Comparative Media Studies

Established as a graduate program in 1999–2000, Comparative Media Studies (CMS) infuses the study of contemporary media (film, television, digital systems) with a broad historical understanding of older forms of human expression. The program embraces theoretical and interpretive principles drawn from the central humanistic disciplines of literary study, history, anthropology, art history, and film studies and aims for a comparative synthesis that is responsive to the distinctive emerging media culture of the 21st century. Students in the program are taught to explore the complexity of our media environment by learning to think across media and to see beyond the boundaries imposed by older medium-specific approaches to the study of audiovisual and literary forms.

The comparative and cross-disciplinary nature of both the graduate and undergraduate programs is embodied in a faculty drawn from the Art and Architecture; Anthropology; Foreign Languages and Literatures; History; Literature; Music and Theater Arts; Philosophy; Writing and Humanistic Studies; Science, Technology, and Society; Media Arts and Sciences; Political Science; and Urban Studies and Planning programs. Approximately 35 faculty members teach subjects in Comparative Media Studies.

The graduate program consists of a two-year course of study leading to a master of science degree. The program aims to prepare students for careers in fields such as journalism, teaching and research, government and public service, museum work, information science, corporate consulting, media industry marketing and management, and educational technology. Our recent graduates are working in fields such as higher education, teaching, journalism, and photojournalism, as well as at media and technology consulting firms and media production companies. The undergraduate program, approved as an interdisciplinary major in spring 2003, mirrors the graduate program in concept and ambition and has been experiencing steady growth since its inception.

Research

Themes

Like the academic program, CMS research themes cross academic disciplines and involve both traditional and emerging communications media, establishing a focus for public presentations, research agendas, and curricular initiatives. The primary research themes are:

- Convergence culture—understanding the new media landscape

    The Education Arcade—the pedagogical potentials of computer and video games

    Innovation and diversity in game design

    Digital databases and humanities computing

- New media literacies

- Media in transition
- The future of civic media
- Global culture

Projects

The Convergence Culture Consortium (C3) was formally launched with three initial corporate partners: Turner Broadcasting, MTV, and GSD&M (an ad agency). C3's mission is to track down new forms of storytelling, advertising, and branding; analyze them; and examine how they can be placed in a larger cultural and commercial context. The project's team members author white papers on topics such as "advergaming," product placement, digital rights management, and mobile entertainment; operate two project-related blogs; publish a weekly newsletter of news and critical commentary; organize fact-finding missions (including a trip this summer exploring mobile media in China); provide onsite briefings and brainstorming sessions; and host an annual conference to brief sponsors on their ongoing research. C3 continues to attract new members and to generate significant interest from the public and industry alike.

The New Media Literacies project, sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation, completed Phase 1 of its operations and started Phase 2. The first phase sought to identify core social skills and cultural competencies young people need to fully participate in the emerging media culture and piloted pedagogical approaches for integrating those skills into in-school and after-school programs. During the second phase, the project will develop a range of curricular materials, including a casebook for media ethics (in collaboration with Harvard's Project Zero), a library of short digital films and other resources focusing on the creative and ethical choices that media makers face, and a series of initiatives designed to show the fit between media literacy principles and traditional school content. The project is part of a larger MacArthur initiative involving coordination and collaboration with researchers at the University of Southern California, the University of California–Berkeley, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the University of Chicago, and American University. This larger initiative is designed to explore the social and educational opportunities of the new media landscape.

The Education Arcade seeks to identify the pedagogical potential of games as a medium and to find ways to use games for learning both inside the classroom and out. This year, the Education Arcade began its Learning Games to Go initiative with support from Maryland Public Broadcasting through a grant from the Federal Star Schools program. It is developing four online games, each with applications compatible with cell phones, PDAs, and geographic information systems, for middle-school math and literacy learning targeted at underserved populations. Team members are also developing augmented reality games with projects using such simulations as an avian flu outbreak to test response scenarios and a planned bioterror lab to model the spread of conflicting ideas in a dispersed civic debate.

