Date: 27 January 2010

From: Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature

To: Sarah Larsen, Chair; John Keller, ex-officio member, Provost’s Task Force on Graduate Education: Selective Excellence

Re: Response to the Task Force’s preliminary recommendations

Please find attached CCL’s response to the Task Force’s preliminary recommendations. We have considered the Task Force’s evaluations seriously and thoroughly as a department.

The following note should be given special consideration by the Task Force:

CCL functions as a department, not as a collection of disparate programs. Treating the programs as independent entities without apparent connections to one another ignores:

a. the unique interdisciplinary environment that CCL faculty have created through hard work,

b. the resulting advantages to its graduate students, who are consistently well placed as a result of the cross-disciplinary training that CCL’s departmental configuration makes possible for them; and

c. the potential impact that changes to one program may have on any of the others.

We have attempted to re-emphasize the departmental nature of CCL in the response where space has allowed. For additional examples, please see our initial report to the Task Force.
FILM STUDIES [FS] DOCTORAL PROGRAM
Response to the Report of the Task Force on Graduate Education: Selective Excellence

We find the initial designation of the Film Studies doctoral program as “weak” to be based on limited criteria and inaccurate information, and request an appropriate reclassification based upon the following:

PRESTIGE AND IMPACT. There are no national rankings of Film Studies (FS) programs because such programs reside in multiple departments; therefore, to aid in your evaluation, we have sought assessments by colleagues around the world. The attached statements reveal that major figures in our field consistently rate the UI FS doctoral program to be of exceptional quality and among the most important in the nation. Our graduates are not just successful; they are nationally and internationally recognized as leaders in the field.

FACULTY. FS faculty are among the highest quality in the nation, as demonstrated by recent awards (Getty, Guggenheim, ACIS, NEH, and Max Planck Institute Fellowships) and important publications. Also, numerous UI faculty in the humanities outside of CCL regularly serve on our graduate committees, stabilizing our faculty to graduate student ratios and demonstrating the centrality of Film Studies to the humanities.

GRADUATE ADMISSIONS. The Task Force report misrepresents our highly selective and diverse admissions process. We receive 120 applications per year from top candidates around the world from which we admit 4 to 6 doctoral students. Last year, 4 of our MA students were accepted to our PhD. Of 7 current MA students, 6 have applied to our PhD program. Students apply to our MA hoping to be accepted into the PhD program; cutting the PhD would destroy the MA.

COMPLETION RATES. The Task Force notes that the FS completion rate is “higher than the average.” In fact, at 73%, it is the second highest among Arts and Humanities PhD programs in the Graduate College.

TIME TO DEGREE. Our designation as “weak” seems largely based on this single criterion
- The TTD figures cited (9.3 years) are misleading; they include students who entered Communication Studies (FS left Communication Studies to form CCL in 2000) between 96-00 and do not include 2002-2009 FS students in CCL, which would reduce TTD to 8.6 years. Of 10 FS students entering between 00-03, 4 completing the degree between 06-09 took an average of 6.35 years (Eliaz 8.3; Nordfjord 5.3; Fleeger, 6.0; Hanlon 6.3). We expect the 6 remaining students in this category to finish in 2010.
- We are an interdisciplinary and international program often requiring extended study abroad: our students are regular recipients of Crossing Borders, Cleary, Stanley, and other fellowships that take an extra research year. 7 of our 9 Crossing Borders Fellows have undertaken research outside the US.
- Three years ago, we established a successful new mentoring program, assigning incoming students to faculty mentors, and over the past two years we have introduced a series of dissertation and job seminars.
- To better align our funding and TTD, we are considering increasing our support commitments from 5 to 6 years post-B.A. and from 3 to 4 years post-M.A. The TF’s concern that we lack funding was a misreading of our stated concern with budget cuts to the entire Graduate College and the University.

PLACEMENT. Our results are not just “good” but spectacular, with 17 of 19 recent graduates holding academic jobs, 13 in tenure-track positions. Those receiving degrees since 2000 teach at Chicago (2), Notre Dame, De Paul, Michigan State, Concordia, Georgetown, Middlebury, Montana, Carleton, Hofstra, Trinity, Florida Atlantic, Brock, Ohio, and The Catholic University, as well as in Serbia and Iceland. Previous Iowa FS grads now teach at top-ranking institutions, including Chicago, Harvard, MI I, Brown (2), Yale (2), Dartmouth, and Northwestern (2). Also, our PhDs are highly valued for the teaching experience they gain in our undergraduate Cinema BA.

