

## Comparative Media Studies

Established as a graduate program in 1999–2000, Comparative Media Studies (CMS) aims to integrate the study of contemporary media (film, television, digital systems) with a broad historical understanding of older forms of human expression. The program embraces theoretical and interpretive principles drawn from the central humanistic disciplines of literary study, history, anthropology, art history, and film studies and aims as well for a comparative synthesis that is responsive to the distinctive emerging media culture of the 21st century. Students in the program are taught to explore the complexity of our media environment by learning to think across media and to see beyond the boundaries imposed by older medium-specific approaches to the study of audiovisual and literary forms.

The comparative and cross-disciplinary nature of both the graduate and undergraduate programs is embodied in a faculty drawn from the Art and Architecture, Anthropology, Foreign Languages and Literatures, History, Literature, Music and Theater Arts, Philosophy, Writing and Humanistic Studies, Science, Technology, and Society, Media Arts and Sciences, Political Science, and Urban Studies and Planning programs. Approximately 35 faculty members teach subjects in Comparative Media Studies.

The graduate program consists of a two-year course of study leading to a master of science degree. The program aims to prepare students for careers in fields such as journalism, teaching and research, government and public service, museum work, information science, corporate consulting, media industry marketing and management, and educational technology. Fields in which our recent graduates are working include higher education, teaching, journalism, photojournalism, and at media and technology consulting firms and media production companies. The undergraduate program, approved as an interdisciplinary major in spring 2003, mirrors the graduate program in concept and ambition and has been experiencing steady growth since its inception.

### Research

#### Themes

CMS research themes cross academic disciplines and involve both traditional and emerging communications media, establishing a focus for public presentations, research agendas, and curricular initiatives. The primary research themes are the following:

- Convergence culture—understanding the new media landscape
- The education arcade—the pedagogical potentials of computer and video games
- Informed citizenship and the culture of democracy
- Global culture and media
- Media in transition
- Transforming humanities education

## Projects

The Education Arcade Project seeks to identify the pedagogical potential in games as a medium and to seek ways to utilize games for learning, in and out of the classroom. This year the Education Arcade has been field-testing its prototype for an American history game, *Revolution*, produced with the cooperation of Colonial Williamsburg; continued development of a Shakespeare game, *Prospero's Island*, produced in collaboration with the Royal Shakespeare Company; continued to develop location-based augmented reality games for educational use; helped set up the Teacher's Arcade to support the use of commercial games in the classroom; documented best practice in media literacy training around games; and again this year hosted a major national conference on educational gaming at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, a major trade show for the games industry.

The Meta-Media Archive Project, funded by the D'Arbeloff Award for Excellence in Education, continued development of interactive archive models for use across a broader range of topics in the humanities and social sciences. Intended to serve as modules that teachers and students could use to explore rich subject areas, create rhetorical multimedia documents, and collaborate over the internet, early Meta-Media Archives have stretched instructors' and students' notions of textbook, research paper, and classroom. Recent projects used in classes include a multimedia archive of American and British authors; the *Shakespeare Electronic Archive* and *Hamlet on the Ramparts*; *Flaneurs savants* (knowledgeable wanderers), a walking tour of the Marais neighborhood in Paris designed for use of hand-held devices; and *Cultura*, which connects MIT students taking French classes with students taking an English class at a university in Paris, France. New projects include *Digital Duerrenmatt*, an interactive archive for literary scholars and theater producers begun in collaboration with the Swiss Literary Archive and the Swiss National Library; the *Eurasian History and Memory Visual Archive*, relating to Eurasian cultural history in China and the United States; and the *Jews of Shanghai*, documenting the multinational Jewish community in Shanghai from 1930 to 1950, developed in collaboration with the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

*Virtual MIT*, a collaboration between CMS and the Academic Computing group in Information Services and Technology, targets incoming MIT freshmen and seeks to take the idea of an open university to the next level. By creating an online representation of MIT and its various cultural communities, it will make MIT culture more accessible to incoming students.

The Convergence Culture Consortium is a new initiative that will bring together key companies interested in exploring shifts that are occurring in the branded entertainment sector. We are in the process of identifying and soliciting 10 member companies that will support ethnographic research into consumer responses to trends in advertising and entertainment. A blog for the MIT Branding Cultures Laboratory is already attracting significant public and industry interest.

The New Media Literacies Project, sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation, seeks to identify core skills and competencies that young people need in order to become full participants in their culture. We will be working with schools, after school programs,

museums and public institutions, and media companies to develop models for media literacy activities appropriate for the changing media landscape and to make them available to the largest possible population. The project works in concert with another research effort at the University of Southern California and the University of California–Berkeley that seeks to document the skills and practices of the most digitally engaged youth.

## **Fundraising**

A continued goal of activities this past year was to develop and implement sustainable and scalable business, teaching, and research models within which faculty and graduate students could explore interdisciplinary research themes and educational priorities. As it continues to solidify administrative and academic infrastructures, CMS has focused on cultivating a broader range of sponsored research and gifts from corporations, individuals, and foundations.

