Proposal for changing the Department of Film Studies into an Interdisciplinary Program in Film Studies

We are writing to request that CEP approve a change in the designation of the Film Studies department, one that would restructure it as an interdisciplinary program in Film Studies. The undersigned faculty welcome the chance to work collaboratively to make the study of film at Bowdoin a more comprehensive and collective endeavor. Such a change will allow us to capitalize on and make more visible the resources already present at the College.

Among the benefits we envision, the change to a program structure will:

- transform Film Studies into an interdisciplinary and collective mission
- provide a formal acknowledgment of what individual faculty members are already doing in their teaching and scholarship
- allow us to pool resources and faculty more effectively
- answer articulated interest from students for a fuller and richer program in Film Studies
- make Film Studies more visible to students and to the larger community
- provide for more thoughtful enhancement of the curriculum
- create space for collegial conversations and faculty/program development

Background and Overview

Bowdoin’s inclusion of Film Studies in the curriculum began in the early 1970s with the hiring of Barbara Kaster, who made her academic home in the English Department. On her retirement the Department of Film Studies was created with the appointment of Tricia Welsch in 1993. Although conversations about expanding the department have occurred at various times in the ensuing years, no additional faculty lines have been allocated to the department by CEP, and Tricia Welsch remains the single faculty member appointed to the department. In the meantime, as Film Studies has become ever more central to the arts and humanities in general, a number of faculty across a wide range of departments and programs with expertise in this area have joined the Bowdoin faculty and have incorporated Film Studies in both their teaching and research.

Currently, courses offering a sustained engagement with and analysis of cinematic language, theory, and history are offered at Bowdoin by faculty members in Romance Languages, Asian Studies, English, German, Sociology and Anthropology, and Gender and Women’s Studies.
Additionally, a recently hired member of the dance faculty, Charlotte Griffin, holds an advanced degree in Dance and Film, and a new faculty member joining us in the fall, Allison Cooper, will contribute at least one course to the film curriculum each year. Thus, we have in place a significant cohort of accomplished faculty who possess substantial expertise in film and whose potential contributions to that discipline at Bowdoin are not (yet) fully realized within our present administrative and curricular framework.

In recent years a group of faculty has met to discuss the next steps for building on the strengths of the curricular offerings that Tricia Welsch has single-handedly shepherded. This group—acting as a de facto program committee—has been seeking ways to take advantage of present and future collaborations by focusing on what we can accomplish with our existing resources. Thus we propose to the Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee the conversion of Film Studies from a single-member department to an interdisciplinary program.

We envisage that the new structure, like other interdisciplinary programs at the College, will involve multiple faculty members. Tricia will remain appointed in Film Studies (now to the program), and Aviva Briefel (English) and Shu-chin Tsui (Asian Studies) will convert their positions to joint appointments with Film Studies. Additional faculty members are committed to contributing to the program from their departmental appointments. The program structure will create a group of faculty who share in the oversight of the curriculum and advising, as well as the administration of the program, and significantly increase the coherence of course offerings in Film Studies for our students across the curriculum.

The program structure will also allow us to explore the College’s visiting scholar positions and the possible appointment of post-docs to add perspectives beyond those of our current faculty.

Recent Review

Film Studies underwent an outside review of its structure and curriculum in 2008. The external reviewers met with those faculty members who most regularly offer film courses, in order to consider the broad range of options available at Bowdoin. The reviewers were pleased to discover many film courses on offer and sought to outline ways in which the College might coordinate and integrate the courses and the contributing faculty members.

The review offered several significant suggestions. First, it counseled the College to find ways to link faculty who offer courses in Film Studies.
Observing that the growth of film at Bowdoin would “depend upon the creation of a viable and authentic film community,” it urged the College to capitalize on the strengths those faculty members present. Second, it suggested that at least one new faculty line be added to the department (and preferably two), to broaden and strengthen the current curricular offerings and provide more stability and diversity within the department’s leadership. These new faculty lines would also pave the way for a major in Film Studies, which the reviewers considered overdue at the College. The review also strongly suggested that the College take steps to add dedicated film production courses to the curriculum, noting that the absence of such courses makes Film Studies different than every other arts program on campus. It also noted the absence of a film theory course from the current offerings, and suggested that it too should be a priority. Other identified fields of interest for new hires were documentary cinema, animation, and screenwriting.

It is to the reviewers’ first suggestion that we now return, confident that the adoption of a program structure is a significant and feasible step toward the worthy goals the review helped identify. A program structure will allow faculty members already at the College to explore the connections among us that our research and teaching interests provide. It will help provide a more comprehensive approach to Film Studies as a discipline at Bowdoin. It will make the current film minor more clearly accessible to students and intelligible to those outside the College, and it will permit us to contemplate in due course the creation of a major in Film Studies.

For students, the advantages are evident. A program structure will help us sequence courses more appropriately, since we will be able to develop plans for how and when core courses are offered. It will expand the advising structure to give students more than one option for advising and independent research. It may also lead to some courses being reconceived: for instance, film courses presently conducted in other languages may be restructured to include students who are not fluent in that language.