Now in its fifth year, the Metamedia Archive Project, funded by the D'Arbeloff Award for Excellence in Education, continues to develop interactive archive models for use across a broader range of topics in the humanities and social sciences. Intended to

serve as modules that teachers and students can use to explore rich subject areas, create rhetorical multimedia documents, and collaborate over the internet, early Metamedia Archives have stretched instructors' and students' notions of textbook, research paper, and classroom. Recent projects include the Eurasian History and Memory Visual Archive, Hip-Hop Japan, the Beijing Film Academy Animation Archive, and the Archive historique de Marais, strengthening the international reach of the project and making the most of the project's decision to use an open standard system.

MIT Ghost (formerly *Virtual MIT*), a collaboration between CMS and the Academic Computing group in Information Services and Technology, continued its work creating a massive, multiplayer, online game environment based on student life at MIT. The project targets incoming MIT freshmen and takes the idea of an open university to the next level. By creating an online representation of MIT and its various cultural communities, it will make MIT culture more accessible to incoming students.

Fundraising

A continued goal of activities this past year was to develop and implement sustainable and scalable business, teaching, and research models within which faculty and graduate students could explore interdisciplinary research themes and educational priorities. As it continues to solidify administrative and academic infrastructures, CMS has focused on cultivating a broader range of sponsored research and gifts from corporations, individuals, and foundations.

After funding Phase 1 of the New Media Literacies project, the MacArthur Foundation has committed $1.8 million for Phase 2's multiyear completion.

The Convergence Culture Consortium's first three members generated $210,000 as the initial installment of a two-year funding cycle.

The Education Arcade benefited this year from a $550,000 Star Schools grant as part of its ongoing collaboration with Maryland Public Television.

Paul Levitz, the president of DC Comics, has established an annual lecture series hosted by CMS and named in honor of longtime DC editor Julius Schwartz.

The fund recognizing outstanding media productions by CMS undergraduates, established in honor of longtime CMS program administrator Chris Pomiecko, continued to grow, with new contributions amounting to $10,000.

An anonymous donor pledged $500,000 over five years in support of the CMS program. The new fund will support an international graduate student and a postdoctoral fellow.

The Greg Shaw Technologist in Residence Fund continues to support new technologists. Greg Shaw, an alumnus in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and an early supporter of the CMS program, established the fund. Philip Tan was the first CMS technologist in residence.

Gerald Katell, an MIT alumnus and CMS Advisory Group member, continued payment on the $1 million pledged to endow the Gerald L. Katell (1962) Fellowship and Education Fund in Comparative Media Studies.

We are also currently in conversation with NBC about the potential funding of new games initiatives, with the Knight Foundation about a potential joint CMS–Media Lab initiative on the future of civic media, and with the government of Singapore about possible funding of a games innovation lab that would involve collaborations inside MIT with the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory and beyond MIT with a host of Singapore educational institutions.

Governance

The program in Comparative Media Studies has two directors: John E. Burchard professor of humanities Henry Jenkins (Literature and Comparative Media Studies) and Professor William Uricchio (Literature, Foreign Languages and Literatures, and Comparative Media Studies). The program is under the auspices of three humanities programs: Literature, Writing and Humanistic Studies, and Foreign Languages and Literatures. Administratively, CMS is housed in the Literature program. The program is governed by a steering committee jointly chaired by Professors Jenkins and Uricchio. Other committee members for AY2006 were Professor James Buzard, head of literature; Professor James Paradis, head of writing and humanistic studies; Edward Barrett, senior lecturer in writing and humanistic studies; Kochi Prefecture–John Manjiro professor Shigeru Miyagawa; Douglas Morgenstern, senior lecturer in Spanish; and Janet Sonenberg, associate professor of theater arts.

Staffing

CMS started AY2006 with an entirely new staff: Sarah Wolozin, program administrator and graduate officer; David Edery, associate director for development; Generoso Fierro, administrative assistant and undergraduate officer; and Evan Hinkle, administrative assistant. In addition, research project management was handled by Parmesh Shahani (C3), Margaret Weigel (New Media Literacies), and Brett Camper, succeeded by Scot Osterweil (Education Arcade).

