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COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, CINEMA AND MEDIA  
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January 18, 2018

To: Robert C. Stacey, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
David L. Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean, The Graduate School  
Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, The Graduate School

From: Eric Ames, Department Chair, Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media (CLCM)

**RE: Interim Report on the 2012-13 Review of the Dept. of Comparative Literature**

The May 28, 2013 memo from David Eaton and Rebecca Aanerud requesting an interim report on our last decennial review outlines the general challenges and risks that were then facing the Department of Comparative Literature, followed by specific recommendations from the Graduate School Council. This report describes how, over the past five years, the Department has responded to all these points, in the order that they are presented in the memo.

**1. "Few faculty at the mid-career level due to a hiatus in hiring;"**

RESPONSE: Since 2013, the Department has hired one assistant professor (Groening), who works in Cinema and Media Studies (CMS) and is currently up for tenure and promotion. Another assistant professor (Mahadevan), also in CMS, was promoted to the rank of associate. One full professor (Ames) moved his appointment from Germanics, while another (Wong) moved fifty percent from English; both work in CMS. As far as Comparative Literature, one assistant professor (Benitez) left the Department. We've also had six more retirements (Brown, Collins, Modiano, Searle, Steele, and Vaughan – a mix of partial and full-time appointments) and zero replacements, for a total loss of 4 FTEs. One jointly appointed full professor (Staten) moved entirely back to English, while another (Handwerk) moved entirely from English to CLCM. In sum, the Department today is smaller than it was in 2013, and has a few more faculty at the mid-career level, because of promotions and lateral moves. In the course of time, the challenge has changed: now we have few faculty members at the early-career level due to a hiatus in hiring.

2. **“The growth of Cinema Studies, coupled with a Literary Studies emphasis that has seen its world hold steady, if not shrink, has generated an uneven workload and a sense of competition for scarce resources.”**

RESPONSE: These challenges stemmed in part from the perceived, yet unspoken status of Cinema Studies as secondary to that of Comparative Literature within the Department. Over the past five years, with so many retirements in Comparative Literature, the CMS faculty have necessarily taken on administrative responsibilities (including Department Chair, Associate Chair, and Graduate Program Coordinator). In so doing, the perception of their workload and access to resources has changed a bit, even though several of these faculty members actually carry an even greater load now than they did in 2013, service has become even more demanding, and internal resources have become scarcer than ever. CMS faculty have also been particularly successful in winning grants from external sources (the Mellon Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences) as well as internal sources (RRF, Society of Scholars), providing those faculty members with much-needed course relief, while boosting their sense of worth. From an ABB perspective, CMS courses now play a vital role for the Department, generating the vast majority of our student credit hours and degrees granted. CMS continues to offer at least one large lecture (sometimes two) every quarter, each with capacity for 120-240 students, depending on TA support. What’s more, every full-time CMS faculty member has joined the large-lecture rotation, including the Chair, the Associate Chair, and the GPC – perhaps a unique situation. Although we are currently unable to give course reductions for service positions, these faculty members understand the situation, partly as a result of their new leadership roles, and every one of them has stepped up, without exception. In Autumn 2017, the Department introduced a new free-standing major in Cinema and Media Studies, and we expect to see a gradual uptick in the number of majors. The challenge then will be how to staff the program as it continues to flourish. Without new hires, the Department will soon have a new, more consequential labor problem within CMS itself.

**“The review committee proposed changes with a stated goal of fostering a sense of common mission and shared future, aimed at removing some sources of discomfort with the status quo.”**

### **Undergraduate program**

3. **“Create a distinct undergraduate major in Cinema Studies and take steps to make Comparative Literature the campus hub for historical and theoretical scholarship on cinema and media;”**

RESPONSE: We have had great success in this area. As a result of extensive collaboration among the CMS faculty, which had already begun before the last review, we created and implemented a distinct B.A. in Cinema and Media Studies. Its key features include a new gateway course (CMS 301), four series of 300 and 400-level courses on historical issues and critical concepts in film and media studies, and a new senior capstone (CMS 487). There are already signs of increased student interest in the new major. With direct

admissions coming to the division in Autumn 2019, we believe this new major will attract more students than ever before. (The “Cinema Studies Option” in Comparative Literature is being phased out, but it remains on the books until all the students registered in it have graduated.) On another level, we continue to collaborate with faculty from other units (including Anthropology, Communications, Drama, DXARTS, Music, GWSS, and all the language and literature departments); to cross-list their film and media-related courses; and to advertise events around the study of film and media on campus and beyond. Finally, we have undertaken a number of smaller initiatives to increase visibility of the new CMS major and to build community among our students. These include: providing free popcorn to the 1,200 new Huskies who attend Quad Flicks, the outdoor movie that is part of Dawg Daze and organized by First Year Programs; hosting “The Big Social,” a party including free food and bowling for the hundreds of students currently enrolled in CMS courses; and making more use of social media accounts (on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook). These have become our primary means for reaching students as well as for promoting events.

