A PROPOSAL TO CREATE A NEW HUMANITIES MAJOR
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COMMITTEE REPORT

Members of the Committee:

Eric Ames, Associate Professor, Germanics
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Geoffrey Turnovsky, Associate Professor, French and Italian Studies
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Summary of the Proposal:

The Committee unanimously recommends that the faculty of the Humanities Division endorse the creation of a new, cross-departmental "Humanities" major that would complement, but not replace, existing departmentally-based majors and minors. This new major would offer at least as much breadth and depth of coverage as departmentally-based majors, while allowing students to take advantage of existing areas of divisional strength that cross departmental and divisional boundaries.

This new major would not be departmentally based. Instead, it would capitalize on the cross-departmental strengths of the Humanities Division as a whole. The Humanities major would be governed by a faculty director and a faculty steering committee appointed by the Divisional Dean of Arts and Humanities. Amongst its other duties, this steering committee would approve all proposals to create new modules and oversee the administration of existing modules. In evaluating proposals for modules, the steering committee would be charged to ensure that all proposed modules be coherent, feasible, and sustainable. Guidelines for coherence, feasibility, and sustainability are described below.

The Humanities major would be organized as follows.

- Students must satisfactorily fulfill their 5-credit "C" course requirement plus 10 VLPA credits before enrolling as Humanities majors.
- The Humanities major would require a minimum of 60 credits, distributed between two "modules" of 30 credits each. Because most Humanities courses are 5 credits, each module would thus require at least 6 courses to complete. To ensure that students could complete each of their two modules in a timely manner, every module would consist of a minimum of 10 courses (50 credits) from amongst which students could choose. Many modules would include more than 10 courses/50 credits, but none would include fewer.
- Modules might focus on particular historical periods ("Medieval and Renaissance Studies"); intellectual or cultural movements ("European Romanticism," "Modernism," or "Post-Colonial Studies"); literary genres ("Epics" or "Lyric Poetry"); area, regional, or national studies ("China

Studies" or "South Asian Literature and Film"); or other commonalities that cross time or space ("The Literature of Empire"; "Media and Modern Culture"; "Eco-Criticism and the Arts"). This list is intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

- Each module would include courses at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced undergraduate level.
- Courses included in a Humanities module could be drawn from any department with relevant offerings, whether or not that department is located within the Humanities Division of the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Each module must include courses drawn from at least two different departments or programs.
- No course could be included in a module without the consent of the faculty member(s) teaching it and the department(s) in which it is taught.
- Each module would be organized and administered by the faculty members whose courses were included in it, with the oversight of a faculty director and a faculty steering committee.
- Once enrolled in a module, students would be guaranteed the right to complete it in a timely manner.
- An undergraduate advisor would be hired to work with students enrolled in the Humanities major, advising them about course selection and clearing them for graduation.

The Background to this Proposal:

There is both a local and a national context for this proposal.

The Humanities Division at the University of Washington consists of twelve departments and programs with approximately 160 tenure-stream faculty members. 50 of these faculty members are in the Department of English. As these numbers make clear, many of our departments are small, with fewer than 10 tenure-stream faculty members assigned to them. As faculty numbers in Humanities departments continue to shrink in response to ongoing budget cuts, and student numbers rise with the growing size of the undergraduate student body, these small departments will find it increasingly difficult to maintain departmentally-based undergraduate majors and minors.

Across the country, similar developments have led administrators to close scores of humanities departments on the grounds that these departments have too few majors to justify the cost of maintaining them. Yet in most cases, courses taught in these departments have high student credit hour enrolments; and in almost every case, the intellectual importance of the subjects they teach is undiminished and even increasing. The result is a paradoxical situation in which language and literature departments are being eliminated, at the same time that our national leaders are calling for American students to prepare themselves for an increasingly globalized and integrated world by studying the languages and cultures of other countries.

Our proposal to create a cross-departmental Humanities major structured around faculty-designed modules is a response to the new world in which we are now operating. This new major will allow small departments to contribute actively in training Humanities majors, whether or not they choose to maintain a departmentally-based major also. Its modular format will encourage faculty to teach courses that bring them into regular contact with faculty in other departments who share similar

teaching and research interests, leading to a better integration of teaching and research for both students and faculty. It will encourage departments to cross-list courses and to draw upon curricular strengths in other departments to strengthen their own departmentally-based majors and minors. Asian Language and Literature, for example, is already designing a new, departmentally-based major that would consist of several years of language study combined with a single, cross-departmental module. We anticipate several other departments following their lead.

