Process

Following meetings of the faculty with graduate-student representatives, the Director of Graduate Studies of the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature proposed a timetable for the Graduate Program Goals and Student Outcomes process. The DGS drafted a statement of goals and outcomes and circulated it to all faculty, who then commented by e-mail. The DGS revised that statement and called on all graduate students, in turn, to discuss and to write their own statement of goals and outcomes. Both parties exchanged statements. The DGS then synthesized the goals and outcomes that faculty and graduate students had identified. Faculty approved the final statement below at a December 12, 2014, meeting.

Profile of the CL and CSDS Graduate Programs

The Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature (CSCL) offers two PhD programs: Comparative Literature (CL) and Comparative Studies in Discourse and Society (CSDS). Within the broader intellectual movements of cultural studies, world and comparative literature, film studies, and sound studies of the past three or four decades, both programs are widely recognized as innovative. Comparative literature typically involves the study of two or more literatures in their original languages. While our program emphasizes such study, what sets it apart are its nontraditional emphases on critical genealogies of theory and philosophy; on intersections of word, image, and sound in multiple media (e.g., literature, film, music); and on cross-disciplinary work. Our unique approach stems, in part, from the symbiotic relationship of CL to CSDS, which transgresses the usual boundaries of humanistic and social-scientific fields to pursue cross-disciplinary (even anti-disciplinary) and cross-cultural problems. Linking intellectual and cultural to social and political history, CSDS trains students to articulate the ways in which elite, popular, folk, and mass culture (e.g., music, film, television, myth, ritual, architecture, landscape and urban design, painting, sculpture, literature, new media) both shape and are shaped by the forces of time, space, matter, and society. A principal objective of both programs is to prepare candidates for placement in academic positions in comparative or national literatures; cultural, film, cinema, or media studies; and interdisciplinary programs such as American studies and gender studies. While our programs focus on research and pedagogy—the heart of the academic humanities—we also prepare students to pursue alternative-academic as well as non-academic positions.

The unique profile of CSCL motivates our graduate students to pursue research of unusual agility, originality, and scope. Their research record is impressive. Of the 53 CL and CSDS graduate students active between Fall 2010 and Fall 2013, at least 27 published over 100 articles in scholarly journals and edited volumes, many peer-reviewed, and at least 39 presented some 327 conference papers. Factoring in AY 2013–2014, at least 28 students have received over 55 extramural fellowships and grants, including such prestigious awards as the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS)/Mellon Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship, National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars Award, Social Science Research Council International Dissertation Research Fellowship, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship, as well as the Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr., Research Grant of the Keats-Shelley Association of America and the Harry Ransom Center Dissertation Fellowship at the University of Texas, Austin. All indicate excellence in the diverse disciplines that CL and CSDS encompass.

Students in CL and CSDS typically complete three years of coursework before proceeding to doctoral preliminary examinations in their fourth year and then to the dissertation. For the 10-year period 2003–2013, average median time to degree has held steady across both programs, at 8.0 for CL and 7.9 for CSDS. Current Graduate School policy (beginning January 2013) stipulates 8 years from matriculation as the normative time to the PhD; our medians fall within that ideal range. We believe that time frame is justified by the complex linguistic, theoretical, field-specific and cross-disciplinary, and pedagogical training our students must undertake to master relevant languages and disciplinary frameworks and to develop intellectually sound degree programs, dissertation projects, and teaching portfolios. It is further justified by
the fact that our PhD students teach a wide range of courses at both the 1xxx and the 3xxx levels and, in tune with expectations in most humanities disciplines, write book-length dissertations—some grounded in archival, museum, or field research—that require time to develop.

Our placement information on 54 of the 58 graduates who completed an MA (six) or a PhD (52) in CL or CSDS between 2003 and 2014 reveals that 42 are employed in academic positions, either faculty or alternative-academic; of those who are faculty, 18–20 are tenure-track or tenured. Four (all MA recipients) are current students in PhD programs at the University of Minnesota and elsewhere, and at least eight are employed in non-academic contexts, ranging from independent filmmaking to journalism to business and the law. Apart from first and second tenure-track placements, most recently at such institutions as Dartmouth College, Macalester College, Stony Brook University, and the University of Washington, recent graduates have landed highly competitive postdoctoral appointments at Brown University, Duke University (two, one an ACLS New Faculty Fellowship), the University of Southern California, the University of Toronto, and the University of the Western Cape in South Africa.