**4. “Redesign the curriculum so that the unit’s two major emphases (literary/textual studies and cinema/media studies) are better integrated;”**

RESPONSE: Today, this recommendation feels like a relic of an earlier age. It is also too insular and faculty-centered, and doesn’t take into account the realities of student interests, fields of study, and related job markets. In 2013, there was no distinct major in CMS; we had only one major, which subsumed all its various elements under the sign of Comp Lit. Now, by contrast, the prospect of a CMS department may be imminent (for some even desirable). A few of us (Crnkovic, Sokoloff, and Steele) have combined film and literature in the context of particular courses. (The same holds true for some cross-listed courses housed in area studies and national literature departments.) At the program level, however, the faculty decided against this recommendation in favor of another: to develop a coherent, independent CMS major and strengthen its role on campus.

**5. “Determine the rationale and role of comparative literary studies in the curriculum;”**

RESPONSE: From Summer 2015 to Spring 2017, a small group of Comp Lit faculty worked hard to reimagine the program in terms of “world literature.” The high point of this initiative was a conference that we organized on “Teaching World Literature: Debates, Models, Pedagogies.” It included something like an outside review committee (scholars from Harvard, Stanford, Rutgers, Wisconsin, George Mason, and Simon Fraser) focused exclusively on the prospects for world literature at UW. Two results came of it: First, we created a new course called “World Literature and the Nobel Prize” (C LIT 200). Taught by a rotating cast of faculty from across the Humanities, the course was offered for the first time in Autumn 2017, and enrolled one hundred students (more than any other C LIT course in recent years). Second, we came to realize that, for all our good intentions, teaching world literature is not something that any one department can do; it needs to be a divisional project. And that is where our efforts came to an end, for the time being. Our initial proposal for a divisional major housed in CLCM found no traction among chairs

(who have their own agendas and no concrete incentives to collaborate), but it might obtain new relevance in the context of direct admissions. We hope it does.

**6. “Consider offering different levels of language requirements for the BA vs. BA Honors track;”**

RESPONSE: We had to reduce the language requirement for both the C LIT degree and the Honors track. In 2009, the UW eliminated its foreign language requirement (beyond the admissions requirement of two years of one foreign language in high school). By 2013, as a result of this change and its knock-on effects, the Department had to drop its own requirement of at least one foreign literature course in order to remain viable. Now the C LIT major requires (among other things) 15 credits “in 300 or 400 level literature, cinema or media studies courses from among the offerings of Comparative Literature and the following participating departments: Asian, Classics, English, Germanics, NELC, French and Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, Scandinavian, and Slavic.” It is entirely possible to satisfy this requirement by taking three courses taught in English. The Departmental Honors Program now requires only “One foreign literature course, studied in the original language.” Both reductions were meant to stimulate the C LIT major by making it easier for students to complete. Unfortunately, the number of C LIT majors continues to shrink.

**7. “Consider renumbering courses so as to minimize confusion.”**

RESPONSE: In Autumn 2016, as part of our efforts to create a free-standing CMS major, we rolled out a new course prefix, CMS, in addition to our historical prefix, C LIT. At the same time, we also renumbered the CMS courses, to minimize confusion with C LIT course offerings and to delineate the new CMS curriculum.

## **Graduate Program**

**8. “Implement strategies and coursework that would allow for greater mentorship and professional and intellectual socialization;”**

RESPONSE: We’ve made good progress in this area, thanks to our GPA (Yuko Mera), who has spurred every one of these initiatives. To begin, the GPC (Braester) implemented a faculty mentorship program. Every incoming graduate student is paired with a faculty mentor (ideally, one who works in a different area of specialization than that of the graduate student). Throughout the first year, they meet on a regular basis to discuss the challenges and opportunities of course work, exams, dissertation projects, and graduate-student life. In addition, we have organized a series of orientation events, so that incoming students meet the faculty and some of the more advanced graduate students right away. In 2016, the GPC led a first-quarter practicum, designed to open up a broad view of the fields of both Comparative Literature and Cinema and Media Studies. We have held professionalization workshops on aspects of publishing and on various phases of the academic job search (with another planned for Winter 2018). Occasionally, we have hosted lunches as a low-key way of bringing together grad students from different admission cohorts and different areas of study. Finally, we have instituted quarterly “graduate

student meetings,” which are loosely based on the model of faculty meetings. These provide a forum for discussion at a critical moment in our trajectory as a department and for improving communication between graduate students and the Chair.

