

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

SUBJECT: Department of Screen Arts and Cultures

ACTION REQUESTED: Rename as the Department of Film, Television, and Media

EFFECTIVE DATE: September 1, 2018

The dean and the Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts request approval to rename the Department of Screen Arts and Cultures as the Department of Film, Television, and Media, effective September 1, 2018.

In 2005, when the Program in Film and Video Studies was becoming a department, the name requested was Department of Screen Arts and Cultures (SAC) to match the name being proposed for its new Ph.D. program. The name was selected for the following reasons: 1) to distinguish the department from other media units where “film studies” or “school of film and media” were commonplace, and more importantly; 2) to anticipate new directions and technologies of screen media. At the time, scholarship in digital media was in its early days and then program director, Gaylyn Studlar, wrote, “With the dispersion of film studies and creative practice across electronic and digital media, the focus of our academic interests is on that which produces [involves] moving images [and sound]—no matter what its technological variation.” In terms of the second charge of allowing for the emergence of new media technologies, it was believed that Screen Arts was a welcome, even prescient, name at the time. However, the former distinctive aspect “Screen Arts and Cultures” had from the names of other North American programs has had a discernible downside, and departmental members now believe that it has outlived its usefulness. For “Screen Arts and Cultures” never succeeded at setting the department apart from other units. Rather, it has been left off the radar.

In departmental discussions, SAC faculty quickly identified a number of limits and constraints. First, to call themselves “X Studies” fails to represent the production component of its undergraduate program. Second, if we used “X School,” it would have the reverse problem, suggesting the department did not do studies, just production. The term also implies arts or professional training rather than a fully-rounded liberal arts education. Third, shortening “Screen Arts and Cultures” to “Media Studies” invites speculation that the department focus on media industry studies, which is one among many approaches taken in the department. Moreover, “Media Studies” is reserved for units that approach media thorough social scientific methods and frameworks. Last of all, “Visual Cultures and Production” invokes an art school context rather than the department’s Liberal Arts context, and invites a visual bias SAC does not endorse.

Rather quickly, the department decided on the clear, functional list-name of “Film, Television, and Media, sequencing the name to reflect the historical emergence of the three media. Including the three media reflects what the faculty know and do: every department member teaches in one or more of these three (broad) areas, whether as producers or as scholars. This

new department name not only reflects that expertise, but it announces the department's commitment to film, television, and digital media with a concreteness that "Screen Arts" just could not attain. The term "Media" does not restrict what faculty in the department do, nor does it duplicate the title of "Digital Studies (DS)," conveying the overlap SAC enjoys with DS as a trans-college discipline in LSA. The faculty overwhelmingly preferred the clarity that "Film, Television, and Media" brings to the unit. Departmental members also felt that this name will enable them to move forward in several significant areas—giving the department greater visibility and search-ability, attracting good students, and making the department easier to find from the outside.

We recommend approval of the recommendation of the Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts that the Department of Screen Arts and Cultures be renamed as the Department of Film, Television, and Media, effective September 1, 2018.

Recommended by:

Recommendation endorsed by:



Andrew D. Martin, Dean
Professor of Political Science and Statistics
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts



Martin A. Philbert
Provost and Executive Vice President
for Academic Affairs

June 2018