Mission: Cinema and Comparative Literature (CCL). At the core of CCL’s 21st-century educational mission is the crossing of borders—between nations, media, and disciplines. To that end, CCL’s constituent programs promote the study of the arts and technologies of modern global print and media cultures as a nexus of instruction, scholarship, creativity, and public programming focused on world literatures, international cinemas, literary translation, and film, video, and digital production.

CCL comprises 4 graduate programs and awards 6 graduate degrees: Comparative Literature (MA, PhD), Film Studies (MA, PhD), Film and Video Production (MFA), and Literary Translation (MFA). CCL’s major objectives include: (1) broad undergraduate education in creative and scholarly aspects of its focus areas; (2) in-depth graduate education attentive to professional training; (3) interdisciplinary connections with other programs, departments, and colleges within the university; and (4) extensive public programming and outreach activities, integrated with the professionalization of graduate students. CCL’s academic degree programs (MA and PhD) that study artistic media and culture are thus interconnected with the MFA programs in which the creation of new artistic media (film and world literature) is the central focus; in effect, the department puts the scholarly and the creative together in a manner that is both unique—it is the only department of its kind at the UI—and highly productive in the training of both undergraduate and graduate students (see also “Program Characteristics” below).

Budgeted faculty are at 12.4 FTEs, with one FTE pending in the form of a director for the translation MFA program, half of whose position the Provost’s Office has pledged to support as soon as CLAS is in a position to authorize the search. These FTEs comprise 15 total faculty members, 10 appointed 100% in CCL and 5 with partial CCL appointments. CCL’s graduate programs rest on a bedrock of approximately 300 undergraduate majors and thousands of enrollments each year. CCL’s 6 graduate degree programs currently serve 76 graduate students: 37 are candidates for the PhD, 28 for the MFA, and 11 for the MA. All programs take active part in both internal and external funding competitions for graduate students, and all grant TAships for the delivery of courses at the undergraduate level in the 4 departmental areas of literary studies, film studies, filmmaking, and translation, as well as through the Interpretation of Literature program (English), the modern foreign language departments, Rhetoric, and Classics.

Program Mission Statements

Comparative Literature (CL). CL students conduct research on literatures and cultures from comparative and international perspectives. The subfield of Translations Studies continues to develop as a distinctive feature of the PhD. In 2009-10, students are working in Arabic, Chinese, Danish, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish literatures, with on-site research in China, Denmark, Israel, and Japan. In the past 2 years students have chaired and presented on panels at the Associated Writing Programs conference in New York, the American Association of Literary Translators conferences in Minneapolis and Pasadena, and other regional, national, and international conferences. From 2006 to 2008, graduate student creative work appeared in 7 different literary journals. One Presidential Fellow was admitted in 2009 and another continues from 2007.

Film Studies (FS). The FS MA serves 2 basic purposes: (1) to give students substantial training in film analysis, history, and theory, and (2) to afford students an opportunity to learn about various film-related disciplines in order to make an informed career choice. The FS PhD is dedicated to the questioning of received knowledge and
the creation of new knowledge about film, charting the ways in which film shares or challenges the production of knowledge with other forms of art, communication, and culture. It also depends on an ability to share insights with scholars and practitioners around the world. The FS doctoral program encourages students to consider the relation between art and society from interdisciplinary, international, and comparative perspectives.

FS trains internationally diverse students to become exceptional instructors (two recently won Outstanding Teaching Assistant awards) and leading scholars of film history and theory; recent graduates teach in tenure-track jobs at the University of Chicago, the Catholic University, Michigan State, and Hofstra, among others. Dissertations produced in our program have won national awards and are regularly revised for publication at leading university presses. Our MA and PhD students regularly present work at national and international conferences (including 11 at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in 2008) and publish in professional journals; they also regularly organize public events, including the Avant-Doc conference (Spring 2009) and Works in Progress Festival (Fall 2009). Reflecting the international and intellectual strengths of our program, one of our students spent the last two summers in China attending the Beijing Film Academy and an interdisciplinary design conference in Shanghai, two have recently completed research in India, three are Crossing Borders Fellows, and two are Presidential Fellows.