**9. “The doctoral degree option in Theory and Criticism could be phased out without a loss, with teaching hours diverted to more integrative courses;”**

RESPONSE: This is another initiative that was already underway at the time of the last review. Since then, the Theory and Criticism degree option has “gone dark” and no longer appears on our website or in the available information about the Department. The joint-doctoral program is no longer enrolling, and we are no longer advertising it in either admissions or recruiting. There are however a few continuing grad students who registered for this option years ago, and have completed its requirements, but have yet to complete their doctoral dissertations. So we have not yet begun the RCEP process.

**10. “Stabilize TA lines in cinema and new-media courses;”**

RESPONSE: We have done our best under the circumstances. Over the past five years, the Department has had to weather a perfect storm. Previously, Comparative Literature relied for most of its TA quarters on the English department and the foreign-language units. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement. Graduate students in Comparative Literature need experience teaching composition and language; English and foreign-language units need graduate-level instructors to staff their programs (and also to populate their seminars). Historically, then, Comp Lit admissions were based on the number of TA quarters that we received from other departments. And yet, the increased cost in TA wages has reduced the number of TA quarters for units across the board. With the exception of French and Italian Studies, foreign-language units can no longer afford to offer us any TA quarters (and we in turn can no longer admit students who work in those languages). Under these circumstances, we have we have lobbied hard for an increase in our permanent TA allocation, so far without success. Permanent TA allocation at UW is historical and not rational or based on data. It is also a zero-sum game. Just last week we lost another 3 quarters due to budget cuts alone. All we can do now is gradually shift some of our 19 TA quarters from C Lit to CMS courses. Yet even that won’t do. Next year, for the first time ever, it appears that we won’t be able to meet our existing guarantees, even though we have scaled down admissions in recent years. In 2017, we admitted only one graduate student, and this year we are contemplating zero admits. Without an increase in our permanent TA allocation, CMS – one of the division’s few growth areas, with courses reaching enrollments of 200 or more every quarter – will have to downsize its classes and teach them without TAs, resulting in a drastic reduction in SCH and revenue generated, for lack of instructional support.

**11. “Obtain more space for TA offices;”**

RESPONSE: Demand for space on campus has reached an all-time high. In 2015, we lost the one TA office that we had in Communications. We were able to move the 4 TAs being housed there over to the second floor of Padelford, into an office that has been temporarily loaned to us. We also have two “permanent” TA offices there. One faculty member (Bean)

generously shares her office with a TA every quarter. When faculty go on leave, we put TAs in their offices, too, but that tends to be on a quarter-to-quarter basis. In any given quarter, then, 5 or more TAs still do not have office space. The problem remains unsolved.

**12. “Emphasize its diversity mission and work with GOMAP to recruit and retain underrepresented minorities in its graduate programs.”**

RESPONSE: Since 2013, the Department’s Diversity Committee has been reconstituted, and each year it includes a graduate student representative. In 2016, building on the work of that committee and extensive discussion at faculty meetings, we published a diversity statement (<https://complit.washington.edu/diversity>), which declares our commitment to recruiting and retaining underrepresented minorities at every level. We continue to apply for GO-MAP Graduate Diversity Fellowships. Since 2015, we have used The National Name Exchange. The Chair sends letters to all student participants who indicate an interest in either film or media, informing them about our program, encouraging them to apply, and following up with those who express interest. Thanks to the generosity of one faculty member (Searle), we also have a new “Opportunity Award” to help recruit underrepresented minorities to our graduate program. The annual distribution amounts to about \$2,000 in top-off money as part of a larger recruitment package. (If only we could make use of it. This year, it appears, we won’t be able to admit any graduate students, for lack of instructional support.) Last but not least, we recently created two new DIV courses: “Perspectives on Visual Culture: Sex, Race, and Power” (CMS 275) and “Oppositional Cinema and Media” (CMS 321), each of which could be scaled up to include TAs, with added instructional support from the College.