CENTRALITY. With its emphasis on critical analysis of the audiovisual form defining art and entertainment since the beginning of the twentieth century, Film Studies is central to the contemporary Humanities. The UI remains a longstanding national and international leader in this area.
External Evaluations of the University of Iowa Film Studies Program [January 2010]

The following are representative statements from leading figures in Film Studies affirming the status of Iowa's graduate Film Studies programs. The full text of their statements, along with nearly fifty similar evaluations from scholars in the field as well as Film Studies alumni, is available on request.

The University of Iowa film studies program has been recognized for forty years as one of the two or three most outstanding programs of this sort not just in the US but in the world. It is not too much to say that the Iowa tradition virtually created the academic study of film.

David Bordwell, Jacques Ledoux Professor of Cinema, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The reputation of the department in the international field of cinema studies is at the highest level. The department is considered one of the three top programs for the study of cinema in the world. It has shaped our field.

Patricia R. Zimmermann, Shaw Foundation Endowed Chair, Wee Kim Wee School of Communications and Information Science, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

The best measure of success is surely placement— Iowa's grads are everywhere. And they are the leaders of our field.

A. M. Nornes, Chair, Department of Screen Arts and Cultures, University of Michigan

Your Film Studies program has a long, proud, and influential history, but it also continues to shine as one of the premiere programs in the country. It is internationally known and respected, both for its exemplary faculty and for the amazingly productive and significant graduate students it has sent into the world to shape our discipline.

Richard Neupert, Coordinator of Film Studies, Wheatley Professor of the Arts, University of Georgia

The plan to move film/video production to Communications, splitting these faculty and students off from film studies (and from film studies specialists in comparative literature), and to move the Comparative Literature faculty to Languages, would seriously undermine U Iowa's long-standing reputation as one of the foremost universities in the country in film/media studies... You rank among a bare handful of state schools placing graduates at the top universities, both public and private, in the country.

Chris Holmlund, President-Elect, Society of Cinema and Media Studies, Chair, University of Tennessee Cinema Studies Program

I attended the University from 1982-1986. The graduate program in Film Studies was considered then (and is still considered now) as one of the finest in the country. Would the University consider eliminating the Writers' Workshop? I very much doubt it, and if it did, it would be a tremendous blunder. The Film Studies PhD is just as prestigious, and just as important to the legacy and reputation of the University of Iowa.

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

[..] the Iowa program’s formative influence extends well beyond its illustrious alumni. And when we consider its alumni, the program’s global impact becomes evident: in the past year, I met Iowa-trained experimental filmmaker-theorists doing groundbreaking work in India and China. Iowa boasts one of a handful of cinema programs that combines theory and practice—indeed, that refuses to accept the artificial and archaic demarcations between the two.

Bhaskar Sarkar, Associate Professor, Film and Media Studies, UC Santa Barbara

Iowa has long been associated with the highest calibre scholarship in our discipline.

Diane Negra, Head of Film Studies, School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin

This PhD program has produced a prodigious number of outstanding film scholars who went on not only to become leaders in the discipline but have also built up graduate programs in film studies—at Yale, Harvard, Madison, Brown, and other universities—with first-rate reputations all over the world.

Miriam Hansen, Ferdinand Schevill Distinguished Service Professor in the Humanities Departments of English, and Cinema and Media Studies, University of Chicago.
The MFA in Film and Video Production (FVP) is a strong program, deriving its reputation from the national and international exhibition record of its faculty and on the success of its graduate students. We admit 4 students per year (from 35-40 applicants) to the 3 year program, averaging 12 students in the program at any one time.

- The FVP faculty and MFA students consistently present their work and win awards in esteemed venues such as Lincoln Center, and at film festivals including Sundance, Tribeca, Rotterdam, Edinburgh, Black Maria, Ann Arbor, Screen Actors Guild, etc. as well as in art museums and broadcast venues throughout the world. FVP faculty have received prestigious awards from the Guggenheim, Rockefeller, NEA, MacDowell, Graham, and Yaddo foundations.

