

WASC ASSESSEMENT REPORT
Film and Media Studies
University of California, Irvine
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Submitted by Lucas Hilderbrand, grantee and curriculum committee chair
FLM&MDA curriculum committee: Fatimah Tobing Rony, Bliss Cua Lim, and Kristen Hatch

INTRODUCTION

The Film and Media Studies (FLM&MDA) curriculum assessment during the grant period has focused on dual projects: (1) revising the course catalogue for the major and (2) assessing student learning as part of the WASC. The substantive work for goal (1) took place in fall 2010 and for (2) in spring 2011. These projects and outcomes are detailed below.

CURRICULUM REVISION

FLM&MDA has grown in faculty numbers and student majors significantly since departmentalization in 2002. Historically, curriculum policy was administratively decided either by department faculty as a whole or delegated to the faculty undergraduate coordinator and department chair. In academic year 2009-2010, FTE reached 11.25 to our 320 majors, and a curriculum committee was appointed to undertake continuing review of department curriculum and with leading the WASC assessment.

During the grant period, the curriculum committee created course rubrics in relation to recurring themes of electives and strengths of the program to create the following new course areas:

- Popular Culture and Media
- Sound Studies
- Audiences and Reception
- Documentary and Experimental Film and Media
- U.S. Cinema

Each of these new course categories reflects major areas of emphasis among faculty and lecturer teaching in the major, but no course numbers previously existed to rationalize such teaching. The courses that can now be listed under these categories had previously either been taught under a general “special topics” course number or wedged into specialized but less-suited course numbers. The committee also discussed adding a course number for “Special Topics in Critical Practice” to reflect new directions in the discipline toward “production studies” and theory-practice and a topical senior research seminar, but the committee determined that there are not yet sufficient faculty or other resources to create such course categories.

The curriculum committee also revised language and/or course titles for the following continuing courses:

- Introduction to Film and Visual Analysis (previously Visual Analysis)
- Broadcast Media History and Analysis (previously History of Broadcasting)
- New Media and Digital Technologies (previously New Technologies)
- Film and Media Theory and Practice (previously Media Theory and Practice)
- Studies in New Media
- National/Regional Cinemas and Media (previously National Cinemas)
- Global/Transnational Cinemas and Media (previously Global Media)

These changes were made in order to clarify the instructional content, orientation, and goals of learning each course, as well as to allow for more up-to-date descriptions of “new media” and more flexibility in conceiving regional and transnational frameworks for analysis. Revisions were drafted in consultation with faculty who regularly teach related courses.

The curriculum committee also discussed restructuring our major requirements into a “menu” system, which would rationalize the electives students take in fulfillment of the major and enforce the need for students to take non-U.S. film/media courses and non-film media courses. The committee will continue to do “peer review” to examine curriculum, requirements, and scheduling modules at peer institutions, including other UC schools. Course scheduling modules have become a particular concern for the department, as screening times make classroom scheduling and conflict between department offerings a recurring challenge.

ASSESSMENT

For the WASC assessment, the curriculum committee enumerated six comprehensive learning goals for FLM&MDA majors:

1. Demonstrate critical thinking and analysis skills
2. Write with coherence and clarity and develop a focused argument.
3. Interpret the complex formal and cultural meanings of various media texts and technologies.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of film and media history.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of major concepts and arguments in film and media theory.
6. Experience and understand the production of texts through screenplay writing or video practice.

The curriculum committee focused assessment on student papers from FLM&MDA 110: Film and Media Theory. This course was chosen because it is a core course required of all majors, but it is typically the finale core course students take after other requirements and prerequisites have been satisfied. Therefore, FLM&MDA 110 gives a measure of all majors, yet it does so late enough in their trajectory to assess what they’ve learned at the conclusion of their coursework.

FLM&MDA 110 allowed measure of four of our six learning goals: critical thinking (1), writing (2), interpretation (3), and comprehension of theoretical concepts (5). Learning related to knowledge of film history is primarily located in our core survey 101A-B-C; learning related to production is based in our 117A-B-C, 120A-B-C, and 111 courses. No single course allows us to measure all six learning goals.