## **General**

**13. “Consider renaming the department to more accurately reflect the unit’s trajectory;”**

RESPONSE: In Spring 2014, we were officially renamed the Department of Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media. Symbolically, the new name recognizes and gives equal weight to both “sides” of the Department. That was important for the CMS faculty at the time of the last review. Practically, however, the new name turns out to have drawbacks. For one, it’s a mouthful. For another, it’s idiosyncratic and therefore unrecognizable outside of the UW. (Maybe that explains why, after numerous requests to update its list of academic departments, the UW website continues to call us Comparative Literature: <http://www.washington.edu/about/academics/departments/>) Prospective graduate students continue to request clarification about the status of CMS within the Department, and with good reason. Our Ph.D. degree remains in Comparative Literature, which is not ideal or advantageous for graduate students competing for jobs in cinema and media studies. Finally, the new name and its acronym (CLCM) both have unforeseen downsides for online searches and web domain names – two related issues that also need to be considered when naming departments. Indeed, as the College moves toward direct admissions, the problem of recognition will extend to prospective undergraduates, their parents and advisers. With all this in mind, we have been working with UW IT to make the Department more visible, legible, and recognizable to others online. Rather than “reflect the unit’s trajectory” (a very

narrow way of framing this recommendation), a name should speak to those who don't already know about us and help us connect out to them.

- 14. “Enlarge the departmental roster and intellectual diversity by:**  
**a. striving to make additional hires;**  
**b. using adjunct appointments and partial faculty lines;”**

RESPONSE: Since 2013, we have requested to make multiple hires every year that the administration has invited search requests. We received authorization for only one, but that one had already been promised in Spring 2012, prior to the last review. So we have been unable to make any progress in this area since the review committee made its recommendation. To make matters worse, the College just announced a new hiring freeze. And yet we remain optimistic about our chances to make additional hires as soon as the freeze is lifted, because of continued demand and growth in CMS.

By Winter 2019, scheduled retirements will have reduced Comparative Literature to 1.25 FTE (Handwerk and a fraction of Reed), and we are told that these lost positions will not be replaced. In other words, we will soon become a “Department of Cinema and Media” de facto, by means of attrition alone. In the meanwhile, it is possible to have a curriculum that relies almost exclusively on adjuncts and cross-listed courses – that’s how we’re able to mount a program next year – but it’s not sustainable. It also creates a new set of problems around staffing (adjuncts teach electives based on the needs of their home departments, as determined by their chairs), time to degree (core courses become scarce), planning, service, graduate recruitment, and TA training. Since 2013, we have made one adjunct appointment (Alavi, NELC) and several faculty members have moved either part or all of their lines to CLCM, as noted earlier. But the climate for such appointments has become almost hostile in recent years, with chairs seeking to block such moves for lack of resources and other reasons. Diplomacy has its limits. Add to this both the hiring freeze and CAS budget cuts and the current situation comes into view. What was once a sensible means of enlarging the departmental roster – indeed, that’s how Comparative Literature was historically populated – has become increasingly difficult and ineffective.

- 15. “Create the position of Associate Chair, held by the Cinema Studies Director;”**

RESPONSE: We created this position in 2014. It doesn’t come with partial course relief, unfortunately; it provides only one month of administrative supplement. The position of Associate Chair formally recognizes the importance of the administrative work that the director of CMS does year after year. Now that the position has been created, some rotation in it would be helpful. While the Department Chair changes every three to five years, the Associate Chair (Cinema Studies Director) does not. This is a sensitive matter, but it could have been addressed up front, when the position was created, along with strategies for maintaining continuity. The sharing of leadership has implications not just in terms of workload, recognition, and supplementary pay, but also – more importantly – for promoting among the faculty even greater collaboration, a sense of public outreach and accountability, and a better understanding of administrative challenges. In a small department, persuading faculty to assume administrative duties can be especially

difficult. But there needs to be an expectation of regular change in leadership at every level.

**16. “Fund administrative support dedicated to the cinema studies emphasis;”**

RESPONSE: So far, no steps have been taken in this direction. As the CMS program has grown, Comp Lit has shrunk, and the staff has adjusted its approach. This issue may need to be revisited, if the CMS degree succeeds in attracting a more significant number of majors and the Department becomes reconfigured in the wake of retirements.

**17. “Consider a sound-proofed media room for screenings.”**

RESPONSE: We have tried in vain to identify a space on campus that could potentially be converted into a designated screening room. Film programs at peer universities have multiple screening rooms, big and small. At the UW, however, to have even one is almost too much to ask. Even if we had an interested donor (as we currently do), CMS doesn’t have the institutional leverage that sort of acquisition would require, especially with the campus-wide crunch for classroom space. For these and other reasons, we are trying a different approach: streaming video. It doesn’t solve the problem of physical space, but students today just expect to have personal screens and streaming video. The social and technological conditions for screenings have changed. With that in mind, we have been working with the UW Libraries as well as with a cloud-based service called MediaAMP to provide all our students with secure, reliable, round-the-clock access to course materials. We still hope to one day have a gathering space for screenings and public events, but for the time being we’ll make use of the cloud and take advantage of online learning tools.

cc: Michael C. Shapiro, Divisional Dean for the Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences  
Wesley Henry, Associate Director, Academic Affairs & Planning, The Graduate School