- Through a unique blend of scholarly and creative work, our MFA program develops artist/scholars with the intention of producing well-rounded professors who will bring a liberal arts patina to our fine arts discipline. Our MFAs have been highly successful gaining teaching positions in institutions such as Kansas State University, University of Missouri, Vassar College, University of Denver, University of Colorado, Penn State University, and many others.

The Task Force suggestion that the FVP MFA be moved to an eventual Communications Program is not tenable. The FVP MFA is an art discipline drawing on the craft and history of art, literature, music, film, and theater—it is not a "communications" discipline. A merger with a reconfigured "communications" program would be anathema to our history, to our current practice, and to our vision of the future.

- The FVP MFA has thrived within CCL. The interdisciplinary environment within CCL is productive, particularly with regards to the Film Studies program. However, in response to the task force suggestion that the FVP MFA be merged with a larger unit we are exploring other administrative arrangements (for instance with Art and Art History and with Theatre Arts) that could be productive for our students and faculty should it become necessary to move the FVP MFA out of CCL. We are open to continuing these conversations in the coming months.

- Since its inception in 1994, the FVP MFA has had a long and fruitful link with the MA and PhD in film studies. This relationship cross-fertilizes our MFA, the film studies MA and PhD, and contributes incredible depth to our Cinema BA. One way or another, we hope to maintain strong links with the exceptional graduate programs in film studies in the future. We are also concerned about the continued health of the popular BA in Cinema (with some 250 declared majors at present—many of whom unofficially self-identify as "production" majors), a course of study dependent on the robust graduate programs in both film studies and in film and video production.
The TF rating of the comparative literature (CL) programs as “weak” [now “Additional Evaluation Required”] is based on a misreading of several factors, which we address below.

**Time to Degree**
Given the small sample for CL, MA/PhDs (7 students in the previously provided statistics, 8 in the newly revised ones), the averages used by the TF create an incomplete picture. Add or subtract a student by looking a year before or after the sample and the TTD figures change significantly. Examples:
- CL’s latest PhD grad, Rebecca McKay, entered the MFA in 2002 and graduated in 2005, then entered the CL PhD in 2005 and graduated in 2009. Four years to complete the PhD changes the TTD rate for the program significantly.
- MFA grad Adrienne Ho (2006) entered the CL PhD in 2006 and has an estimated completion date of Spring 2011.
This is a trajectory other students are finding appealing, and we anticipate the trend to continue, significantly lowering our TTD averages and putting our students in a unique position to compete for jobs (see placement).
- TTD for the 48 s.h. CL-MFA is exemplary at 2-3 years, with a 95% completion rate, and should be recognized as such.

**Selectivity**
Here the TF’s tendency to compare apples and oranges is evident; much of the selectivity of our programs, as in CL programs in general, targets the requirements necessary for admission. In other words, many people think they can become writers and will apply to MFA writing programs in English because they can. Relatively few apply to CL programs because they lack the requisite language training. Once they acquire it, they enter a very selective rank of applicants. We take only the very best at that point. Success in enrolling superior students is very high, measured by GRE scores, GPA, scholarly writing/translation portfolios, honors, and activities. CL students are consistently competitive for Iowa Arts Fellowships, Presidential Fellowships, and thesis/dissertation writing fellowships.

**Placement**
Iowa CL graduates and former faculty colleagues fill prominent places in colleges, universities, and professional organizations around the US and abroad. Examples: Gayatri Spivak (Columbia), Xueping Zhong (Tufts), John Brenkman (CUNY), Hazard Adams (U of WA), Tomislav Longinovic (UW Madison), Richard Pevec (translator, Paris, France), Zhang Yingjin (UCSD), Astradur Eyasteinsson (U of Reykjavik, Iceland), Eugene Sampson (Goethe Institute, Chicago), Tomislav Kuzmanovic (U. of Zadar, Croatia), and Christi Merrill (Michigan). As noted under TTD, the UI’s continued competitiveness in placement, a sure measure of quality than TTD, is due to the unique set of qualifications students acquire in our programs, which enable and encourage disciplinary cross-pollination from film to literature, from analysis to creation, and back.