The local context for this proposal is also important to understand. The Humanities Division is unique amongst the other divisions and colleges of the University in that our departments are NOT divided along disciplinary or methodological lines. With the exception of the Linguistics Department, the Department of Comparative Literature, and the Comparative History of Ideas Program, our departments are distinguished from one another by the languages or linguistic families (Asian, Classical, English, French & Italian, Germanic, Near Eastern, Scandinavian, Slavic, Spanish and Portuguese) in which the literary and cinematic texts they study were composed. Our faculty members adopt a variety of methodological approaches in their work, but there is no sense in which the methods appropriate to the study of Near Eastern languages, literatures, and civilization (for example) are fundamentally distinct from those appropriate to the study of English or Asian languages, literatures, and civilizations. Methodological differences between members of a single Humanities department are almost always greater than are the methodological differences between the members of two different Humanities departments.

What this means is that an undergraduate major in the Humanities is NOT directed at teaching students to think like a Germanicist, or a classicist, or a Slavicist, in the way that majors in other divisions would be directed toward teaching students to think like sociologists, or chemists, or mathematicians. As Humanities scholars, our methods cross departmental lines. We have philologists, linguists, cultural studies scholars, critical theorists, and film and media scholars in almost all of our departments. As a result, students seeking to build a deep methodological or disciplinary competency can more easily do so by working across departmental boundaries than by remaining within the confines of a single department. This is an important reason why a cross-departmental Humanities major makes sense, in a way that a cross-departmental social or natural science major might not.

With respect to the local context for this proposal, it is also important to recognize that the Humanities Division does NOT include all the departments whose subject areas are usually considered to be part of the humanities. For historical reasons peculiar to this institution, the Humanities Division is a "languages and literature" division. History, Philosophy, Art History, Music History, and Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies all lie OUTSIDE the Humanities Division. Yet any proper understanding of Romanticism or Modernism, to cite but two obvious examples, MUST include course work in all these subject areas as well as in the study of literature and language. This is another reason why a cross-departmental Humanities major makes sense for us at the University of Washington. Such a major can draw on relevant course work from across all the humanities subjects, not just those that are taught within the rather arbitrarily drawn boundaries of the Humanities Division.

The cross-departmental course offerings of this proposed major will thus ensure that students majoring in Humanities acquire an appropriate breadth of subject knowledge in their course work, while the modular structure will ensure that this breadth does not lack depth. We believe, indeed, that these new Humanities majors will come away with MORE depth of understanding of their fields of study than

may currently be the case for many of our departmentally-based majors, precisely because our departments are not disciplinarily defined.

Guidelines for Modules:

The following quidelines would be applied by the Faculty Steering Committee in evaluating modules proposed for approval as part of the Humanities major:

Modules must be intellectually and pedagogically COHERENT.

- Modules must have a clear intellectual focus, but one broad enough to be appropriate to an undergraduate major. Historical and comparative perspectives should be incorporated into the curricular offerings of a module wherever possible.
- Modules must provide for both breadth and depth in their treatment of their subject(s). To this end, modules must offer a mix of introductory, intermediate, and advanced-level courses.
- The intellectual rationale for each module must be articulated as part of the approval process, and should be posted after approval on the Humanities major website, so that students and faculty can consult that rationale when making curricular choices. Faculty teaching in a module should help students to draw connections between individual courses and the larger intellectual rationale of the module.
- Modules must have clearly articulated learning objectives.
- Modules must provide avenues through which students can develop their skills in writing, close reading and analysis, and research.
- Modules whose aim is to teach students to read, write, speak and/or understand a language at the first, second, or third year level will not be approved as part of the Humanities major. This does not preclude language departments from restructuring their existing majors along modular lines if they choose to do so. It is simply to say that such language-only modules will not be accepted as meeting the requirements of the Humanities major.
- Modules may include courses that require competency in a language other than English, but must not require such courses unless competency in a non-English language is stated as a prerequisite for enrolling in the module.

Modules must be FEASIBLE for students to complete.

- Modules must be comprised of classes that are offered regularly and predictably. Students, including transfer students, must be able to complete modules in a timely manner.
- If a module requires specific courses that every student who enrolls in the module must take, then these required courses must be offered annually, without fail.
- There must be a sufficient range of courses included in the module to ensure that students can complete the module in a timely manner. For a 30 credit module, this will ordinarily mean that at least 50 credits worth of courses should be included in the module's curricular options.
- Reasonable course substitutions will be permitted to allow students to complete modules. Such substitutions must be approved by the Faculty Director of the Humanities major.

Modules must be SUSTAINABLE.

- Required courses in a module must be able to be taught by more than one faculty member.
- Departments housing required courses in a module must agree to ensure that such required courses are offered at least annually.
- Admission to modules may be capped upon the recommendation of the faculty associated with the module and with the approval of the Faculty Steering Committee.
- Modules can be eliminated with the approval of the faculty associated with the module and with the concurrence of the Faculty Steering Committee.
- If it is decided to end a module, students already enrolled in that module must be permitted to complete the module, provided that the student does so within three years following the closure of the module to new students.
- Faculty proposing a module must commit to admitting students into the module for at least five years from the date on which admissions to the module are opened.