

Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

- 1. Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

"Almost everything in our national culture, even the news, has been reduced to entertainment or altogether eliminated."

"The purpose of arts education is not to produce more artists, though that is a byproduct. The real purpose of arts education is to create complete human beings who are capable of leading successful and productive lives in a free society."¹

This proposal seeks interdisciplinary collaboration to exploit FILM AND DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION as a proactive tool, exposing students to new ways of seeing, speaking truth to power, and the courage to seek local solutions to global problems in the twenty-first century.

FILM is a sexy word and an undeniable draw for incoming students seeking a major. Students migrate toward FILM AND DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION with stars in their eyes and guns blazing, attempting to copy their favorite popular movies. This proposal begins with the initial question: why should we support a discipline that overwhelmingly trades in the lowest common denominator? The short answer, of course, is that critical thinking fostered by a liberal education is the last bastion in the fight against passive consumption of images. If we are indeed able to turn out informed citizens capable of navigating the messages in visual media, is it a bridge too far to suppose that we could fight back as part of the solution? This proposal seeks to stimulate an environment of interdisciplinary problem solving through research, writing, art, technology, and FILM AND DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION, that empowers students to take on the most pressing issues of their lives, including poverty, homelessness, income inequality, political polarization, government accountability, access to education, environmental devastation, climate change, safe food and water, gender equality, human rights, and social justice.

This proposal seeks to leverage FILM AND DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION to achieve heavy lifting for every department and discipline across the university.

- 2. Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

FILM AND DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION offers flexibility for students to forge their own connections between ideas across disciplinary boundaries to address real world issues, or "Big Questions." This proposal seeks interdisciplinary collaboration to revise the existing Film, Video and Media Studies major into a FILM AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES degree, in which students are required to choose specific secondary program components composed of courses

from appropriate departments spanning the university, culminating in a capstone course with a documentary film project in the senior year.

There is unlimited potential for existing units, programs, and colleges to be involved, including: College of Arts and Sciences; College of Aviation; Haworth College of Business; College of Education and Human Development; College of Engineering and Applied Sciences; College of Fine Arts; College of Health and Human Services; and the Lee Honors College. A survey would be created to poll each unit/major for interest level, then a plan of required courses would be agreed upon.

Other Campus Possibilities: 1. INTERDISCIPLINARY FILM INSTITUTE or certificate, serving multiple constituents (any student can take a sequence of courses in film production to use toward a specific "Big Question" they would like to pursue); 2. FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE COURSE where students collaborate on a "Big Question" micro-documentary; 3. TEAM TAUGHT COURSES combining Environment and Film to create videos documenting LEED Certified structures on campus; 4. Student generated 30 minute TV SHOW featuring Kalamazoo history from Zhang Archive.

Other Community Possibilities: 1. ANNUAL "BIG QUESTION" FILM FESTIVAL in partnership with Arcus Center, Kalamazoo Film Society, or Kalamazoo Arts Council; 2. Student generated 30 minute TV SHOW in magazine format titled "Pure Michigan" on environmental topics (and recreational opportunities) in partnership with Public Media Network. Possible buy-in from state board of tourism.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

"Far too many college students are slouching through the curriculum, completing their courses, collecting their credits, but, in fact, underperforming on many of the essential capacities they (and society) need...global knowledge, science, civic responsibility, ethics, and diversity—are among their lowest priorities for their own learning."²

Students currently enter the film program with preconceived notions tied to the lowest common denominator of entertainment. Once they learn how to operate digital technology they can make a film about anything, but they are not likely to move away from Hollywood stereotypes without encouragement. We need to take the raw passion and emotional identification that film excites and help students harness it to make films about things that matter.

This proposal takes an already popular film major and infuses it with purpose by requiring students to tackle "Big Questions" in exchange for the technical knowledge of filmmaking. It is precisely because students do not see global knowledge, science, civic responsibility, ethics, and diversity as priorities for themselves, that we should take this opportunity to provide structure for them. This can be achieved by revising the current film curriculum to include existing curricula from other units/majors. Film majors would be able to choose from a set of "Big Questions" designated in modular components of prescribed courses from other disciplines. Modular components will also make planning more predictable for revenue sharing under the new budget model.

Films that matter—created by students—have the potential to increase visibility of the university, growing enrollment. Students already want to make films, it's our job to inspire them to discover something worthwhile to make films about. Interdisciplinary collaboration will not only make this possible, but more likely to happen through our guidance.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

"...in the first two years of college, students learn to think in silos rather than in an interconnected, multidisciplinary way. A problem-based major...provides a way for students to see beyond such silos."³