For the assessment, the curriculum committee examined five representative (of the range of grades and student abilities) sample papers from each of the three sections of FLM&MDA 110 during fall 2010 (1 section) and winter 2011 (2 sections). The committee read and assessed redacted student papers, using a rubric (see Appendix 1) adapted from the Upper Division Writing grading rubric. Findings are below in the next section.

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

The curriculum committee's assessment of sample papers suggests that students are generally performing at expectations in the goal areas of critical thinking, writing, interpretation, and theoretical comprehension. In general, student work averages in the B/B- range, a satisfactory and above-passing level of competence, with some producing truly outstanding A level work and a small number failing to perform at college level. The sample papers demonstrate that our students are learning the analytical skills we seek to instill, though we would like to see more improvement in student writing, which we feel is generally the weakest area for our students but one that is expected of humanities graduates and necessary for professional success. A grid of student paper scores is included after this report (Appendix 2). Overview comments appear below.

Numerical findings from analysis of papers:

- Strengths: theoretical comprehension, critical thinking, and textual analysis
- Weaknesses: quality of writing, including basic structure, argumentation and grammar
- Deviation between strengths and weaknesses not very wide, though the committee would like to see improvement in student writing.

Committee reflections/comments:

- Quality of writing and thinking has improved over past several years.
- Quality of thinking has remained consistently high (differing views of changes in student writing from faculty who had taught in the major for several years).
- In recent years, faculty have designed final paper assignments in ways that have trended toward shorter assignments in length but with expectations of more accomplishment (quality over quantity).
- Syllabi and anecdotal evidence suggests that most instructors enforce reading and reading comprehension through regular messageboard or worksheet assignments; these assignments have disciplined students to do reading, to engage and comprehend readings at a higher level. Faculty who uses these assignments have tended to put less emphasis on the final paper (in grade weight and in length). This suggests that class

assignments tend to focus on course content with perhaps reduced emphasis on original research and long-form writing.

- Related to concerns about student writing: We expect humanities majors to be able to write well. Anecdotally, FLM&MDA faculty who teach in our upper-division writing course, 139W, have commented that it is one of the most challenging to teach. Core faculty teach the majority of 139Ws, with other sections typically taught by long-term lecturers. Entering student competency in basic writing skills are often lower than expected/desired, and the course inevitably must address fundamental writing and revision issues. This seems to point to systemic and insufficient preparation in writing during K-12, and possibly at the community college level for transfers or in the lower division for “homegrown” students. The curriculum committee has tried to be proactive in developing strategies for addressing these issues, including sharing pedagogical strategies, rubrics, and making best-practice recommendations to instructional faculty—particularly for addressing students with ESL or below-college-level writing skills. Instructional faculty observe improvement in student writing during the course of 139W but would like to be able to address even more advanced writing, analysis, and argumentation. FLM&MDA faculty regularly refer students to on-campus recourses for assistance with basic writing skills (LARC, program in Academic English), but UCI needs to invest in and expand these resources in order to address the pervasive problems.

FLM&MDA GRADUATE SURVEY, AY 2010-11

In addition to the “direct evidence” of student papers in a targeted class, the curriculum committee wanted a more holistic snapshot of student learning and experiences in the major. Toward this goal, FLM&MDA conducted its first exit survey of students who have graduated or will graduate this academic year. The survey was conducted via the EEE survey tool, with 32 respondents out of a possible 98. (No prizes were used to incentivize or influence participation.) The questions were all phrased as short-answer in format rather than numeric in order to encourage qualitative rather than quantitative responses. We were particularly interested in student expectations of the major, self-described learning, and career plans beyond UCI. The survey text appeared as below:

The FLM&MDA department is assessing its current curriculum and is interested in student experiences in the major. Please comment in response to the following questions, which give a broader sense of student experiences than course evaluations for individual classes.

1. Why did you become a Film and Media Studies major?
2. What did you expect to learn in FLM&MDA?
3. What do you feel you have learned in FLM&MDA?
4. How has being in FLM&MDA changed the ways you understand film and media?
5. If you are interested in production, how has FLM&MDA changed the ways you understand production?
6. What do you plan to do after graduation?
7. Other comments?

