


**TO:** Dr. Scott Furlong, Provost  
**FROM:** Dr. Kristin Croyle, Dean CLAS  
Dr. Julie Pretzat, Dean SCMA   
**DATE:** October 14, 2020  
**RE:** Departmentalization of Cinema and Screen Studies and Transition to SCMA

The faculty of the Cinema and Screen Studies (CSS) program have formally requested to departmentalize and transition from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to the School of Communication, Media, and the Arts. Their proposal, dated December 2019, is attached. One primary driver of the request is the alignment of resource needs between the CSS program and the Broadcasting and Mass Communication program with the hope that placing them under the same school umbrella will better support both programs and potentially yield some efficiencies. A second driver is the hope that new physical space in the renovated Hewitt building where most SCMA programs will be located will be better suited for the needs of their program and students.

The six CSS faculty that would transition from CLAS to SCMA include:

Josh Adams, Assistant Professor  
Tiffany Deater, Assistant Professor  
Jacob Dodd, Associate Professor  
Chris Lalonde, Professor  
Bennet Schaber, Professor  
Amy Shore, Professor

Though CLAS and the English and Creative Writing Department will be sad to see CSS shift to a new college, the college and the department support their request to move in the hopes that they will indeed be able to better and more efficiently deliver their program and support their students. A memo to that effect from English and Creative Writing Chairperson, Leigh Wilson, is attached. SCMA is also in support of the request.

Given that this is a move across colleges/schools, we believe that the specifics regarding impact on budget, staffing support, etc. are best determined through the Provost's office.

cc Leigh Wilson  
Amy Shore

Attachments CSS Proposal  
Memo of Support from Leigh Wilson

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Kristin Croyle, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
From: Leigh Wilson, Chair, Department of English and Creative Writing   
RE: CSS Program Move to School of Communication, Media & the Arts

For the past year, in both formal and informal venues, the faculty of the Department of English & Creative Writing have discussed the implications of a move the Cinema and Screen Studies Program intends to make to the School of Communication, Media & the Arts.

Ultimately, in consultation with the CRW and ENG department faculty, although personally and professionally sorry to see the program go, we support the wishes of our CSS colleagues and therefore support this move.

We understand that space and resource issues critical to the program can be better served by SCMA, and particularly by the renovation of Hewitt Union as a future home for the program. The program has clearly laid out its needs and vision of its future in the self-study document it produced last year; most of these needs can only be met within SCMA.

Although there will be a considerable cost to our department in this loss of a major program—six tenured/tenure track faculty, as well as three of our four Full Professors—nevertheless our department wishes the program well.

## CINEMA & SCREEN STUDIES

### Proposal to move to the School of Communication, Media & the Arts

Submitted to the Administration of SUNY Oswego by the Faculty of Cinema & Screen Studies

December 2019

#### OVERVIEW

The faculty of the Cinema and Screen Studies (CSS) program are requesting to become an independent department in the School of Communication, Media and the Arts (SCMA). Launched in 2007 as a small interdisciplinary program housed in the Department of English and Creative Writing, CSS has grown to include six full-time faculty who offer a comprehensive curriculum to 150+ majors. While we welcome this growth, we also recognize that it is compromising our ability to carry out CSS's mission, learning outcome goals, and instructional practices, which we (the faculty) believe are precisely what have led to the program's growth. We are at a proverbial crossroads: either retrench and revise in ways that we believe would radically alter what is effective about CSS or relocate and grow with peer programs and resources that make it possible to further advance our program's mission, goals and practices. After much deliberation and attempts to "make it work" in our current configuration, CSS faculty have determined that the best course of action is to embrace a growth plan that includes becoming an independent department in SCMA.

#### MISSION – GOALS – PRACTICES

The mission of SUNY Oswego's Cinema and Screen Studies program is to provide an open, accessible and rigorous course of study that engages students in critical filmmaking practices. "**Critical filmmaking**" integrates the analytical and technical, critical and creative, and prepares students for success in the myriad fields related to our major. **Accessibility** is a founding principle of the major. The BA in CSS provides any student, regardless of background or experience, a chance to study and make cinema. Specifically, CSS majors learn to:

- Deploy a technical and conceptual vocabulary to describe, categorize, analyze and create cinematic projects.
- Recognize, engage in and transform the contexts through which cinema and its artifacts are received and created.
- Use and deploy appropriate technologies both to analyze and create cinematic projects.
- Engage in writing for and about cinema in multiple ways and for multiple audiences.
- Collaborate on cinematic projects in a variety of roles and in the service of a shared vision.

