

University Senate

Proposed: November 16, 2018

Adopted:

RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH A CERTIFICATE IN COMPARATIVE MEDIA (GSAS)

WHEREAS it is a commonplace that the current digital revolution has changed our economy, society and culture as profoundly as did the industrial revolution before it, and thus the study of media technologies has expanded into anthropology, architecture, art history, religion and music, and

WHEREAS the Certificate in Comparative Media is aimed at graduate students in the arts and sciences whose research engages the history and theory of media technologies, and

WHEREAS the certificate's syllabus is structured around comparison – historical, geographical and disciplinary -- with a required core course introducing the paradigm of comparative media, jointly taught by two faculty members from differing disciplines, and

WHEREAS the certificate will be supervised by faculty affiliated with the Center for Comparative Media, which brings together scholars in diverse departments to develop new approaches to media and to use media to generate new analytic modes of inquiry for their home departments, and

WHEREAS while Columbia currently offers an M.A. in Film and Media Studies in the School of the Arts and a broadly interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Communications from the Journalism School, this certificate is designed not to compete with these programs but to engage students currently enrolled in Ph.D. programs by providing a more rigorous training in media theory and history, and

WHEREAS, programs in media and digital studies across the country are growing, and this certificate will render students whose research directly engages media more employable in media programs,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate create a Certificate in Comparative Media in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in collaboration with a Center for Comparative Media.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Education Committee review the program five years after its launch.

Proponent:
Education Committee

1) Purpose

The Certificate will be supervised by faculty affiliated with the Center for Comparative Media whose aim is to develop new theoretical and methodological approaches to examining the ever proliferating forms of media that structure our cultural and social worlds. The move from analog to digital technologies means it is hard for us to purchase commodities, make art, seek medical help, travel, educate ourselves, work, or even worship without passing through the bottleneck of algorithms and software that organize and control how we operate in the world. These changes have led scholars to examine influence of media in a much broader way and also have made the influence of media more apparent to disciplines seemingly far removed. The Center seeks to engage this transformation in two ways. The first is historical. The digital revolution pushed scholars into examining earlier historical moments of media transformation - from manuscript to print cultures or from print to electromechanical and electronic media - as a way of understanding with greater specificity how it is that media technologies are constitutive of our world and how this has changed. Historical comparison troubles the certainties we have about media now and allows us to see more clearly what is distinct about the changes brought by digital media. Second, we recognize that there has been a global reorganizing of media production so that present and future engines of media development and innovation are likely to be as much outside the historical centers of the West as within them. Scholars have largely assumed that media were developed in the West and later exported to other places which were then in the place of 'catching up' with a media history that had already been established. But we know that cinema arrived in Shanghai and Calcutta at the same time as it did in London and then evolved in those locations to produce different institutional and aesthetic forms. We also know that currently Seoul is far more 'wired' than New York, that Lagos is developing a film industry that is dominant in all of Africa and moving into new global arenas. Comparative Media is designed to provide a fundamental rethinking of media technologies and media theory by building an approach that is constitutively comparative and better suited to understand the media world we live in today.

The Certificate is aimed at graduate students in the arts and sciences whose research engages the history and theory of media technologies. Pedagogically it is structured around comparison – historically, geographically and disciplinarily. It is comprised of a core course introducing the paradigm of Comparative Media, jointly taught by two faculty members from differing disciplines, that is required of all students in the program. The aim of insisting on scholars from different disciplines is intended to recognize that the study of media has moved beyond its traditional bounds into a range of other fields and that to analyze media will require methodologies and theories from a range of locations across the social sciences and humanities. Comparative Media at Columbia has some of the top scholars of media in Latin America, Africa, South and East Asia as well as in Europe and the U.S.. To leverage this expertise, students are required to take four other courses from a selection of graduate seminars offered by Comparative Media faculty – two of which must be historically or geographically comparable to but not identical with the student's research topic. These courses are to be approved in discussion with the Comparative Media DGS. Finally, there will be a dissertation workshop for senior students in which they present their chapters in progress. The intellectual purpose of the Certificate is twofold. First, the Certificate will provide a space in which faculty engaged in the Center for Comparative Media can expand through pedagogy our unique approach to understanding media and students can engage with a distinct comparative media approach to media. Second, currently in Columbia there are students studying media in disciplines as diverse as Anthropology, Architecture, Art History, Communications, East Asian

Studies, English, Film, French, German, History, MESAAS, Music, Religion and other fields. The aim of the Certificate is to bring these students together, train them in a specific approach, allow them to recognize each other and faculty engaged in similar pursuits. It gives greater intellectual rigor to what is already occurring on campus – students interested in media seeking courses outside of their home disciplines in order to better train themselves for their research projects. Awarding them a Certificate in Comparative Media formalizes their research in media, making it visible to scholars beyond their home discipline and making them more viable on the job market.

Currently, Columbia University offers an MA in Film and Media Studies in the School of the Arts. It also offers a broadly interdisciplinary PhD in Communications from the Journalism school. This Certificate is not designed to compete with these programs but to engage students *currently enrolled in PhD programs* by providing them with a more rigorous training in media theory and history. It also expects to engage in fruitful intellectual exchanges with students and faculty from both Communications and Film Studies.

2) Need

It is a commonplace that the current digital revolution has produced a profound a change in our economy, society and culture as the industrial revolution did before it. As a consequence, the study of the ways our world has always been organized by media technologies has expanded beyond the disciplinary homes of film or communications into a range of other fields as they recognize that religious life, political organizations, cultural texts, all rest upon a base of media technologies that organize how these phenomena operate. Because of this, on the Columbia campus, disciplines that previously were seen as wholly separate from film and media – anthropology, architecture, art history, religion, music – have begun to incorporate the study of media into their core pedagogy and train students in these methods and ideas. The Center for Comparative Media grew at Columbia from the interests of scholars in diverse departments coming together to develop new approaches to media and to use media to generate new analytic modes of inquiry for their home departments. The Certificate draws on the energy that exists on campus amongst faculty and students regarding interest in media and seeks to give this interest a coherent, intellectual focus.

This general expansion of interest in media is also matched by the rise in enrolments and growth in programs in media and digital studies across the country while some other disciplines are contracting. Allowing students whose research directly engages media to leave Columbia with a Certificate makes those students more employable in media programs.

Have students at the University or elsewhere requested this program? How many?

Graduate students interested in media have long crossed disciplines to try and take courses related to their interests that their home fields do not support. All faculty in our program have been used to teaching students beyond their disciplines for a considerable amount of time. The Certificate places this interdisciplinary crossing onto a more rigorous intellectual foundation, it allows students in different departments to build a cohort relation and learn from one another, and it formalizes this through a Certificate that makes this training visible to employers.