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July 30, 2003

To: David Thorud
Acting Provost

From: Marsha Landolt, Dean

Re: Department of Comparative Literature Program Review

Summary and Recommended Action

At its meeting of May 1, 2003, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team reviewing the Department of Comparative Literature as well as with Michael Halleran, Divisional Dean for Arts and Humanities, and Gary Handwerk, Chair of the Department. The Council recommended continuation of all the Department's degree programs (B.A., M.A. and Ph.D.), with its next review to be conducted in 10 years (2013). The Council was impressed with the Department's consistent high quality and outstanding leadership. Its strong recommendation followed considerable discussion of the Department's potential as a nexus in future work in the Humanities.

Background

Comparative Literature works across national and regional boundaries to explore the relationships among multiple literary traditions, and the connections of literature to other arts and fields of knowledge. It is less a distinct discipline than a place for working through connections within and across disciplinary fields of study. It is a nodal point for the Humanities in particular; as such, more than other departments it depends deeply on—and contributes to—the units that surround it. Since its last review, the Department and College have codified the involvement of faculty from these units in Comparative Literature, creating a new set of partially salaried appointments (12 partially salaried faculty slots, totaling 3.17 total faculty FTE, were added in September 1993). This and other changes have enhanced the Department's ability to deliver its programs. Cinema Studies was established as a separate track within the Comparative Literature undergraduate major in 1998. It has become extremely popular: it has granted 70 B.A. degrees in the last two years, has currently 107 declared majors, and sends 20-25 students on internships each year. The Department also embarked on a review of the undergraduate literary studies major to clarify learning objectives and encourage students to undertake a more broadly international course of study. As a result, undergraduate enrollments have grown: enrollment figures for

Autumn 2002 showed Comparative Literature to be the second-largest department in the Humanities. In addition, the Department has worked to decrease graduate enrollments, thereby allowing for better advising and mentoring. It has also enhanced professional development activities, revamped its PhD exam system, and worked to improve graduate student support. Although difficulties remain (especially in the area of student support) which hamper the Department's recruitment abilities, recent student awards and PhD placements attest to the growing success of the Department's approach.

In its report, the review team underscored the sense that the Department will derive its greatest benefit from focusing on its identity as a *Comparative Literature* program; that is, by not becoming overwhelmed by any one of its dynamic programs—Cinema Studies is currently the prime example—but instead by incorporating these activities into an evolving vision of comparative scholarship and teaching focused on texts. Developing and maintaining such a vision of itself is the largest challenge identified by the review team for the next 10 years. The Council in its discussion was most struck by what one individual called the program's potential as a unique "center of attention for rethinking the humanities." It currently functions as a node in its relation to many national literature departments; this should be encouraged and its scope should continue to expand into non-European areas. The Council queried, however, whether this nodal function should not be considered more broadly; whether Comparative Literature should not take up the challenge of becoming a nexus for intellectual and public discussions within and beyond the Humanities. To accomplish this, faculty split appointments and TA support will have to be further stabilized and supported.

cc: Lee Huntsman, Interim President
David Hodge, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Michael Halleran, Divisional Dean for Arts and Humanities
John Slattery, Associate Dean for Academic Programs
Members of the Review Committee
Graduate School Council
Heidi Tilghman, Assistant to the Dean