Request to Discontinue Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies

This request to discontinue the Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies (CLFS) is the culmination of actions taken in the wake of a program review completed in spring 2017. That review identified significant problems with the department and the academic programs within it including distressingly low undergraduate enrollments (only three declared majors); outmoded undergraduate and graduate curricula based on a narrow definition of the field; unacceptably long time to degree and poor placement in the graduate program; inappropriate and ineffective curricular assessment; uneven research productivity across the faculty, especially the senior faculty; a small faculty size which compromised shared governance; and lack of a critical mass of Folklore faculty to deliver the curriculum.

After receiving the program review and recommendations from the L&S Academic Planning Council and the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee, on October 10, 2017, the CLFS Department submitted a request to restructure that had been unanimously approved by its executive committee. Given concerns about the best interest of undergraduate and graduate students while the department and its academic programs were being restructured, on the advice of the L&S and Graduate School deans, the department voted unanimously to request suspension of admissions to the undergraduate and graduate programs effective Fall 2018. These requests were approved by the L&S APC and then the UAPC on December 14, 2017. Subsequently, all academic programs housed in the Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies were either moved to another department and reopened (see below) or discontinued. There are no CLFS undergraduate majors and only a few remaining dissertators in the graduate program all of whom are on track to defend their dissertations by summer 2021. All faculty members have moved their tenure homes to other units. Given that no academic programs, students, or faculty remain in CLFS, on October 5, 2020, the L&S Academic Planning Council voted unanimously to discontinue the CLFS.

Throughout the review and restructuring process, L&S has recognized that UW-Madison’s programs in comparative literature and folklore have long and storied histories. Both are among the oldest programs in U.S. universities in their respective disciplines and both have been home to award-winning faculty and successful graduates. While seeking discontinuation of the current departmental structure housing comparative literature and folklore, L&S reaffirms the intrinsic value of research, teaching, and public engagement by scholar-teachers working in these fields. The relocation of the folklore studies program and comparative literature faculty serves the goal of improving curricula, advising, research, and outreach in these disciplines. With the move to GNS+ Department, the Folklore undergraduate certificate program not only continues, but has been strengthened in its governance, advising, and communications. There remain opportunities for undergraduate students to pursue their interest in the study of comparative literature by taking courses in the English Department, the Integrated Liberal Studies program, and various world language departments. A committee has been formed to explore the idea of developing an undergraduate certificate in comparative literature.

Before seeking discontinuation of the CLFS Department, L&S Academic Planning Council sought assurance that doing so would cause no harm to students, faculty and staff, or academic programs, and that resources, especially donor funds, will be stewarded appropriately after discontinuation of the department.
Students
All undergraduate students who were enrolled in the CLFS major at the time admissions were suspended (Fall 2018) have completed their degrees. Thus, closing the department will not impede the ability of any undergraduate student to complete the major.

When graduate admissions were suspended (Fall 2018), a teach-out plan was implemented for the CLFS doctoral program and currently six students are enrolled, all of them dissertators. The last term in which graduate students can be enrolled in the existing CLFS graduate program and be awarded that credential will be Summer 2021. All six of the current students are on track to complete the program within this timeframe. Should any of these six students be unable to defend their dissertation by the end of the Summer 2021 term, a special committee degree can be awarded, with text that will indicate their area of study (i.e., “Comparative Literature” or “Folklore”).

Academic Programs
Academic programs formerly housed in the Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies have either been moved to another unit and reopened or discontinued.

Two programs were moved to the Department of German, Nordic, Slavic (GNS+), which now serves as the administrative home for the Folklore Program. These academic programs are now administered by an interdepartmental program committee, which successfully submitted proposals to revise and reopen them:
- Graduate Minor (GMIN423) Folklore
- Undergraduate Certificate, Folklore (CERT424)

To support this work, the Subject Listing through which Folklore courses are offered (FOLKLORE) also was transferred to GNS+.

All remaining Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies programs have been approved by the University Academic Planning Council for discontinuation:
- BABS and BMAJ 2215, Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies – final term for awards Summer 2020
- MA225L&S, Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies (Parent Program, no awards granted)
  - MA 225L&S, FOLK ST OPT – final term for awards Summer 2021
  - MA 225L&S, COM LIT OPT – final term for awards Summer 2021
- PHD225L&S, Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies (Parent Program, no awards granted)
  - PHD225L&S, FOLKLORE OPT – final term for awards Summer 2021
  - PHD225L&S, COMP LIT OPT – final term for awards Summer 2021
- GMIN225, Comparative Literature – discontinued Fall 2020
- SCRT424, Special Certificate in Folklore – final term for awards Summer 2020
The COMP LIT subject listing has been transferred to L&S Administration. L&S will work with departments and faculty who teach courses in Comparative Literature to transfer (where appropriate) COMP LIT courses to other departments. Courses that are not transferred will be discontinued and, when that work is complete, the listing will be retired.

Faculty and Staff

All CLFS faculty have moved their tenure homes and budgeted appointments to other departments, the majority of them to English. Two faculty members continue to seek tenure homes that will be a good fit for them as well as for the department. As this process unfolds, these colleagues, one an associate professor and one a full professor, have been appointed Professor of the College.

An academic staff member who taught in the CLFS Department has found a home in the Integrated Liberal Studies program, where she continues to teach comparative literature courses. The former CLFS department administrator found a parallel position in another L&S department two years ago.

Budget and Gift Funds

Budget resources associated with teaching assistantships allocated to Folklore courses for many years have been moved to the GNS+ Department, which has become the administrative home of the Folklore undergraduate certificate program. Likewise, Folklore donor funds and grant funds have been moved to GNS+. Comparative literature donor and trust accounts have been moved to the English Department, where the majority of former comparative literature faculty members now have their tenure homes and the funds are designated for use to support students studying comparative literature.

In conclusion, with no students, academic programs, faculty, or financial resources remaining in CLFS, the College of Letters & Sciences seeks to discontinue the department.