**Film and Video Production MFA (FVP).** FVP combines creative and scholarly coursework aimed at developing the candidate’s ability to produce effective artistic work in film and video. Thorough hands-on training, regular critiques, and a strong scholarly environment support MFA candidates as they develop technique and build a historical, critical and theoretical background that both informs their creative work and prepares them for creative and academic career paths. Graduates have been successful in attaining tenure track jobs at numerous institutions including Penn State, the University of Colorado, Vassar, the University of Denver, Ithaca College, and Emerson College. MFA students regularly screen their work at established film/video festivals including Ann Arbor, PDX, Black Maria, Athens, and many others. In recent years, students have organized three important festivals that bring filmmakers to Iowa City to interact with students and local audiences: the Iowa City Experimental (ICE) Film Festival (Fall 2007), the Iowa City International Documentary Festival (Spring 2007 and 2008), and Iowa City Microcinema (2008). Three students gave conference papers in 2007 and two students were named Obermann Fellows and participated in the Obermann Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy in January 2008. FVP currently has two Iowa Arts Fellows and one Graduate Dean’s Fellow.

**Literary Translation MFA (LT).** The core of the LT program is the Translation Workshop, which employs the workshop method developed at Iowa in the mid-twentieth century to develop candidates’ ability to produce effective artistic works in translation. LT students also frequently take part in the IWP translation workshop, in CL seminars, and in creative writing courses in the other constituent MFA writing programs at the UI. Graduates have been successful in obtaining professional positions in arts organizations such as the Goethe Institute and tenure-track jobs at institutions such as the University of Michigan, the University of Zadar (Croatia), and Florida Atlantic University. Students in the program edit the online translation magazine *Exchanges* and regularly take part in readings in collaboration with other UI writing programs, as well as the annual conferences of the American Literary Translators Association and the Association of Writing Programs. In 2008-9, translation MFA students received internal and external grants to carry out research in Bolivia, Germany, Italy, Fiji, and the UK. This year’s cohort includes translators from Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Modern Hebrew, Norwegian, and Spanish. Graduates from the program have recently published book-length fiction and poetry translated from French, Croatian, Italian, and Modern Hebrew. The program currently has three Iowa Arts Fellows, a Graduate Diversity Fellow, and a Fulbright Fellow from Iraq.

**Admission Processes and Criteria**

CCL’s admissions committees for each program comprise the program head and at least two members of the general faculty. All programs maintain very high criteria for selecting students, determining cumulative quality based upon each student’s academic record, GRE/GMAT, TOEFL scores for international students, letters of
recommendation, and a statement of purpose. CL and FS also require scholarly writing samples, and FVP and LT require portfolios of creative work (see also this section below). All of these, as well as a supplemental information form, are used to carefully determine that applicants meet the high standards of our programs and match the expertise of the faculty and the resources of the UI. The admissions committees pay attention to all parts of the application: GPA, test scores, statements, writing samples, life experience, recommendation letters, and creative portfolios, as they look for evidence of learning ability, creative thinking, a self-starting attitude, and an aptitude for independent work.

The MAs and PhDs in CL and FS average a total of approximately 90 applications per year from an exceptionally diverse range of students, from both private and public schools of various rankings, and from around the world: current and recent graduate students in our program hail from France, Germany, India, South Korea, Iceland, Japan, China, Russia, and Brazil, as well as the United States.

In CL, multi-year packages of support are rarely awarded, except in the case of Presidential Fellows, but we do not admit students without funding, and we anticipate being able to fund students through a maximum of 5 years. In FS, all admitted PhD students are guaranteed 5 years of financial support through a combination of fellowships, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships. Qualified MA and PhD students from CCL often receive support by teaching courses in other programs, including Rhetoric, the foreign language departments, and the Gen Ed Lit program administered by the English Department. Recently reduced opportunities for our qualified students in such programs have significantly hampered our efforts to support graduate students through such means (see also Program Characteristics below).

The required portfolio for application to each of the MFA program requires specific materials: for FVP these comprise creative films and/or videos; for LT they are translations into English of poetry or fiction accompanied by original source texts. Since both our MFAs have a strong scholarly component, we review the academic record and writing samples carefully to ensure that candidates will contribute to the intellectual life of the entire department. The most important components of the MFA application materials are thus the statements of purpose and creative portfolios. In these, we consider the candidates ability to grow given the resources of our faculty, the appropriateness of the candidate’s goals, and the diversity each candidate would bring to our community. FVP requires previous experience in film/video making, but not an academic background in film/video. The program does not seek any particular style of film/video making but instead works to determine potential for development in all modes of production. LT applicants must demonstrate evidence of advanced competence in the source language and exceptional English creative writing skills. LT also requires GRE scores.

