critically, historically, interculturally, across platforms, without reducing to lowest common denominators?”

Reflecting the increased importance of cinema to the department, we recommend that the **director of the Cinema Studies unit be named associate chair**, with partial course relief to offset the administrative load.

The Humanities find themselves in a defensive position today, and budget conditions at UW add to the stress. Rather than defending territory (an understandable stance), the department should encourage its members to **formulate future plans and strategies**, perhaps including participation in a new Humanities major taught as a combination of independent curricular modules. Inertia is an unaffordable luxury.

We recommend that the department’s progress toward these goals be evaluated in five years, as described in our concluding recommendation. (This will happen automatically if the new major tracks we recommend are established.) Indeed, we are heartened to see that similar steps began to be discussed between the submission of the Self-Study and the review team’s arrival.

Programmatic/Curricular Initiatives

At the undergraduate level, the great programmatic question will be determining a rationale for comparative literary studies. Defining the new major in “Cinema Studies” should help to clarify the department’s self-understanding. Is this a hybrid department, a department integrated around methodology, or a department carrying out parallel programs with similar scope? What is the importance of language study? What are the likely career paths of graduates in Comparative Literature or Cinema Studies?

Recently graduated majors said that they were drawn into Comparative Literature by taking a large class that was compellingly taught—a testimony to the dedication of the faculty. Students spoke of the inspirational quality of learning theory and applying it to new objects. Most had come to Comparative Literature from another discipline seen as more constraining. Some undergraduates spoke to us of language requirements standing in the way of completing their course work. While loath to diminish the role of language,

we advise that it may be opportune to consider having different levels of language requirements for the regular BA and BA-Honors tracks.

We heard, but could not confirm more broadly, an opinion expressed by one undergraduate that the literature side of the department was not welcoming to international students. Perhaps a broadening of scope or an effort to publicize the international character of the program would address this issue.

At the graduate level, we heard concerns that advising was not performed effectively from the beginning of a student's career. Ideally, each incoming graduate student should be assigned an advisor or mentor from the start. In addition, a Proseminar for first-year graduate students would (a) build community, (b) showcase the variety of topics and approaches among the department's faculty, and (c) introduce the theoretical and critical concepts that graduate students will use throughout their careers. At the other end of the graduate-school experience, professional development is necessary. Preparation for the job market, advising about the mechanics of seeking a job, help in reading articles for submission to journals, mock interviews and the like all reduce anxiety and build confidence.

The current PhD option in Theory and Criticism could, we feel, be phased out without loss, as theory has migrated to become an integral part of so many disciplines. Teaching hours dedicated to courses for the Certificate could be redeployed in the integrative courses we have suggested at both graduate and undergraduate levels.

We recommend that a stable number of TA lines be dedicated to courses in cinema or new media. We would like to insist that the currently existing TA-ships in language areas be maintained, since language is central to the identity of comparative literature.

Lesser matters to be addressed include the confusing and unnecessary system of cross-listing and the use of the 315 course number ("National Cinemas") as a catch-all for courses that would better be developed as regular offerings related to the faculty's specific areas of interest.

Physical:

Several colleagues spoke of the need for reliable, adequately-equipped classroom spaces. This is especially crucial for the teaching of Cinema and Media Studies. A soundproofed media room for screening will be a vital, much-used resource. Physical space for TA offices is at a premium, with four or more course assistants often crowded into a single room.

Personnel:

The department's diversity committee has reportedly been on hiatus and is now about to be reconstituted. We feel that recognizing and seeking diversity is essential to a department with such international range. Similarly, the department should engage with GOMAP to recruit and retain underrepresented minorities in its graduate programs.

Inasmuch as the Cinema Studies emphasis bears so many of the student hours, administrative support should be specifically designated for it. Administrative support would also make more practical the idea of making the department the hub for activities involving film generally across campus: the Cinema Studies administrator could be

tasked with collaborating with colleagues across campus, and organizing a calendar of screenings, lectures, and visits by directors, conferences and the like.

We note that, historically, faculty members have devoted more or less of their time to Comparative Literature at different stages of their career. Some current members whose focus of activity has gone elsewhere might wish to redeem their (usually fractional) appointments in Comparative Literature. By freeing up these pieces of FTE, the department would have a currency with which to recruit new members already on campus. This will take diplomacy, but if associated with the reorganization process can perhaps be done without provoking distrust.

Discussions should be opened with faculty and with the Dean about the eventual succession of longtime senior members of the department. Since, as we have noted above, the department went through years of no new hires, repopulating the ranks will be essential. Gaining some reassurance about these replacements will depend, we expect, on constructing a persuasive rationale for comparative worldwide studies of literature, cinema and other media. The department is fortunate in having a faculty of thoughtful, generous, imaginative individuals who treat each other with friendship and respect, and are certainly up to the task.

The review committee recommends continuing status for the department's degree and certificate programs, with full program review in ten years. In addition, we recommend submission of an interim report after five years to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and to the Graduate School. The interim report should describe what progress the department has made in response to the review committee's recommendations.