The McArthur Foundation has provided substantial funding toward the launch of the New Media Literacies Project, which is intended to be a multiyear effort.

Jon Cropper, formerly an executive at Young and Rubicon and now working for Sean “Puffy” Combs, has established an annual \$10,000 prize encouraging undergraduates to reflect on the future of advertising, to be administered by the CMS program; the first recipient was a CMS undergraduate, Nicholas Hunter.

Paul Levitz, the president of DC Comics, has established an annual lecture series hosted by the Comparative Media Studies Program and named in honor of longtime DC editor Julius Schwartz. The first event will be held in spring 2006.

A fund recognizing outstanding media productions by CMS undergraduates was established in honor of longtime CMS program administrator Chris Pomiecko, who passed away this past year. We are now collecting gifts from CMS faculty, alums, students, and friends.

The program launched a new consortium effort, the Convergence Culture Consortium, designed to attract 10 member companies interested in learning more about consumer response to shifting strategies for branding.

Jon Underkauffler, an alumnus from Media Arts and Sciences, made a gift to the CMS program that has been used to support the CMS Colloquium and other program events.

A generous gift made in December 2003 by Ron Crane, an alumnus in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) and a founder of 3Com, supported graduate students doing research for the Education Arcade.

Greg Shaw, another EECS alumnus and early supporter of the CMS program, established the Greg Shaw Technologist in Residence Fund. Philip Tan continued as the first CMS technologist in residence.

Gerald Katell, an MIT alumnus and CMS Advisory Group member, continued payment on the \$1 million pledged to endow the Gerald L. Katell (1962) Fellowship and Education Fund in Comparative Media Studies; this fund was used to support undergraduate students doing research for the Education Arcade.

## **Governance**

The program in Comparative Media Studies has two directors: Professor Henry Jenkins (Literature and Comparative Media Studies) and Professor William Uricchio (Literature, Foreign Languages and Literatures, and Comparative Media Studies). During fall 2004, Professor Uricchio was on leave and associate professor of theater arts Thomas DeFranz served as the program's acting associate director. The program is under the auspices of three Humanities programs: Literature, Writing and Humanistic Studies, and Foreign Languages and Literatures. Administratively, CMS is housed in the Literature program.

The program is governed by a steering committee jointly chaired by Professors Jenkins and Uricchio. Other committee members for AY2005 were Professor Peter S. Donaldson, head of literature; Professor James Paradis, head of writing and humanistic studies; Edward Barrett, senior lecturer in writing and humanistic studies; Shigeru Miyagawa, the Kochi Prefecture–John Manjiro professor; Douglas Morgenstern, senior lecturer in Spanish; and Janet Sonenberg, associate professor of theater arts.

## **Graduate Admissions**

CMS continues to attract a diverse group of applicants and students. Our current cohort of 17 students includes 9 women and 4 international students from India, Bulgaria, and Australia.

For admission to the program in fall 2005, we received 85 applications, including 43 women, 7 minorities, and 27 international students. We admitted 16 students, and 13 have accepted, including 6 women, 1 African American, and 3 international students (Israel, Belgium, China).

During fall 2004, the program hosted four on-campus information sessions that were designed to allow potential students to meet CMS faculty and students, evaluate opportunities in the program, and attend classes, events, and research group meetings. CMS also conducted online chat sessions to facilitate interaction with potential applicants who could not attend these on-campus sessions; online sessions were particularly popular with our international applicants. The graduate homepage is <http://web.mit.edu/cms/Education/gradprog.html>.

## **Undergraduate Education**

The undergraduate program—established in 1982 under its former name, Film and Media Studies—serves as preparation for advanced study in a range of scholarly and professional disciplines and also for careers in media or industry. The curriculum consists of more than 50 subjects arranged in three tiers and broadly subdivided into three areas or fields: comparative media, film, and digital studies.

In spring 2003, Comparative Media Studies was approved as a full interdisciplinary major, effective fall 2003. CMS is MIT's first full interdisciplinary major and was approved by the Committee on Curricula, the Committee on Undergraduate Programs, and the MIT Faculty on an experimental five-year basis. We are currently introducing a new required subject, CMS.400 Media Systems and Texts on the intermediate level, helping to solidify both our course of study and our cohort of students.

As of June 2005, there were 22 CMS majors and 59 concentrators. Susan Stapleton, administrative assistant and undergraduate administrator as of fall 2004, will be replaced by Generoso Fierro, administrative assistant, in fall 2005.

CMS has also developed educational and research programs to provide additional opportunities for undergraduates to gain both academic and professional experience in media-related fields.

In AY2005, Comparative Media Studies hired 20 Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROPs) students for pay and credit. This robust number of UROPs reflects the continued increase in research activity in the program. Undergraduates worked with faculty and CMS graduate students on projects like *Augmented Reality Simulations*, which create hand-held educational games; *The Storyteller Project*, which investigates methods to create cultural media programming for children; and *Revolution*, a multiplayer role-playing game set in Colonial Williamsburg. The undergraduate homepage is <http://web.mit.edu/cms/ugrad/>.