As a result of such efforts, CCL’s MFA programs receive healthy numbers of applications each year from qualified candidates (approximately 60), and admitted applicants represent an exceptionally diverse group. Of the 27 MFA students currently enrolled, two are African-Americans, one is Native American, one Hispanic American, two students are from China, and one student each is from Great Britain, Israel, Iraq, and Romania. Admitted MFA students are offered financial support with the expectation that this support will be renewed for up to 3 years for the successful candidate. Most FVP students receive 1/3-time TAships (.67 HTE). LT student support ranges from 1/4-time to 1/2-time (.5 - 1 HTE). Students receiving Iowa Arts Fellowships generally complete the MFA in 2 years, and CCL’s MFA programs generally receive between 2 and 3 such awards each year.

Program Outcomes

Degree completion rates for CCL’s PhD programs between 1996 and 2001 averaged approximately 53% (64% for FS and 43% for CL). Time-to-degree rates tended to be high relative to other PhD programs in the same period. These figures have improved markedly in recent years but remain high in some cases as students are expected to attain a high degree of mastery in other languages en route to their dissertation projects, with clear benefits to their research and careers. Moreover, we also want to emphasize that the consistently high quality of the dissertations produced in our programs—many of them award-winning and eventually revised into prominent
publications—confirms that the additional time required is sometimes warranted. Degree completion rates and time-to-degree rates for the MFA programs, according to our internal records, are exemplary: very few students leave the programs without completing their degrees, and almost none take longer than three years to finish.

Graduate students in CL and FS are regularly supported by Presidential Fellowships and appointments as Crossing Borders Fellows, and consistently receive Seashore-Ballard Dissertation fellowships, among other internal awards. They are also supported by external awards and fellowships: recent examples include year-long fellowships from the US Fulbright Program and the American Institute for Indian Studies. CCL graduate students have also been awarded Outstanding Teaching Assistant awards (three in recent years), and a recent FS graduate won the Outstanding Dissertation Award from the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, the main professional organization in the field. Most of our students present their work at major conferences and publish essays in notable journals and anthologies prior to their graduation. A significant number of books in CL and FS from major academic publishers (Duke, California, Columbia, Indiana, and Routledge) are derived from Iowa dissertations.

Students who complete a CL or FS MA may go on to doctoral work in CL or FS or another discipline, MFA work in literature, film, or another discipline, a Library Sciences degree, film distribution, literary publishing, film programming, archival work, arts management, and many other disciplines. At the PhD level, our graduates have systematically garnered the top teaching positions in their home countries (Canada, Iceland, Finland, Japan, Korea, the Philippines) or in the U.S. (Dartmouth, Middlebury, Harvard, Brown, Yale, Georgetown, Pittsburgh, Notre Dame, Indiana, Chicago, Northwestern, De Paul, Texas, Colorado, etc.). Though competition for jobs has increased in recent years, Iowa has maintained a very strong placement record: in 2008-09 FS graduates have accepted tenure-track jobs at the Catholic University, Michigan State, and Hofstra, while more than half the PhDs in CL over the past decade have found positions (part-time and tenure-track) in which their skills in literary studies, film studies, language pedagogy, and inter-media make them attractive junior colleagues; its most recent placements are at Michigan, San Francisco State, Florida Atlantic, and McGill.

FVP and LT MFAs have been successful at finding publishers for their creative works and at exhibiting their work at internationally competitive film festivals. For those who choose an academic career, our students have been very successful at finding faculty positions. We attribute this to the unique blend of scholarship and creativity within our MFA programs. FVP graduates have taken teaching positions in a range of universities and colleges across the country including Penn State, the University of Colorado, the University of Michigan, Kansas State, Denver University, Grand Valley State, Ithaca College, Emerson College, Pratt Institute, and others. LT graduates work as freelance translators or have found positions in arts organizations such as the Goethe Institute; others have continued on to Ph.D. programs at Michigan, UC Irvine, Northwestern, NYU, UW Madison, and the UI. Most of our graduates enter the academic profession, though some FVP graduates have sought out successful careers in the film/video industry. For example, one graduate owns a commercial film editing house in Chicago, another is a camera operator/cinematographer in Seattle. A few work in community video, supervising and teaching video production for diverse groups such as inner-city teenagers, or the Inuit population of Northern Canada.