Our instructional practices are designed to help students meet these learning outcome goals:

- **Practice-as-Research** – We understand that the creative and cultural inquiry undertaken by artists is a form of research. Whether students are producing a short narrative film, creating a piece of experimental video art, or writing a screenplay, Oswego CSS frames this artistic work as active research. For example, in a course on cinematography, students might be asked to shoot a scene using a Super 8 camera with celluloid, then a VHS camera with video tape, and finally with a digital camera. Then they consider the ways that such design choices derive from and/or produce different aesthetic, social and cultural experiences for spectators (e.g. realism or nostalgia). This kind of critical, hands-on research is known as "practice-as-research" and differs substantially from a more traditional notion of film research such as written, compare-and-contrast essays. It requires integration of theory and practice within and across the curriculum.
- **Culture of Collaboration** – Filmmaking is a profoundly collaborative form of creative practice and research. All CSS courses require collaboration in some format, from group projects to workshopping of screenplays to peer mentoring on research papers. But the *real* collaboration in CSS extends far beyond the classroom. Underclassmen work on senior thesis projects; CSS students recruit non-majors to act in their films, help them create special effects, design poster art, etc.; CSS students help non-majors document their research in visual formats; students and faculty work together to put on film festivals; and much more. This culture of collaboration aligns with the practice-as-research approach by encouraging students to engage their peers in their acts of inquiry and creation.
- **Studio & Lab Intensives** – In order to enact the practice-as-research model and provide the time and space for students to collaborate, CSS offers studio/lab intensive courses. This increased instructional time allows faculty to guide, model and facilitate practice-as-research and collaborative techniques for students. As

students move through the curriculum to upper division courses, the focus of these studio/lab courses moves away from faculty-led work to student-led work and autonomy, thus preparing them for the “real world” after graduation.

Ultimately, whether CSS students enter the film industry or pursue a career in another field, they will graduate with both soft and hard skills that are critical to success in contemporary workplaces.

### PAST CHALLENGES & CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Even when CSS was a smaller major, the program mission, goals and practices described above were challenging to enact. But as the major grows, we find it difficult to maintain the integrity of the program. Currently, CSS enrolls an average of 150-160 majors annually with the number mushrooming up to 170 or 180+ prior to graduation in spring terms. This enrollment growth has come about despite the fact that currently we do not actively recruit majors.

**Cinema & Screen Studies Majors  
Fall Enrollment Figures, 2015-2019**

	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019
<b>CSS as 1<sup>st</sup> Major</b>	81	80	98	115	124
<b>CSS as 2<sup>nd</sup> Major</b>	33	29	33	38	38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>162</b>

Some of the challenges we have faced as the number of majors grows are the following:

- **Lack of seats in required courses to ensure degree completion** – Even with increasing the number of sections of required courses, students frequently have to wait to take the introductory level of a course series (e.g. CSS 235: Introduction to Cinema Production) that is a prerequisite for a higher-level course. We have to either over-enroll sections and compromise quality of instruction or allow students to skip prerequisites and then back-track in a later semester. Both of these solutions are clearly problematic.
- **Lack of elective courses to ensure a diverse, inclusive curriculum** – In order to maintain the appropriate size for required courses based on our instructional practices (e.g. 15-student cap on studio intensive courses), we have had to offer more sections of these courses in order to make sure that students are able to move through the curriculum in a timely manner. As a result, the range of elective courses we offer has diminished significantly over the past five years.
- **Lack of facilities and space to accommodate instructional modes** – Practice-as-research, collaboration and all forms of critical filmmaking require sufficient and appropriate facilities and physical space. CSS has outgrown our home in the English Department and Marano Campus Center classrooms, which are designed to support more traditional forms of humanities classes and instructional practices.
- **Lack of resources to ensure accessibility & equity** – While we have been able to increase the overall equipment available for use through the CSS program, we are not able to provide sufficient access to production and post-production resources in order to ensure that students who cannot afford their own equipment, editing software, etc., have an equitable experience in the program.
- **Lack of human resources to provide quality advising and resource management** – As the faculty-to-student ratio continues to increase (currently 26 majors to each full-time faculty member), our ability to provide intensive, one-on-one advising decreases. And as the resources we offer also increase (e.g. equipment) without dedicated staff to help manage those resources, faculty attention is increasingly drawn away from our students and towards tasks such as checking in and out equipment, repairing cameras/tripods/lights, tracking down lost items, etc.

