

REPORT ON A FACULTY DISCUSSION ABOUT A DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION STUDIES IN THE PROPOSED COLLEGE OF MEDIA, DESIGN AND THE ARTS

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Parallel to the Summer 2012 discussion about the ICJMT proposal by faculty associated with the Center for the Humanities and the Arts, another group of faculty held a discussion about one aspect of the ICJMT proposal, namely, the idea of a Department of Information Studies as it might fit into the proposed College of Media, Design and the Arts. Participating were three faculty members of the ICJMT Steering Committee (Brown, Calabrese and Palen). Two additional faculty participants were from the University Libraries (Ascher and Johnson), both of whom earned masters degrees relatively recently in Library and Information Science and are very familiar with how Schools of Information are designed, and therefore had much to contribute to considerations about how a proposed Department of Information Studies might resemble and/or depart from existing models. Also participating, via Skype and email from Norway, was Prof. Kai Larsen, whose research focuses on uses of information technology in the study of human behavior.

Throughout the discussion, a number of important considerations were raised, and the meeting resulted in some valuable recommendations for how the campus can move forward with a plan. These matters are enumerated below.

1. Identity in the Field: The group recognizes that the name “Information Studies” has specific connotations in some academic contexts, and may, for example, suggest to some that the Department offers an ALA (American Library Association)-accredited Masters in Library and Information Science. Or the name may suggest to some that the Department is a member of the “iSchools Caucus” (<http://www.ischools.org/site/>).

The group does not consider ALA accreditation or focusing on professional training for librarians to be a valuable goal for the immediate future of the Department, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the demand for professional librarians is growing slower than average for all occupations

(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Education-Training-and-Library/Librarians.htm>)

However, we did see identification with and membership in the iSchools Caucus as a goal that would benefit CU, if not immediately, then as soon as it would be feasible. According to the iSchool Caucus website, training for “the information field” is becoming increasingly vital in the digital age:

The study of information is interdisciplinary, fed by multiple diverse fields. Librarianship and computer science have historically been the primary feeders of the field, but information studies is also fed by fields such as education, psychology, anthropology, business, journalism—indeed, the range of social sciences.

<http://www.ischools.org/site/about/>

An important requirement for membership in the iSchool Caucus is that a program offer a Ph.D. degree, which is recommended below. Overall, the group feels that the Department should be agile and responsive to changes in professional expectations and opportunities in the range of information fields. This should include ongoing monitoring of the relevance, value and demands for professional accreditations. For example, eventual ALA accreditation may increase the value of the degrees offered by the Department. As well, Departmental membership in other consortia may be sought, on the advice of the faculty of the Department, and based on professional expectations for work within specific information fields the Department aims to serve and lead.

2. Interdisciplinary Orientation: At the same time that the ICJMT Steering Committee and this group see an intellectual affiliation between the proposed Department and “the range of social sciences” that are characteristic of iSchools, given the context in which the Department has been proposed, i.e., within a College of Media, Design and the Arts, the group also recognizes, as did the ICJMT Steering Committee, the unique potential for this Department to develop and demonstrate strength in media, design, and the arts. To that end, the humanities, arts, and social sciences should all be included within the purview of the proposed Department.

Based on existing campus strengths, and in anticipation of future hiring, the Department has the potential to initially develop interdisciplinary distinction in technical fields of interest to artists, designers, and journalists, along with a broad range of relevant social science and humanities disciplines.

3. Porosity: In keeping with the call for the development of a new College of Media, Design and the Arts that has highly porous curricular relationships with other Schools and Colleges on the CU-Boulder campus, the Department could be developed to fruitfully serve the needs and aims of both the proposed new College and those of a wider range of disciplines across the entire campus.

Moreover, as the ICJMT Steering Committee’s proposal for a new College emphasizes, the goal of porosity should not be limited to building strong relations between and among Schools and Colleges on the campus. Equally important will be the porosity, and the resulting strength, of relationships built between the new

College, including the Department of Information Studies, and the world beyond the University. To cite but one important example, the Department could play a vital role not only in its relation to the various campus-based disciplines that are concerned with the natural and built environments (e.g., in environmental science, urban and regional planning environmental law and policy studies), but it also could, along with the rest of the College, make invaluable contributions to the governmental, corporate and non-governmental institutions that are the focus of these disciplines.

4. Design Emphasis: The ICJMT Steering Committee placed significant emphasis on “design thinking” as an important and growing interdisciplinary area of practice and research, the relevance of which extends not only across the units proposed for inclusion in the new College, but also likely for other disciplines across most, if not all, of the Departments, Schools and Colleges on the CU-Boulder campus.