Survey responses indicate:

- A number of students became FLM&MDA majors because of an interest in filmmaking, despite the major's orientation toward history and theory. (There are a limited number of production classes.)
- FLM&MDA is the "closest" alternative fit for other types of potential majors, such as communications (which is not offered at UCI).
- FLM&MDA 85A acts as an effective gateway course, which not only introduces the major but also spurs converts to the major.
- Numerous students remarked that they expected to learn more hands-on production techniques and post-production skills.
- Students in some cases did not have clear expectations for what they would learn in the major.
- One student commented, "It challenged me! It challenged me to think beyond what was being presented. I was forced to analyze and formulate my own argument. This is something that you cannot develop in a science and biology class. FLM&MDA represents a progressive kind of teaching. It requires its students to be independent thinkers."
- Student responses to what they have learned were mixed, with general consensus that they learned how to analyze films, the histories of film movements, and basics of film theory. Some also commented that their writing skills improved. A number of students expressed that they wished they had learned more production skills.
- One student commented, "I have learned how to be a self-starter. ... The majority of this curriculum has enabled me to critically analyze films, while my extracurricular activities have provided me with some production experience and valuable networks."
- Numerous students commented that they have a better critical awareness of the form, production, and industrial issues that go into making a film or television text. Some students critiqued the theoretical orientation of the major, which was viewed as irrelevant to a career in the industry.
- Student responses were divided between a majority of respondents who wanted more or "better" production classes and those who had limited interest in production. Students suggest that the primary way to understand filmmaking is by doing, rather than through "studies" approaches.
- Students commented that production equipment, such as cameras and computers for editing, was insufficient in quantity and out of date.
- Most students intend to work in the film/media industry following graduation and in many cases expect to enter the industry through an internship. The second most common plan was to pursue graduate school.

CONCLUSIONS

Curriculum: The curriculum committee will continue to assess the curriculum structure, including major requirements, through "peer review" comparison with peer institutions

and discussions of holistic learning goals and the state of the discipline. The committee will also discuss course scheduling modules and screening times, which have impacted students' abilities to make timely progress through the major (due to course conflicts and/or rigid course sequences).

Assessment: The next stage of assessing student work may focus on our 101A-B-C sequence, a required film history lecture sequence with larger enrollments than 110. This would allow measure of student learning in terms of historical comprehension and to measure student performance slightly earlier in their trajectory through the major. Alternatively, 139W could be targeted for assessment for closer scrutiny of student writing.

Student writing: The curriculum committee remain particularly concerned with finding strategies for improving student writing throughout the major and utilizing resources on campus to aid faculty in teaching writing. Problems in student writing are seen as primarily the effect of insufficient and systemic pre-college training, but faculty remain committed to continuing to expect and train students to write at a high level.

Production resources: The department is in the process of updating our production equipment and outfitting a new media lab with new computers and post-production software. Equipment and furniture arrived last week, and the lab should be running at full capacity for fall classes. This presents a major step forward for production classes.

Communicating learning goals: The exit survey revealed that there appears to be pervasive misperceptions about FLM&MDA's learning goals by students, specifically about the orientation of the program toward production classes. FLM&MDA is firmly a humanities major, with limited course offerings in production or screenwriting; these production and creative writing classes are intended to supplement "studies" learning about critical analysis, history, and theory of film and media texts and industries. For-credit internships also allow for some on-the-job training and, perhaps, demystification of work in the film and media industries. Learning goal (6) above does reflect that production and/or screenwriting are part of our curriculum, but these classes and goals are considered to enrich and supplement goals (1)-(5) rather than being the primary goal. FLM&MDA has never been and does not have the resources to become predominantly a production or studio-based program. Other schools in the region—particularly Chapman University, University of Southern California, and UCLA—are orientated toward this kind of training; what UCI's FLM&MDA major was conceived to do is something different: film and media *studies*. A tension between studies and production curriculum is a frequent issue beyond UCI in other film and media studies departments. Language explaining the academic orientation of the department is prominent on both the department website and in the course catalogue, and students are advised that FLM&MDA at UCI is not a production program, yet students' expectation for a different kind of program—centered on production—clearly continues to exist. Perhaps a better job could be done to *clarify* the orientation and the learning *goals* of the major as a studies major earlier and more regularly throughout their advising and coursework.

Faculty involvement: This report will be shared with all FLM&MDA core faculty to raise awareness and allow discussion of findings. Faculty input will also be welcomed for future stages of assessment and curriculum development.