**Centrality to the University Mission**
CL’s MA, MFA, and PhD programs have long treated literature—both studying and creating it—in a global context. With writing as one of the UI’s core teaching areas of excellence, it is no accident that CL
- was an integral part of the work of the Provost’s Task Force on the Writing University
- offers constituent courses in the undergraduate writing track of the BA in English
- provides faculty for the Overseas Writers’ Workshop
- is guaranteed placement for its students as Provost’s Writing Fellows
- graduates MFAs and PhDs who are hired in creative writing and scholarly programs alike
- oversees and teaches the Gen Ed sequence Major Texts of World Literature

Our programs’ centrality to the UI’s writing mission is also indicated by the fact that the current Editor of *The Iowa Review*, the UI’s preeminent literary magazine, is fully appointed in comparative literature. Our faculty also consistently play a central role in the training of graduate students from other departments (e.g., English, Spanish, and Portuguese) in literary history, and literary and cultural theory.
Future Trends
Iowa is at the forefront of changes that both CL and other literary studies programs are undergoing as disciplines, particularly with the growing interest in translation studies at the national and international levels. This year’s annual MLA convention featured 50 panels on translation, and new programs in translation studies are being formed at the University of Michigan, Columbia, UC Irvine, the U of Rochester, the U of Illinois, and elsewhere. Iowa has been a partner in the informal consortium of universities holding graduate student translation conferences every two years—at UCLA in 2004, Iowa in 2006, Columbia in 2008, and, two months from now, at the U of Michigan. The organizers of the Michigan conference are three alumni of Iowa’s CL programs. It is no exaggeration to state that there is not a single program in the US with a greater impact on the translation and dissemination of world literature today than Iowa’s Translation Workshop, which, together with the PhD in CL, stand at the forefront of graduate education in comparative literary studies today.

External Evaluations of the University of Iowa Comparative Literature Program

“As an alumna, I look back at my graduate studies in Iowa as some of the most enriching years and the best educational experience in my life; the reputation of the University of Iowa’s incomparable graduate program in comparative literature and film is at stake. It is recognized nation-wide and internationally, as is the Translation Workshop.”

Dr. Sylvie Blum-Reid, Associate Professor of French & Film, University of Florida, Gainesville

“As the realities of the 21st century pressure literary cultures to justify their existences vis-à-vis market value in English-speaking countries, individual literary translators—graduates of the MFA program in literary translation and the PhD program in comparative literature—fight to preserve the books and poems of these cultures while spreading the word about the ethics of translation in an era of globalization. In so doing, Iowa translators occupy an important position in world literature and English literature.”

Eugene Sampson, MFA 2006, Program Coordinator, Goethe-Institut, Chicago

“The Task Force proposals would deal a serious blow to the academic respectability of translation studies embedded in the more general humanities fields of Cinema and Comparative Literature.”

Barbara Harshav, Yale University, President, American Literary Translators Association

“During my nine years at Iowa I was proud to be associated with CCL, which is a stimulating department with interesting synergies between film studies and film and video production, between film studies and comparative literature, and between literary translation and comparative literature. This configuration is unusual in US universities, and certainly makes CCL a unique and important program, and one whose areas of excellence in literary translation and film studies are widely known.”

Daniel Balderston, Mellon Professor of Modern Languages, University of Pittsburgh

“We are currently in the midst of a tenure-track search at Carleton College, for someone with expertise in cinema/comparative literature studies. Our first task was to pull candidate files from the top programs in the country. Iowa was at the top of our list! That’s why I could only imagine the news about the dismantling of UI’s Cinema & Comparative Literature program was a joke. I can’t imagine why UI would want to undercut one of the programs for which it is most renowned, nationally and internationally.”

Carol Donelan, Associate Professor, Cinema & Media Studies, Carleton College

“[CCL] enjoys an extremely positive reputation for its singular array of excellent programs; there is no other Comparative Literature department in the world that combines both Cinema Studies and Translation under the same aegis, none that works in such proximity to the best MFA program in Creative Writing anywhere, and none with such access to international writers as provided by the International Writing Program.”

Bill Martin, Polish Cultural Institute, New York