Although a design emphasis need not, and perhaps should not, be centered exclusively in a single department in the proposed College, a Department of Information Studies could be one of the most important units in the proposed College for faculty and curriculum development in this area. Whether the end product of design appears on a hand-held device or an IMAX screen, or whether the outcome is in three dimensions at any scale, an increasingly common denominator of design work is advanced skills in the use of digital and traditional design tools. From genetic modeling to computer animation to multimedia news or entertainment organizations, and the development and curation of digital archives, and from fashion to furniture, architecture, and urban and regional planning, design work is creative work that is information-intensive and increasingly (and heavily) digital. Development of a design emphasis could distinguish the proposed Department of Information Studies by bringing together activities that involve creative practice and relevant humanistic and social scientific conceptualization and evaluation.

5. Commitment to Flexibility and Experimentation: As with the development of the proposed College, the development of a Department of Information Studies should be approached with open and flexible minds. Desirable qualities in the Department’s founding Chair and constitutive faculty should be a commitment to exploring how an Information Studies curriculum can provide the best opportunities possible to students inside the College and across the campus, as well as exploring ways to make the curriculum and the research and creative work of the faculty relevant to a variety of sectors in governmental and non-governmental organizations, and in private industry. In other words, the Department should embrace and act upon the ideal of porosity that the ICJMT Steering Committee proposes by creating an agile

Department that can respond to the growing and changing theoretical and practical approaches to a variety of information-institutions and practices.

6. Curriculum, Certificates and Degrees: The group strongly agreed that the Department must ultimately offer undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degrees. However, we also recognize differentials in resource demands across these levels, with an undergraduate degree perhaps being the most demanding. For this reason, the group proposes a phased process along the following lines:
 - *Graduate Certificate, and Masters and Doctoral Degrees*: Graduate degrees should be offered immediately upon the establishment of the Department, based on a small set of core requirements, offered by a constitutive faculty, and supplemented by a cafeteria of course offerings (including cross-listed courses), based on agreements with affiliated departments inside and outside the College. Within a relatively short period of time, the masters and doctoral curriculum could be expanded, not only to serve degree-seeking students in the department, but also students in other Schools and Colleges through graduate course and certificate offerings. At the masters level, there is the opportunity to deliver, perhaps through Continuing Education, a “Professional Masters” degree and certificates in areas such as Human-Centered Computing, Social Analytics, Digital Curation, and Information Policy.
 - *Undergraduate Certificate and Bachelors Degree*: Based on a similar logic as the start-up of the graduate degrees, an initial strategy would be to have the Department offer a small set of core requirements by a constitutive faculty, and eventually expand the curriculum as the process of hiring new faculty moves forward. One factor that distinguishes an undergraduate degree from the graduate degrees proposed above is that Departmental course offerings at the undergraduate level would require more faculty resources than are likely to be available at an early stage, prior to the hiring of new faculty. For this reason, we propose launching an undergraduate Certificate in Information Studies as soon as possible, which would be an ideal way to stimulate and test areas of undergraduate student interest in Information Studies. Along with this plan should be concurrent efforts to launch an undergraduate degree as soon as new faculty have been hired. At that time, the Certificate could continue to be offered to students inside and outside of the College, depending on the Department’s capacity to meet student demand.

7. Hiring Priorities: The ICJMT Steering Committee proposal names the following four areas for faculty and curriculum development:

- *Human-Centered Computing*
- *Social Computing: Analytics and Applications*
- *Digital Archiving, Preservation, and Curation*
- *Information Policy*

There are several faculty members on campus, from various Departments, Schools and Colleges, with strengths in these areas and who potentially could migrate to the proposed Department of Information Studies, be jointly appointed with the Department and their existing tenure homes, or simply cross-list courses tailored to suit the needs of the proposed Department.

The group suggests the hiring first of a forward-looking, broadly knowledgeable and visionary Chair who will then help implement undergraduate and graduate Information Studies degrees and certificates by hiring constitutive faculty and identifying other areas of focus. This will be a key hire as the field of information studies is rapidly growing and changing, and the vision the founding Chair brings will help shape the Department for the future of Information Studies.

8. Proposed Timeline:

- Spring 2013: Assuming that the decision to establish a new College is affirmative, and that the College will include a Department of Information Studies, we anticipate that decisions would be made soon thereafter to constitute a College faculty, including a Department of Information Studies faculty.
- Summer 2013 and AY 2013-2014: Search for and hire a College Dean.
- AY 2013- 2014: Search for and hire an Information Studies Department Chair, concurrent with the Deanship hire.
- AY 2014-2015: Begin searches to hire new College faculty, including an Information Studies faculty.