Post-graduation: The survey results indicate that the two most common planned career paths for FLM&MDA graduates are working in the industry and pursuing graduate school. The department has been successful in placing students on both fields and tracks alumni achievements. On the graduate school front, we have recently placed alumni in programs at Harvard, NYU, USC, UCLA, Yale, UT-Austin, Columbia, and Carnegie Mellon, to name a few institutions.

Conclusion: Student work in FLM&MDA 110 demonstrates that, overall, students are meeting learning goals in the major, though the exit survey reveals that there is some disparity between these goals and what *students* expect to learn.

FMS WASC Assessment Report: Appendix 1: Student Paper Assessment Rubric

	A: Excellent	B: Good	C: Adequate	D: Not Adequate	F: Fails
Critical Thinking:	The paper coheres around an original and insightful argument that is substantive, contestable, and specific. The paper makes the reader think about something in a new and interesting way.	The paper coheres around an argument that is substantive, contestable, specific, and original.	The paper coheres around an argument that is adequately substantive, contestable, and specific.	The paper does not make an argument but is merely a collection of observations.	The paper fails to make an argument.
Theoretical Concepts: Comprehension and Application	The paper makes an interesting and thoughtful contribution to one or more of the debates film/media theory. Sources are properly cited.	The paper engages with theory and reflects a solid understanding of their central arguments. Sources are properly cited.	The paper engages with the theory but has a tendency to draw on minor points or supporting evidence (sub-claims) rather than addressing the central arguments. Sources are properly cited.	The paper cherry picks phrases from theory essays rather than really engaging with them <i>or</i> references to the readings suggest that the author did not understand them.	The paper does not address the theory.
Textual Analysis	The paper uses well chosen examples from the films and provides <i>analytical</i> descriptions of <i>specific</i> shots, sequences, and narrative elements in support of its argument. The analysis brings fresh insights to the film.	The paper uses well chosen examples from the films and provides <i>analytical</i> descriptions of <i>specific</i> shots, sequences, and narrative elements in support of its argument. The analysis reflects a solid understanding of the film based on repeated viewings.	The paper analyzes the films to support an argument but tends towards vague generalizations rather than vivid evocations of specific elements of the films and/or the analysis reflects a superficial understanding of the film.	The paper describes the film rather than analyzing it in support of an argument.	The paper does not demonstrate a basic understanding of the film(s) discussed.
Writing	The language is eloquent and sophisticated, with words chosen for their precise meanings; each paragraph develops a single idea (eloquently stated in the topic sentence) that provides strong support for the paper's argument; the paper's organization is clear and serves the argument well.	The language is correct with words chosen for their precise meanings; each paragraph develops a single idea, though the sub-claims could be more forcefully stated in topic sentences; the paper is well organized but could use more 'signposts' to guide the reader from one idea to the next.	The language is correct but unsophisticated; each paragraph develops a single idea, but that idea is not clearly identified in a topic sentence; the organization is not ideally suited to the argument.	Errors in grammar and vocabulary obscure the author's meaning <i>or</i> paragraphs develop more than one idea <i>or</i> there is little logic to the organization.	The paper does not demonstrate fluency or basic knowledge of English grammar.

Appendix 2: FMS WASC Assessment Report										
FMS 110 Student paper assessments										
Paper #	CT	W	A	T	Grade	Key:				
1	3.7	3.7	4	4	A	CT: Critical Thinking				
2	3.8	3.6	4	4	A	W: Writing				
3	2.9	2.8	3	3	B	A: Film/media analysis				
4	3.7	3.9	3.9	3.8	B+	T: Theoretical engagement				
5	3	3	2.9	2.8	B-	Grade: actual grade given by instructor				
6	2.2	2	2.2	2	C					
7	3	3	3	3	A-	Scores average three grades from committee				
8	3.5	3.5	3.8	3.8	A					
9	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.6	B					
10	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.5	C					
11	4	4	3.9	4	A+					
12	4	3.9	3.9	4	A-					
13	3.5	3	3.6	3.5	B					
14	3	2.7	2.6	3	C+					
15	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	F					
Average	3.107	2.98	3.12	3.1						
Letter equiv	B/B-	B-/C+	B/B-	B/B-						