Postdoctoral Program

A postdoctoral program was approved, enabling CMS to recruit younger scholars and media makers to the program to support both teaching and research activities. Appointments were awarded to Alice Robison (working in the areas of games, media literacy, and learning) and Joshua Green (working in the areas of creative industries and convergence culture); in addition, Hugo Liu (working in the areas of taste cultures, aesthetics, and computational media) will split his time between the Media Lab and CMS. All appointments are effective AY2007.

Graduate Admissions

CMS continues to attract a diverse group of applicants and students. Our current cohort of 21 students includes 10 women and 6 international students from Belgium, Bulgaria, China, India, Israel, and Singapore.

We received 60 applications for admission to the program in fall 2006, including 36 women, 4 minority representatives, and 22 international students. We admitted 14 students, and 7 have accepted, including 3 women and 3 international students (from China, Columbia, and Pakistan). The modest acceptance rate is due to competing programs that offered fellowships (at acceptance deadline, we had minimal funds in hand) and competition from PhD programs in our area (our highest degree remains the master's).

During fall 2005, the program hosted four on-campus information sessions that were designed to allow potential students to meet CMS faculty and students, evaluate opportunities in the program, and attend classes, events, and research group meetings.

CMS also conducted online chat sessions to facilitate interaction with potential applicants who could not attend these on-campus sessions; online sessions were particularly popular with our international applicants. The graduate homepage is http://cms.mit.edu/academics/gradprogram.php.

Undergraduate Education

The undergraduate program—established in 1982 under its former name, Film and Media Studies—serves as preparation for advanced study in a range of scholarly and professional disciplines as well as careers in media or industry. The curriculum consists of more than 50 subjects arranged in three tiers and broadly subdivided into three areas or fields: comparative media, film, and digital studies.

Comparative Media Studies was approved as MIT's first fully interdisciplinary major effective fall 2003. The Committee on Curricula, the Committee on Undergraduate Programs, and the MIT faculty approved the major on an experimental five-year basis. We continue to explore ways to solidify both our course of study and our cohort of students. As of June 2006, there were 21 CMS majors and 30 concentrators. Generoso Fierro, administrative assistant, has been the undergraduate officer since fall 2005.

CMS has also developed educational and research programs to provide additional opportunities for undergraduates to gain both academic and professional experience in media-related fields. In AY2006, Comparative Media Studies hired 14 Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) students for pay and credit. This robust number of UROP students reflects the continued increase in research activity in the program. Undergraduates worked with faculty and CMS graduate students on projects such as Augmented Reality Simulations, which create hand-held educational games; the Storyteller Project, which investigates methods of creating cultural media programming for children; the Machinima project, which explores the pedagogical uses of game engine–based animations; and *MIT Ghost,* a multiplayer role-playing game set in a simulation of Ashdown House. The undergraduate homepage is http://cms.mit.edu/academics/undergrad.php.

Events and Programs

Violence and Desire in Japanese Popular Culture

Assistant professor Ian Condry (Foreign Languages and Literatures and CMS) organized a symposium on Japanese animation as a driving force in the globalization of contemporary Japanese culture (April 14–15). The conference was part of a larger research project titled "Cool Japan: Media, Culture, Technology," which seeks to understand the political potentials, cultural consequences, and dangerous distortions of "cool."

MIT Short Film Festival

Research associate Kurt Fendt (Foreign Languages and Literatures and CMS) organized the second annual presentation of new European short films gathered from festivals and European film schools. Thanks to the new collaboration between Beijing Film Academy's Animation School, CMS, and Foreign Languages and Literatures, this year's festival also focused on Chinese animation.

Convergence 2006

Rather than thinking "outside the box," the first annual conference for members of the Convergence Culture Consortium took as its theme "there is no box." Representatives from GSD&M, Turner Broadcasting, and MTV, together with C3's researchers, explored the implications of thinking outside of familiar marketing and communication paradigms and mapped directions for future exploration.

