

**RECOMMENDATION TO MERGE THE DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
AND THE PROGRAM IN FOLKLORE TO CREATE THE DEPARTMENT OF
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND FOLKLORE STUDIES**

Background

The Program in Comparative Literature was established in 1917 and later developed into a department in 1927. The Department of Comparative Literature offers bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees to students pursuing studies in literary and cultural texts in their original languages comparatively across strategically specified historical periods, geographical areas, and literary and cultural movements.

The Program in Folklore emerged in the 1980s from the university's varied foreign language and area studies programs, one of the largest concentrations in the nation. The program engages varied comparative and interdisciplinary approaches in a broad range of courses on oral, material, social, and spiritual aspects of African, Middle Eastern, Asian, European, American Indian, North, Central, and South American folklore, on theory and the history of scholarship, and on the public presentation of folklore through archives, exhibits, festivals, media productions, and other modes of representation. In 2001, a regional humanities institution – the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures – was created to focus on the languages and folklore of the Upper Midwest's diverse peoples.

There is already a considerable network of connections between the intellectual fields and disciplines of folklore and of comparative literature. Part of that network of connection is rooted in the historical origin of both intellectual fields. That is, the emergence and flourishing of comparative studies in the late 19th century was a response to the proliferation of differences brought close and immediate by modern technology and by modern European colonialism – comparative linguistics, comparative law, comparative literature, comparative religions, comparative folklore. That is a historical connection which has developed in diverse and varied ways – intellectually, academically, and institutionally – in the intervening two centuries.

Here and now, in addition to common intellectual roots, the two intellectual fields and academic disciplines share research principles and questions (see the new department's jointly crafted mission statement below). On the UW-Madison campus, two folklore faculty were already affiliate faculty in comparative literature; for some years, comparative literature faculty have worked and continue to work with individual faculty in folklore; currently, at least four graduate students in comparative literature are working in areas that intersect in exciting and fruitful ways with the field of folklore and the research and teaching of its faculty. Also in the here and now, several administrative challenges faced by the Program in Folklore are addressed by the conjoining of the two units: administrative staffing, graduate student support and tenure homes for folklore faculty.

Finally, the productive and creative linking of the Department of Comparative Literature and the Program in Folklore as the Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies is a small but not insignificant instance of a faculty-generated model for rethinking relationships among humanities departments and programs. Comparative literature and folklore are happy to engage in that effort, which the two units began prior to the state and campus budget cutting mandates. The faculty in both units continue in that effort in the firm belief that they have and will continue to learn a great deal from each other in an intellectually and pedagogically driven administrative union.

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Mission of New Department

The mission of the new Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies focuses on six goals:

- to investigate comparatively the diverse roles that literatures, cultures and traditional arts play in shaping understanding of and participation in the world;
- to expand knowledge of the rich and complex interconnections of the diverse cultures of the world, near and distant, through investigation of the languages and multiple contexts of those cultures;
- to foster informed understanding of societies through comparative study of the cultural forces that move and drive people;
- to study, teach and disseminate knowledge based on questions of culture as it emerges in literatures, traditional arts, popular texts, cultural performances and everyday artistic expression;
- to prepare students to be informed and insightful mediators of and participants in the cultures in which they live and through which they move; and
- to promote understanding of and ability to participate in conversations and other work on diversity in its multiple manifestations – race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, globalization, nation-states, modernity, the individual, community, and role of history and the past in the present.

The proposal to merge the Department of Comparative Literature and the Program in Folklore was approved unanimously by the executive committee of the Department of Comparative Literature and by the steering committee of the Program in Folklore. The proposal was subsequently approved by the College of Letters and Science Academic Planning Council and the University Academic Planning Council.