Goals of the CL and CSDS Graduate Programs

Graduate education in CL and CSDS is transformative. To remain on the cutting edge of the twenty-first-century humanities, we are committed to further change. To that end, we have identified eight graduate program goals toward which we will continue to work in the coming three years:

1. Admitting and retaining graduate students from a diverse spectrum of backgrounds. Our department prides itself on progressive politics. Admitting and retaining larger numbers of students from underrepresented U.S. communities (e.g., African American, Arab American, Asian American, Chicano(a)/Latino(a), Native American) and from other world regions, along with first-generation and working-class white students and those with “unapproved” political perspectives, is crucial to that project. To that end, our Graduate Admissions Committee vets applications and recommends the admission of promising candidates. We are now using the GRE Search Service to identify further potential applicants from underrepresented U.S. groups. We also will explore admission of sponsored international students and conditional admission to international students pending fulfillment of English requirements.

2. Building faculty/graduate student community as well as community in graduate cohorts. Faculty and graduate students are colleagues in a profession. Our graduate students play a vital role in department governance: they run a dynamic Graduate Student Association, elect representatives to the CSDL Committee of the Whole, and serve on ad hoc and standing CSDL Curriculum Committees, as well as on faculty search committees. They also regularly organize conferences, colloquia, and reading groups that cross faculty/graduate/undergraduate “generations” as well as disciplinary and even departmental lines. Our programs support these community-building efforts; we plan further meetings to address concerns specific to first- and second-year graduate students and to encourage contact between those students and their peers in other graduate programs in the humanities.

3. Offering graduate students a strong intellectual foundation in the critical humanities. Our two-semester Basic Research Seminar sequence, required for all first-year graduate students, has long offered a strong introduction to the theoretical and philosophical foundations that underpin the critical humanities. Our broader graduate curriculum articulates connections between these foundations and closer “readings” of word, image, and sound, as well as of the historical, social, economic, and political matrices in which all cultural production is enmeshed. We plan to expand offerings of introductory courses on core debates in cultural studies and comparative literature, as well as in gender and sexuality studies, critical race theory, and postcolonial and global studies. We will continue to revisit our graduate curriculum to sustain its dynamism and to enhance its trans-medial and transcontinental scope, as well as its critical relevance, for students entering the profession over the next decade.
4. **Fostering conscious inter- and anti-disciplinarity in graduate study.** Our graduate programs encourage students to rigorously approach inter- and anti-disciplinary dimensions of their work. We are committed to expanding training in cross-disciplinary methods within CL/CSDS courses. We also advise students to use supporting programs as well as formal graduate minors in other departments, such as the Moving Image Studies (MIMS) minor, to gain systematic exposure to the methods and critical debates of other fields. In 2014, we revised our doctoral degree requirements to promote interdisciplinarity: rather than require students to take 35 credits in the major field, we now require that they take 24 credits within our department and offer them the option of taking the remaining 11 credits either in CL, CSDS, or CSCL courses or in courses in related disciplines. This change affords students more opportunities to take courses that add dimension to their intellectual profiles.

5. **Mentoring graduate-student research and writing.** Our students and alumni have garnered two University of Minnesota Best Dissertation Awards, as well as one honorable mention, over the past several years. By mentoring students in academic research and writing throughout their years in coursework and by requiring them to defend a prospectus within one semester to one year of their doctoral preliminary examinations, we enhance their ability to define, research, and write strong dissertations. Recognizing the importance of scholarly publication to success on the academic job market, we continue to develop program-wide initiatives that support our students as they revise their work for publication, as well as structures that foster collaboration between faculty and graduate students.

6. **Mentoring graduate-student teaching.** In addition to taking the required course CL/CSDS 8901: Introduction to the Profession: Critical Methods of Research, Pedagogy, and Creative Work in the Humanities, which interrelates pedagogy with research and praxis, all students are assigned faculty mentors who advise them on effective syllabus design and evaluate, each year, their full teaching portfolios. We are calling on mentors to advise students on when best to serve as a reader-grader (RG) or a graduate student instructor (GSI), and we plan to direct further attention in the pedagogical dimension of CL/CSDS 8901 to practical aspects of classroom teaching and grading.

