Statement Concerning Social Science and the ICJMT Process (7/12/12)

An ad hoc faculty group met June 27, 2012 to discuss the role of social science in a new interdisciplinary UCB college related to Information, Communication, Journalism, Media and Technology (ICJMT) as proposed by the April 16, 2012 report of the ICJMT Steering Committee. The report recommends the formation of a College of Media, Design and the Arts that would incorporate several existing campus units. This discussion group was convened by Robert Craig (COMM), following an open invitation to interested faculty across the UCB campus. Participating faculty included John Ackerman (PWR and COMM), Stewart Hoover (JMC), Michele Jackson (COMM), Matt Koschmann (COMM), Michael McDevitt (JMC), Bella Mody (JMC), Helmut Müller-Sievers (GSLL and director, CHA), Peter Simonson (COMM), and Paul Voakes (JMC). This statement summarizes salient points that emerged in the discussion and is addressed to interested faculty and administration. (Contact: robert.craig@colorado.edu)

Participants expressed various responses to the Steering Committee recommendations ranging from enthusiastic support to strong skepticism. Many found the idea of a new college, its interdisciplinary aspirations, and many aspects of the Steering Committee report to be promising and even quite exciting. Many also were critical of certain aspects of the report, several noting in particular that it heavily emphasizes technology and digital media arts while having relatively little to say about some other disciplines proposed to be housed in the college. (One participant dissented from this view and expressed strong support for a new interdisciplinary unit focused on technology, although not for the proposed college structure.) The intellectual rationale for a new college needs to be more fully developed. The role of social science, including the communication discipline, is crucially neglected in the current proposal and needs to be more strongly emphasized throughout. While moving in promising interdisciplinary directions, the proposed college still falls short of the transformational vision that was called for at the outset of the ICJMT process. How to get to that transformational vision is a key issue that motivated our social science discussion as it has motivated a parallel arts and humanities discussion group led by Prof. Müller-Sievers. We hope these two discussions will continue in a collaborative spirit.

As the ICJMT process continues, we offer the following recommendations:

**Develop a more inclusive, comprehensively integrated intellectual rationale for the college.**

It should be emphasized that not all participants in our discussion agreed that a new ICJMT entity should necessarily take the form of a college that would incorporate whole existing departments. Some would like the process to remain open to other interdisciplinary configurations that they feel would have a greater potential to be truly transformative. However, if there is to be a new college, it will be important to articulate more fully how the various included disciplines contribute to a coherent multidisciplinary whole. How will this be conceptualized and envisioned practically in the case of each discipline or field? While the Steering Committee report mentions the need to preserve and strengthen existing programs, the dominant emphasis of the report on technology and digital arts does not inspire much confidence in this regard. For example, although a lot of communication-related research and instruction apparently would occur in the proposed college, there is little acknowledgement in the report that a discipline of communication exists (represented by numerous faculty in both COMM and JMC) that would centrally contribute to the intellectual rationale for such a college. Faculty members
in all of the included disciplines whose work does not centrally relate to technology, digital arts, or applied/professional education understandably fear that they will be marginalized by that dominant emphasis. Some would like more assurance that this will be a strongly research-oriented unit appropriate to an AAU institution. These issues need much more attention as the process continues.

**Elaborate the role of social science as a central component of the college.** Social science would clearly have a large presence in the college as presently conceived, and yet the role of social science is crucially neglected. At least three of the proposed units – COMM, JMC (however configured), and the new Information Studies program would include substantial social science components, and other social scientists would potentially be involved through envisioned partnerships with an affiliated institute and other campus units. Many social scientists in our discussion group as well as many colleagues in our units do yet see the proposed College of Media, Design, and the Arts as an environment in which they would thrive.

**Reach out to involve relevant faculty, especially in the social sciences.** Faculty with social science interests who were engaged in earlier stages of the ICJMT process (specifically, by the Exploratory Committee) and who potentially could contribute to the success of a new college have not been involved in the Steering Committee process or since. This may be best accomplished by directly approaching members of existing campus networks and collaborating groups, rather than by open invitations to meetings.

**The name of a new college should be on the table for discussion.** As we have noted, many (not all) faculty in our social science discussion group and in our home units see no clear place for themselves in a College of Media, Design, and the Arts. The name should be negotiated with input from whatever units or faculty members are ultimately to be housed there. There was some support for including “Communication” in the college name as a broad term that embraces social science as well as humanities approaches and covers many aspects of media and information studies without seeming to exclude work that is not centrally concerned with media or information. Support was also expressed for “Design” as a forward-looking concept with rich interdisciplinary potential. There was no consensus either on a particular name or that the name is an important issue, but there was consensus that this should be a matter for discussion depending on the ultimate composition of a new campus entity.