

October 10<sup>th</sup> 2008

To: Jaye Padgett, Chair, CEP.

From: James Clifford, Director of Undergraduate Studies, History of Consciousness

Re: Comment of General Education Reform

The History of Consciousness faculty members have only begun to consider the proposal outlined in the August 22 memo from CEP. Thus, the following brief reactions must be considered preliminary.

The department is committed to participating actively and coherently in undergraduate teaching, both at introductory and upper division levels. It plans to offer more courses than it has in the past, a range of offerings taught by ladder faculty and advanced graduate Teaching Fellows. The extent of this increased involvement will depend, of course, on our ability to sustain Histcon's core mission of graduate training.

Before the current proposal arrived, introducing possible Subject Area (SA) requirements, Histcon was planning to develop large enrollment Introduction to the Humanities (IH) courses. As the General Education curriculum is reformed, we expect to design and offer courses in whatever new configurations emerge. This could include participation with other departments in Interdisciplinary Topical Clusters (ITCs). The undergraduate courses we already offer can be easily adapted to the new requirements, since they have never been tied to a discipline and have always offered breadth across methodologies and topic areas from the humanities, the interpretive social sciences, and the theoretically informed arts. We would welcome the opportunity to cooperate with other departments to offer coherent sequences and clusters. And we will actively entertain the possibility of working with a college to articulate offerings over a multi-year period.

The call to teach "ways of learning" accords well with History of Consciousness scholarship and pedagogy. The department is concerned, however, that the possible categories mentioned in the CEP memo are essentially subject areas, to which others could reasonably be added. They do not describe approaches to learning fundamental to the humanities. Humanistic "ways of knowing" are best taught through thematic courses that focus explicitly on crucial methods such as: textual/visual interpretation; cultural/linguistic comparison or translation; historical contextualization and explanation.

The Disciplinary Communication (DC) requirement, as it is currently conceived, raises some questions of "fit" with respect to offerings Histcon might provide. We had

been planning to add writing intensive courses to some of our upper-division courses. The proposed redefinition of advanced courses in writing/communication as discipline-defined, departmental requirements for majors, is problematic for a unit such as ours that has no undergraduate program and does not represent a single disciplinary style of scholarly communication.

Practically it may make sense to integrate the upper-division writing requirement with the existing curricula of specific departments. But, at least in the humanities, it is problematic to limit the program to “disciplinary” communication. Many modes of exposition, analysis, and interpretation are shared among the disciplines. Moreover, several humanities departments are fundamentally interdisciplinary (American Studies and Feminist Studies, as well as Histcon). Many methodologies and forms of communication are common to these fields—for example, socio-cultural analysis, textual critique, historical contextualization, ethnography, visual analysis, and hermeneutics. Of course there are analytic and communicative traditions closely identified with the traditional disciplines. But in practice these are combined with other modes that are not so identified and that correspond to newer interdisciplinary projects. Moreover, much interdisciplinary work is pursued within conventionally labelled departments. Do we wish to limit upper division writing/communication to “disciplinary” communication? Would this not offer students a narrow grasp of the scholarship and analysis actually done in the humanities and interpretive social sciences and arts?

As upper division writing, or perhaps “academic communication” (AC), course are imagined, we need to recognize the full range of research and knowledge-creation actually being pursued in the humanities and allied divisions. Discipline-based courses that include a developed focus on strategies of exposition and argument should be encouraged, along with courses offered by interdisciplinary units, that also focus on academic communication..

History of Consciousness envisions adding a significant writing/communication element to some of its thematic upper division offerings. It would also be interested in designing courses that would focus more directly on strategies and choices with respect to academic exposition, argument, and rhetoric. These practical issues of communication would be presented through a series of substantive topics or problems that cut across the disciplines. Students would try out different expository and analytic strategies, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each. Forms of writing would probably be at the core. But the use of visual materials and display, or the design of websites, museum exhibits, etc. could also be included in the range of communication strategies under consideration.

A final possibility. Since members of our program are affiliated with other departments (eg. Literature, Anthropology, History, Sociology, Politics) and are professionally trained in these fields we could partner with those departments to offer AC courses that would qualify as training in disciplinary communication (DC). This option would be determined by enrollment management needs and elective affinities.