Furthermore, a program structure will allow faculty working in Film Studies to have a larger and more visible presence outside the college. Combining our efforts will allow us to bring more artists and scholars to campus, to build strong networks to alumni working in film, and even perhaps to host film festivals, symposia, creative competitions, and the like. It will help us to attract new faculty who have the study of film as part of their profiles by providing a collegial home for their teaching and research.
Faculty and Curricular Resources

Faculty members who offer courses frequently used as part of the Film Studies minor include:

Aviva Briefel, English
Steve Cerf, German
Elena Cueto-Asin, Spanish
Sara Dickey, Sociology and Anthropology
Ann Kibbie, English
Jen Scanlon, Gender and Women’s Studies
Jill Smith, German
Birgit Tautz, German
Shu-chin Tsui, Asian Studies

A program structure will allow us to bring those appointed (or appointed jointly) in Film Studies into closer and more productive relation with allied faculty, as is consonant with the direction provided by the external review. We expect to begin conversations about curricular and resource enhancement once the program structure is in place.

For a list of the forty film courses that have been offered at Bowdoin from 2005-2012, see appendix A. A very partial list of independent studies conducted during that time includes topics ranging from Hong Kong cinema to the work of Pedro Almodovar, from female monsters in film to the French New Wave.

Current Minor

We are proposing no changes to the minor in Film Studies, which was approved in 2001 and has been graduating around a dozen students annually. The minor consists of five courses, four of which must be courses offered by the Department of Film Studies. One course must come from another department’s offerings, and at least one course must be at the 300 level or be an independent study. Every student is required to take Film Studies 101 (Film Narrative) and either Film Studies 201 or 202 (Film History I or II), though both 201 and 202 may be taken. Originally the “outside” course was proposed by the student wishing to count it toward the minor; more recently, several regularly-offered courses have been cross-listed. Therefore at the moment there is an anomalous situation: the so-called “outside” course is sometimes also the “same as” a Film Studies department offering.

The proposed change from a department to a program will eliminate the “inside-outside” dichotomy, as program faculty will offer courses that contribute to the minor in a more clearly acknowledged way. The
proposed change will not affect the structure, requirements, or staffing needs of the minor: it is already being offered and completed without difficulty. Catalogue copy describing the minor is attached.

**Governance Structure**

Tricia Welsch will remain appointed in Film Studies. Two faculty members will have joint appointments: Aviva Briefel in English and Film Studies and Shu-chin Tsui in Asian Studies and Film Studies.

A program committee will be comprised of five members of the faculty. It will include those appointed or jointly appointed in Film Studies. Other faculty members offering courses in Film Studies will serve, preferably for three-year terms, and be drawn from a representative range of contributing departments and programs, most likely including German, Romance Languages, Theater and Dance, Gender and Women’s Studies, and English. The chair will serve, preferably on a three-year rotating basis.

Respectfully submitted,

Aviva Briefel, English  
Steve Cerf, German  
Elena Cueto-Asin, Romance Languages  
Ann Kibbie, English  
Shu-chin Tsui, Asian Studies  
Tricia Welsch, Film Studies
Film Courses Offered 2005-2012

Africana Studies/History 25 The Civil War in Film
Africana Studies/English 315 Contemporary African American Film
Africana Studies 344 African American Cinema to 1950

Anthropology 247 Indian Cinema

Asian Studies 225 Introduction to Korea: Literature and Film
Asian Studies 254 Transnational Chinese Cinema
Asian Studies 260 20th Century Japanese Film and Fiction

English 20 Femmes Fatales, Lady Killers and Other Dangerous Women
English 23 Arab and Jew in Literature and Film
English 104 From Page to Screen: Film Adaptation and Narrative

English/Film Studies/GLS/GWS 249 Film Noir

English 287 The Horror Film in Context
English 289 The US at War: Vietnam to Iraq in Literature and Film

Film Studies 10 Cultural Difference and the Crime Film
Film Studies 101 Film Narrative
Film Studies 201 Film History I
Film Studies 202 Film History II
Film Studies 218 Film as a Subversive Art: Avant-Garde Cinema
Film Studies 224 The Films of Alfred Hitchcock
Film Studies 230 The Reality Effect: Documentary Film
Film Studies 252 British Film
Film Studies 315 New Waves in the New World: Latin American Cinema
Film Studies 321 German Expressionism and Its Legacy
Film Studies 322 Film and Biography
Film Studies 333 The Films of John Ford

German/Film Studies/GWS 29 Historians, Comediennes, Storytellers: Women Filmmakers in the German-Speaking Countries

German 151 Literary Imagination and the Holocaust
German 154 Laugh and Cry: Post World War II German Film
German 156 Nazi Cinema
German 321 Before and After the Wall: East German Traditions in Literature, Culture, and Film
German/GLS 390 Robots, Vamps, and Whores: Women in German Culture and Society
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<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German 394</td>
<td>Contested Discourse: German Popular Film since Unification</td>
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<td>GWS 235/History 234</td>
<td>Lawn Boy Meets Valley Girl: Gender and the Suburbs</td>
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<td>GWS/Film Studies 261</td>
<td>Gender, Film, and Consumer Culture</td>
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<td>Italian 311</td>
<td>“Now a Major Motion Picture!”: Cinema and Modern Literature in Italy</td>
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<td>Italian 312</td>
<td>The Fantastic in Italian Film and Literature</td>
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<td>Russian 221/GWS 220</td>
<td>Soviet Worker Bees, Revolution, and Red Love in Russian Film</td>
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<td>Russian 225</td>
<td>Re-Imaging Russia in Contemporary Film and Fiction</td>
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<td>Russian 243</td>
<td>Central Asia Through Film and Literature</td>
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<td>Russian 251/GWS 243</td>
<td>Russia’s “Others”: Siberia and Central Asia through Film and Literature</td>
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<td>Spanish 325</td>
<td>The Spanish Civil War in Literature and Film</td>
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<td>Spanish 327</td>
<td>Reading Spanish Film</td>
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