Communications Forum

Directed by Professor David Thorburn, the Communications Forum sponsors lectures, panel discussions, and conferences on all aspects of technology and communications, public policy, and media in transition. The Communications Forum sponsored several panel discussions that attracted large audiences from the academic community at MIT and in the Boston area. Topics included "Television's New Economics," "A Conversation with Robert Pinsky," "The Future of the Digital Commons," and "Political Communication in the Digital Age." More information about the forum can be found at http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum.

Colloquia

CMS sponsored weekly colloquia designed to give our graduate students and the academic community at MIT a rich and challenging intellectual experience as well as opportunities to interact educationally and socially. Topics included "Narrative Across Media," "Moving Image Media Mash-up," "Notions of Loyalty within Brand and Fan Cultures," "What Is Machinima?" "MTV World," and "May Irwin's Kiss: The Beginnings of Cinema and the Transformation of American Culture." More information can be found at http://cms.mit.edu/events/colloquiaforums.php.

Honors and Awards

Associate professor Diana Henderson (Literature and CMS) was awarded the 2005 Everett Moore Baker Award for excellence in undergraduate teaching.

Professor Michael Fischer (Anthropology; Science, Technology, and Society; and CMS) won the 2005 American Ethnological Society's Senior Book Prize for *Emergent Forms of Life and Anthropological Voice* (Duke, 2003).

Associate professor Thomas Levenson (Writing and Humanistic Studies and CMS) won the National Academies Communications Award for his film *Back to the Beginning* (broadcast on PBS's *NOVA* series).

Associate professor Chappell Lawson (Political Science and CMS) received a $250,000 National Science Foundation grant for a study of campaign effects titled Mexico 2006 Panel Study.

Senior lecturer Martin Marks (Music and Theater Arts and CMS) and his team received a $350,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant to develop *Treasures from American Film Archives 3: Social Issue Films of the Silent Era*.

Assistant professor Charity Scribner (Foreign Languages and Literatures and CMS) was awarded an Alexander von Humboldt fellowship.

Visiting Scholars

CMS hosted a number of new and largely international visiting scholars this year. Jorn Ahrens of Humboldt University Berlin is researching the mythology of modernity through science fiction films with the support of an Alexander von Humboldt Fedor Lynen Fellowship; Stuart Brotman, past president and CEO of the Museum of Television and Radio, is writing a study of digital television; Peter Mueller, an installation artist from Frankfurt supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), is working on the meanings of fictional scientific instruments; Stefan Werning (Bonn University, DAAD fellow) explores the staging of war in computer games; Tomoyuki Iino (Sophia University in Tokyo) works on the relationship between American poetry and music; and Doris Rusch (Technical University of Vienna) investigates the emotional design of computer games.

Frank Espinoza, a highly regarded professional in the film and graphic novel sectors, has been appointed a Martin Luther King Jr. visiting scholar. Effective AY2007, he will join us to teach courses in character design and world building. In addition, CMS maintains longer term research affiliate relationships with several past visiting scholars, including Yuichi Washida (research head, Hakuhodo), Alex Chisholm (producer), and Curtiss Priest (media activist).

Publications

Several faculty members affiliated with CMS published books and media projects this year, including Professor William Uricchio, *Media Culture*s (Heidelberg); assistant

professor Aden Evens (Writing and Humanistic Studies and CMS), *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines and Experience* (University of Minnesota Press); associate professor Diana Henderson (Literature and CMS), *Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen* (Blackwell) and *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare across Time and Media* (Cornell); Professor William Mitchell (Media Arts and Sciences and CMS), *Playing Words* (MIT); and Professor Irving Singer (Philosophy and CMS), a paperback edition of *Three Philosophical Filmmakers: Hitchcock, Welles, Renoir* (MIT). Associate professor Eric Klopfer (Teacher Education Program) released his simulation and game development environment for children titled *StarLogo: The Next Generation*, and CMS graduate student Dan Roy designed the just-released computer game *Making History: The Calm and the Storm*.

Henry Jenkins, Director and John E. Burchard Professor of Humanities
William Uricchio, Director and Professor of Comparative Media Studies

More information about Comparative Media Studies can be found at http://cms.mit.edu/.