## **Events and Programs**

### **Virtual University**

On April 15 and 16, CMS hosted a conference entitled "Building Virtual U: Lessons Learned and Future Possibilities for Education." The event brought together Virtual University users and stakeholders as well as educational and gaming experts for two days of critical discussion around the future of education.

### **The Education Arcade @ E3**

The CMS Education Arcade Project organized a "Games in Education" conference as part of the Electronic Entertainment Expo, held in the Los Angeles Convention Center on May 15 through 17. The event, sponsored by Leapfrog Enterprises and Bell South Foundation and cohosted by the Electronic Software Association, brought together game designers, educators, and technologists to speak about the potential use of games in education, in and out of the classroom. See <http://www.educationarcade.org/>.

### **Media in Transition 4: The Work of Stories**

Nearly 200 scholarly papers were presented in our fourth CMS and Communications Forum conference, with 40 percent of the participants coming from abroad. Held from May 6 to May 8, the conference considered the diverse uses and forms of narrative across media, including migratory stories (across media, history, and cultures), activism

and stories, and the ideological work of stories. For more information on the conference, see <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit4/>.

### Communications Forum

Directed by Professor David Thorburn, the Communications Forum sponsors lectures, panel discussions, and conferences on all aspects of technology and communications, public policy, and media in transition. The Communications Forum sponsored several panel discussions that attracted a large audience from the academic community at MIT and in the Boston area. Topics included “Branding the Urban Landscape,” “New Media, Old Politics,” “New Roles for Established Media,” and “Election 2004 and Beyond: Did the Media Fail?” For more information about the forum, see the website at <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum>.

### Colloquia

CMS sponsored weekly colloquia designed to give our graduate students and the academic community at MIT a rich and challenging intellectual experience and opportunities to interact educationally and socially. Topics included “Comics Journalism,” “Space, Time, Play: Applying Pervasive Game Design for Location-Based Learning,” “The Free and Open Software Movement,” “Media and Community,” and “The Making of King Gimp, with Oscar-Award Winner Jon Meyer.”

### Honors and Awards

Professor Jenkins was awarded the Deflorez professorship allowance.

Professor Uricchio was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for research.

Professor John Dower, Ford international professor of history and CMS affiliate, was awarded a Mellon Distinguished Achievement Award.

Associate professor Pablo Boczkowski (Sloan School of Management and CMS affiliate) was cowinner of the 2004 Outstanding Book Award, National Communication Association, for his *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers* (MIT, 2004).

Professors Dower and Miyagawa received the MIT Class of 1960 Innovation in Education Award for their project Visualizing Cultures.

CMS students also won several awards. Graduate student Michael Epstein was awarded a grant from the DeFlores Fund for a project on mobile technology and live performance entitled *Presence*; graduate student Parmesh Shahani was selected as an MIT arts scholar by the Office of the Arts; and Rekha Murthy and Andrea McCarty were awarded Kelly-Douglas and Foreign Languages and Literature’s grants for their PDA tour of the Marais neighborhood of Paris entitled *Flaneurs Savants*.

## Visiting Scholars

CMS hosted a wealth of visiting scholars this year. Returning US scholars included Maureen McLane, poet and writer; W. Curtiss Priest, media activist; and Vera Walker-Hawkins, a postdoctoral fellow who explores the use of technology to increase curriculum accessibility for all students. They were joined by international scholars including Christoph Ribbat from Germany, who is the recipient of an Alexander von Humboldt Fedor Lynen Fellowship and is studying six American authors and their media representations; Yuichi Washida, from Japan, who is collecting data on how people interact with media; Professor Andrew Jakubowicz from the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, who is working on the use of new media technologies by anthropologists and sociologists; and Professor Theo Hug from Innsbruck University, who explores different forms of learning by embedding the learning process into workflows and daily routines through the innovative use of media.

## Publications

Several faculty members affiliated with CMS published books this year, including Professor Michael Fischer of Anthropology and Science, Technology, and Society: *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledges: Persian Poesis in the Transnational Circuitry* (Duke, 2004); associate professor Joseph Dumit, Science, Technology and Society: *Picturing Personhood: Brainscans and Biomedical Identities* (Princeton, 2004); Professor Irving Singer, Philosophy: *Sex: A Philosophical Primer*, Expanded Edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); and Martin Marks, senior lecturer in Music and Theater Arts, music curator for *More Treasures from the American Film Archives: 50 Films, 1894–1931*, a 3-DVD set for which Marks composed and performed 35 new scores.

**Henry Jenkins, Director and John E. Burchard Professor of Humanities**  
**William Uricchio, Director and Professor of Comparative Media Studies**

*More information about Comparative Media Studies can be found online at <http://web.mit.edu/cms/>.*