7. **Reducing graduate time to degree.** In keeping with Graduate Education Policies, our programs require students who matriculated before 2013 to complete the PhD within five years post-orphals, and all others to do so within eight years from matriculation. To that end, we monitor progress through coursework, preliminary examinations, and dissertation. Recently, we have tied eligibility for additional (above 50%) and summer teaching assistantships to Advanced Doctoral Status, which requires completion of all coursework on the Graduate Degree Plan; this incentive has motivated students to clear incompletes. We also have revised key policies on language examinations and on graduate conference and research travel to encourage timely progress. Finally, by redistributing CLA Graduate Allocation funds to support small grants for Summer 2015, we are responding to students’ request for more secure summer support and thereby helping them shorten their time to degree.

8. **Preparing graduate students for academic, alternative-academic, and non-academic careers.** Our primary goal remains the preparation of students for research and for academic careers. Indeed, as our placement record attests, many of our students and alumni have secured tenure-track faculty positions in a difficult job market. We regularly hold workshops on the academic job search and on effective interviewing, with follow-up mock interviews by faculty of all interested students. To help our students envision the transition from dissertation to first book, as well as entertain alternative career paths that draw on the PhD, we also organize workshops on academic publishing with university press editors. We offer workshops on publishing in scholarly journals, on writing effective grant proposals, and on framing dissertations and next projects with professional adaptability in mind, recognizing that our students may find jobs in programs different from our own. We also have organized and will continue to host workshops specifically focused on alternative-academic or non-academic careers, drawing on CL/CSDS
alumni and others who have pursued such paths to show graduate students what they might learn or do now to prepare for other futures.

Outcomes of the CL and CSDS Graduate Programs

Over the next three years, our graduate programs will track the following seven student outcomes and will continue to assess these through the measures indicated:

1. **Knowledge and scholarship**: Satisfactory completion of graduate coursework in CL and CSDS and interdisciplinary coursework in other fields by end of Year 3; completion of oral and written doctoral preliminary examinations by Year 4; completion of dissertation prospectus meetings by the end of Year 4; defense of dissertations ideally by Year 7 and in any case by Year 8; publications and conference papers; intramural and extramural grants and fellowships received; placement in tenure-track faculty, postdoctoral fellowship, and non-academic and alternative-academic positions.

2. **Acquisition of theoretical foundations and research, methodological, and communication skills relevant to the field**: Satisfactory completion of CL/CSDS 8001–8002: Basic Research Seminar and of CL/CSDS 8901: Introduction to the Profession in Year 1. Many measures in outcome #1 (above) also pertain here.

3. **Language acquisition at a level necessary to handle texts with critical sophistication**: Required: successful completion of two language examinations by the time frames specified in departmental policies, which vary for graduate students who passed doctoral preliminary examinations before and after 16 May 2014; encouraged: successful completion of at least one graduate seminar in a language (other than English) germane to a student’s research and in which readings are undertaken in that language.

4. **Education for service, citizenship in the discipline, professionalism**: Participation of graduate students, either in positions of leadership or in other forms of active service, in the department’s Graduate Student Association and its subcommittees; on departmental, CLA, or University committees; as conference organizers or as members of editorial or creative collectives or boards; as representatives to the University’s Council of Graduate Students or the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly; and as elected representatives or on caucuses or committees of national and international associations.

5. **Pedagogy/training for teaching**: Satisfactory completion of CL/CSDS 8901: Introduction to the Profession in Year 1; quality of graduate student performance as GSIs, as reflected in faculty teaching mentors’ assessments each calendar year, which consider syllabi and assignments as well as quantitative and discursive evaluations; quality of student performance as RGs or discussion section leaders, as reflected in instructors’ evaluations thereof; extent to which students have balanced depth (specialization) and breadth (variation) in teaching assignments, as reported by advisers at annual review of progress; scheduled observations by faculty teaching mentors of student teaching.

6. **Collaboration/interdisciplinary skills**: Credits taken outside CL, CSDS, and CSCL, both toward the 12-credit requirement in a formal graduate minor or supporting program and in fulfillment of the option to take up to 11 credits of core graduate coursework outside the department; number of students who pursue formal graduate minors in other fields, including MIMS; interdisciplinary fellowships, intramural or extramural; publications and conference presentations outside the immediate discipline; extent of collaboration with others in colloquia and other initiatives, within and across disciplines, including projects that extend beyond the University.

7. **Preparation for alternative career paths**: Participation of students in programs that prepare them to pursue alternative-academic and non-academic careers, as well as employment or activity in scholarly journals, in independent or trade magazines, or in academic, trade, or small presses; in film festivals, book events, museums, historical societies, or arts/media centers; and in college-level administration, K–12 education, grassroots or labor organizing, and political, social justice, or arts activism.