Program Characteristics

One of the most exciting aspects for graduate students in CCL is the opportunity to work with faculty and students from any of the four programs. CL and LT students regularly take film history and theory courses, FS students take FVP courses, FVP students take CL and FS courses, and so forth. These interactions also extend to teaching, as FS students with the requisite expertise are sometimes appointed to teach FVP courses, LT students teach CL course, and so on. We have created an intellectual and artistic community unlike any other at the UI, indeed, unlike any other in the nation.

As this document emphasizes, moreover, all CCL programs work together in producing a vibrant interdisciplinary and inter-arts environment for students and faculty alike. Maintaining such an environment
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requires admitting an average of 18-21 new students each year into our constituent programs—2-3 in CL, 8-10 in FS, 4 in FVP, and 4 in LT. These are also the numbers that can be served by our current faculty strength and the numbers that will enable the department to continue to fulfill its role in the undergraduate teaching mission of the university, especially through such courses as the large lecture series Major Texts of World Literature (048:040 and 041), Survey of Film (048:002), courses in the writing track of the B.A. of English (048:078 and 048:079), and the regular variety of first-year seminars, Crossing Borders seminars, and Honors seminars taught by CCL faculty.

CCL’s programs have produced many of the scholars now teaching in other leading programs both nationally and internationally. As one of the leading programs of its kind in the nation, FS’s current major strengths are in film theory and film history, particularly U.S., European, Latin American, and South Asian cinemas. We hope to add East Asian and African Cinemas to these existing areas. FVP’s strengths are in the balance of its offerings (documentary, experimental, and fiction) and its integration of creative and scholarly work. CL continues to have a strong reputation for literary theory and European literary and cultural politics. It currently lacks depth in other world areas and does not have a strong undergraduate component—these are two areas we plan to develop. LT draws its power from its close interaction with other constituent “Writing University” units, a fact evidenced by its selection as one of nine distinctive MFA programs in the country in the November/December 2007 issue of Poets and Writers magazine.

One major problem faced by all CCL’s constituent programs is the uncertainty of multi-year graduate student funding packages. Thus, for instance, while FS continues to enroll students of exceptional quality, our efforts to enroll all of our top selections (50% or more in 2004, 2006, and 2007) were hampered, on one hand, by increased competition from established as well as new graduate programs, but on the other, by our inability to match the financial offers of some of these programs. In the past two years, overall reduced resources have limited our ability to support new students while still honoring our commitment to support ongoing students. Left un-remedied, this could become a program weakness in the years to come.

LT’s major challenge, as noted in paragraph 3 of CCL’s mission statement above, continues to be the appointment of a director for the MFA program. Hiring a director was the top recommendation of the Provost’s 2006 Task Force on the Writing University, and it remains a central commitment of colleagues in the Provost’s current Writing Advisory Group. Iowa’s literary translation MFA is the oldest program of its kind in the country, and also one of the best. A key component of international literary life, translation also fills a need in American letters, a fact made clear last year when the head of the Nobel Prize selection committee said that American writers were unlikely to win the prize because they are too insular; they “don’t translate enough.” We see immense potential for LT as a nexus for foreign language instruction and creative writing, a bridge between CCL and key UI units such as the IWP, the Writers’ Workshop, and IP. Hiring the right kind of director will help to enhance these already existing connections to the benefit of all the programs in question and the students in them.

Conclusions

CCL works at the cutting edge of contemporary arts and humanities and has created a unique scholarly and artistic community. Our immediate steps for improvement include (1) regularizing graduate student financial support in all four programs to stabilize recruitment and retention of the best students nationally and internationally, (2) completing the search for a Director of Literary Translation, (3) hiring a part-time graduate secretary, (4) designing and implementing an interdisciplinary graduate certificate in theoretical debates in the humanities, and (5) furthering the internationalist and comparative scope of all four programs through new faculty hires and enhanced public programming. With proper funding, CCL is positioned to be a leading force in the arts and humanities both nationally and internationally.