This proposal has potential to promote research and creative scholarship across the university. For example, individual faculty could become involved in projects with students who are making films about their discipline to work on a "Big Question" together, or students could choose to feature a faculty member's research in their final documentary project. Cross pollination is possible as students and faculty inspire each other with new ways of seeing the discipline during the process of making a film. Successful "Big Question" films created as a result of the program could be entered into documentary film festivals and/or earn distribution in highly visible documentary venues such as POV and Independent Lens on PBS. The Traverse City Film Festival, run by the award-winning and notorious documentary filmmaker Michael Moore, is a local documentary film venue aligned with values of social justice, that may be interested in sponsoring one or more student films. There are also opportunities to apply for state and local funding, such as the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs Grants, and Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo funding. This could apply to grant funding for student films, funding for facilities and equipment, as well as grants to run a BIG QUESTION FILM FESTIVAL. If this proposal is chosen, I would like to deliver a paper on the experience/pedagogy of creating an interdisciplinary film program at the University Film and Video Association (UFVA), and College Art Association (CAA), annual conferences, among others.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

Common words to describe moving images include: film; movies; cinema; video; media; digital video; digital media; time-based media; intermedia; transmedia; broadcasting, and animation. There was a time when many of these categories could not be lumped together because each used unique tools, required specialized facilities, and represented an extended learning curve. The reason why duplications exist in our current facilities is that departments remained siloed while embracing the same advances in digital technology over the past 20 years. A perfect example is the duplication of equipment, labs, and software used in both the College of Fine Arts and the School of Communication. The content we have been teaching may have remained discrete, but the technology we are using to create the moving images is now largely the same.

No doubt there are other caches of digital video equipment located in other units on campus that could be better managed under one tent. The first obvious place is Athletics. Second would be the recently dissolved media services area. By pooling resources we could create one state of the art equipment loan facility on campus that would reduce duplication of staff required, create a twenty-first century computer checkout system complete with bar codes to keep track

of equipment and phone apps for students to reserve gear, and streamline maintenance schedules to prolong use of the items. Together we might also purchase insurance for the equipment and cover student film productions. Workshops could be designed and delivered by trained student workers demonstrating individual camera models. Students working at the combined facility could use the experience on their resume, and individual programs could also include practicum credit for working at the facility, the same way a theatre student might earn credit for building sets or helping in the scene shop.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

Even as enrollments have declined across the university, Film, Video and Media Studies courses have experienced steady enrollment, with consistent student demand for FILM AND DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION. Unfortunately for students, faculty resignations, retirements, and layoffs from Film, Video and Media Studies during the past five years have not been replaced. Between 2015 and 2020, the program has lost three tenured faculty, one term appointment, and a staff position tasked with equipment support and part time teaching. The School of Communication received permission for a film faculty line in the fall of 2019, but the search was cut short in 2020 due to COVID-19. At this time, the Film, Video and Media Studies major is reduced to one tenured faculty member serving approximately 150 declared majors.

This proposal will allow the School of Communication to streamline the current Film, Video and Media Studies major by combining it with content from other majors on campus, which has the potential to reduce the load of courses on individual faculty in the School of Communication in the short term and improve the student experience through problem-based learning. That said, moving such a large and popular program as film across interdisciplinary boundaries requires an additional film faculty member, not just to teach classes but also to contribute to the various film collaborations that may arise. Possible solutions include reinstating the previous film faculty line that was promised, identifying faculty with appropriate experience in other units and negotiating courtesy appointments, or seeking a cluster hire whose teaching and research expertise span more than one department, as recommended by the WMU Faculty Senate IAS Committee.⁴ Additionally, the success of this venture has the potential to generate increased visibility for the major and the university over time, with the need of one or more faculty to be added in three to five years, depending upon student demand.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

This proposal began as an interdisciplinary discussion between the School of Communication (SoC) and the College of Fine Arts (CFA). So far we have identified shared goals that exist between the current Film, Video, and Media Studies (FVM) major in the SoC, and the proposed Kinetic Imaging (KI) major in the CFA. The creation of a minor in each program has been discussed to facilitate exchange across the colleges for students interested in both programs, as well as serving Multimedia Arts Technology (MAT) students in the CFA. The outlook for further integration of courses across these two majors/colleges remains positive going forward. Other existing units, programs and colleges that could become directly involved to teach hands-on

digital media skills or film studies include English, History, and Music. Whereas the "Big Question" portion of interdisciplinarity could come from any other unit/major on campus that is interested in the collaboration.

1. Dana Gioia, "The Transformative Power of Art," *Liberal Education* 94, no. 1 (2008): accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/transformative-power-art>, (Interdisciplinarity@WMU).

2. Carol Geary Schneider, "A Different Take on Excellence," *Liberal Education* 94, no. 1 (2008): accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/transformative-power-art>, (Interdisciplinarity@WMU).

3. Robert J. Sternberg, "Interdisciplinary Problem-Based Learning: An Alternative to Traditional Majors and Minors," *Liberal Education* 94, no. 1 (2008): accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/transformative-power-art>, (Interdisciplinarity@WMU).

4. Western Michigan University Faculty Senate, *Four Perspectives on the Future of Interdisciplinary Academic Studies at Western Michigan University: Recommended Strategies Going Forward*, The Ad-hoc Committee on Interdisciplinary Academic Studies, (2020): p. 27.

8. Contact

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