These challenges are not new and CSS has worked hard to address them. Following the 2014 self study, we streamlined curriculum, formalized the most significant creative advising piece (the senior thesis) into a regular course offering rather than independent advising, and added 2 new full-time tenure track faculty members and 1 existing full-time tenured faculty member who formerly taught literary studies courses. We also converted an old psychology research lab in the basement of Mahar into a multi-purpose instructional space and editing lab; faculty secured a TIF grant to purchase 6 computers to provide dedicated editing stations (digital) in the lab and secured

under-utilized equipment from SUNY Purchase to provide traditional editing stations (analog). The English Department graciously allowed the CSS faculty to move into an annexed area in the department where we use 4 offices for faculty, 2 closets for equipment storage, and a hallway area to operate an equipment check-in/out system staffed by work study students. We are nothing if not creative in our efforts to solve the problems that have come with our growth but at this juncture, our creative solutions are no longer sufficient.

### **CURRENT CHALLENGES & PROPOSED SOLUTIONS**

When we began our current self study in Spring 2018, CSS faculty recognized the continuing challenges but hoped that we could also continue to find creative solutions. Maybe we can move our offices and equipment to another location on campus but remain a program in the English Department. Maybe we can get a grant to truly convert Mahar 6 into an instructional space that supports our practices (it remains a 1960s-style psych lab but with editing stations and our own televisions used for screening purposes). Maybe we can get a staff person to help with equipment management and keep Mahar 6 open for longer periods (currently it is only open 15 hours a week outside of class time for student use and in no more than 3-hour blocks due to our reliance on work study students to staff it). Maybe we can get our own budget from CLAS to pay for basic equipment updates and repairs (currently paid through SUTRA funds from the English Department, periodic grants that are awarded, and faculty donations). Maybe, maybe, maybe...

During a November faculty meeting where we were once again considering all of these “maybes,” one individual posed a reality that we had all been avoiding: “Maybe we can’t solve these problems.” Which led us to recognize the crossroads we are currently at: either we change the mission, goals and practices of CSS or we change the context in which the program is operating to one that can support our mission, goals and practices. That change in context became clear to us: move to the School of Communication, Media and the Arts as an independent department. This wasn’t the first time we considered this move, but it was the first time we were all in agreement that the move was absolutely necessary if we maintained a student-centered approach to decision making.

Our hopes in moving to SCMA are the following:

- **Establish the Department of Cinema & Screen Studies** with 6 faculty members who would transfer from the Department of English & Creative Writing. Those faculty are:
  - Josh Adams (tenure track assistant professor)
  - Tiffany Deater (tenure track assistant professor)
  - Jacob Dodd (tenured associate professor)
  - Chris LaLonde (tenured professor)
  - Bennet Schaber (tenured professor)
  - Amy Shore (tenured professor).
- **Modify Curriculum to Meet Student Needs** – As a stand-alone department, we would revise the curriculum so that core courses are offered first to CSS majors and then to other students. Currently, many of our core courses fulfill requirements in other majors such as Creative Writing, English/Literary Studies, and Education majors. We will establish some courses to fulfill General Education requirements in the humanities and arts but ensure that those are offered in addition to courses required by our majors. This is particularly important for our large transfer student population that needs to complete the curriculum within two years and cannot wait for seats to open in courses that fulfill requirements in several majors.
- **Access Appropriate Facilities & Space** – Clearly, the renovation of Hewitt was an initial driver in our request to move to SCMA. The plans for 2023 opening more than address the facilities and space needs described above. We are particularly excited by the editing labs, white box and black boxes, and screening room. In the meantime, we are hoping to secure temporary space sufficient to the size of our current faculty and equipment holdings (we are hoping that the Administration might consider a space such as IPAC for our temporary needs). The English Department is in dire need of additional space to house faculty from Creative Writing, Literary Studies and College Writing, so a temporary move would also alleviate their challenges in terms of office space.

- **Share Equipment & Resources** – We hope to combine our equipment holdings with those of the Broadcasting program in order to eliminate redundancies, maximize use of the technology, and develop a common equipment management system. By coming together to address this major need of both programs, we hope to be able to also gain the human resources necessary to properly manage the equipment, particularly a full-time staff person trained in the use, maintenance and repair of film and video technology. We are also hoping that by becoming our own department, we can secure an annual budget to cover our basic operating costs.

#### **LARGER VISION**

While we have very specific reasons for wanting to move to SCMA as our own department, making such an extraordinary change is only warranted, we feel, if the move fulfills the larger vision of the University. By joining SCMA, we believe that we can grow the CSS program with integrity and contribute to the other departments and programs in SCMA. Particularly once Hewitt comes on line and we can inhabit the same space as peer programs, we envision being part of a vibrant, collaborative culture that prepares students for the new and ever-changing world of communication, media and the arts.