Tom and Carol Williams Fund for Undergraduate Education

Williams Instructional Proposal Application

Submission of a **Williams Instructional Proposal** requires short paragraph responses to the prompts below. The prompts are related to a description of the project, its significance, how you will evaluate the success of the project, the budget or resources needed, and the lasting impact of the project.

Please submit a completed version of this document to OtP@uoregon.edu.

Please write your answers to each of the questions below

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Demographic Information

Your name: **COLIN WILLIAMSON**
Your email address:
Your department(s) or unit(s): **CINEMA STUDIES**
Your title: **ASSISTANT PROFESSOR**
Proposal title: **HANDS-ON FILM HISTORY**

Williams Instructional Proposal Application

1. Provide a brief overview of the project you're proposing:

The goal of this project is to develop a hands-on pedagogy that reimagines how undergraduate students study early film history (1880s-1920s). The framework is a new upper-level course on early cinema (CINE 410) that asks: What can students learn about film history when their access to the archive expands beyond viewing, reading, and writing to include experimenting, tinkering, and playing with historical materials? The course innovates on the robust research, analysis, and production training my department offers by having students conduct research and analysis through creative practice. This will involve integrating traditional research methods with creative exercises, workshops, and projects focused on having students recreate and use historical film techniques and technologies related to early animation, one of my primary research and teaching areas. The Williams funding will support the work of developing the new course and two in-class workshops led by guest artists who

will offer hands-on experiences with historically informed animation art. The experiential learning approach will serve 1) to offer students new and different methods for accessing the cinema's past, especially as active constructors of knowledge about it; and 2) to test ways of bringing the two core components of my department's curriculum—critical studies and film and media production—together in the film history classroom.

Project Significance

2. Why is the project worth trying? What issues or gaps would this project resolve? What opportunities would it explore?

This project addresses two related challenges that I face in my film history classes; both have implications for the Cinema Studies curriculum and the university more broadly. The first is the difficulty students often have in connecting at a deep level with so-called "old" media, which, because of the pace of media change, can seem unglamorous and inaccessible relative to contemporary digital media environments. The second is helping students understand how critical studies and film and media production are deeply interconnected in their education—e.g., why learning how to ask original questions about the cinema's past matters for a student's interest in creatively using film and media technologies in the present. My project addresses these challenges at the level of course design by taking our students' acute interest in using media technologies as the framework for critically studying film history. Doing so will create opportunities for thinking through important pedagogical and curricular questions: In what new ways can we balance the research and writing skills that are important to our critical studies learning outcomes with the hands-on training our students receive in film and media production? How can creative practice diversify what the outcomes and deliverables in critical studies look like, beyond traditional research and analytical writing? And how can creative practice help students discover meaningful contemporary relevance in film history?

3. How could this project improve the educational experience of undergraduates?

This project will expand the opportunities for integrating experiential learning in the context of teaching film history. Such a hands-on approach is common in media art and production contexts, and it helps students build collaborative and creative skills that are more difficult to foster in the traditional film history classroom context. Integrating creative practice into that context will help students discover new sensory, affective, and interactive modes of accessing and understanding the cinema's past. Such hands-on experiences promote active and embodied forms of knowledge production that diversify the kinds of agencies students can discover in the learning process. I intend to create a space where the study of film history—

practicing research methods, working with archival materials, and learning how to read films within intricate historical networks—is subjected to that kind of learning. A key part of this will entail students collaborating and creating not only with each other but also with two visiting artists: ██ ██ ██ ███ *Beyond enriching the film history classroom, both workshops will provide students with unique learning and professional development opportunities.*

4. How does this proposal create a more inclusive teaching and learning culture on campus? For example, proposals might support student learning about difference, inequality, and agency or seek to enhance the social and emotional climate of the classroom.

There are three course design areas focused on promoting inclusive teaching/learning. 1) The subject material will introduce students to the politics of race, class, and gender in early cinema history, an approach I take in all my courses. 2) Being a methods course as well, I plan to extend that conversation to the politics of historiography, that is, thinking with students about the ideas, values, and biases that shape historical research, including students' own practices in the classroom. And 3) the course is intentional about diversifying how students access historical materials. My approach involves rethinking the traditional culminating long research paper by dispersing the skills for such writing across a variety of modes: short form research writing, creative exercises, and small-scale digital exhibitions where students compile their work. My interest is not to move beyond traditional research methods and writing but rather to give students the opportunity to pair those modes of engagement with other modes that become possible when they learn through making. ███████████████ ██ ██ ██ *I am thinking through how a similar multisensory approach to activating students' bodies, in addition to their collaborative and creative skills, in this project might make film history and creative practice accessible in new ways to students who have wide-ranging knowledge bases and learning styles. My goal in the process is to help students find more agency in and awareness of their roles in constructing—not just studying—knowledge about film history.*

5. How many undergraduate students would be directly affected?

This project will be piloted in Spring 2025 as an upper-division course—part of my department's existing CINE 410 category—with an anticipated enrollment of 30 students. The smaller size is necessary for the workshop model and the high degree of teacher-student interaction, and for assessing the success of the course's experimental approach. As discussed below, one of the larger goals in undertaking this project is to determine what aspects of the course design can be generalized and scaled in such a way that they become useful for pedagogical innovation in a range of contexts, from larger core film history surveys to special topics and introductory courses, both within and beyond my department.

6. Does the project have implications for teaching and learning that extend beyond a single course or discipline? Are there aspects of this project that encourage students to make connections to areas of thought and experience beyond the context of a single course?

A key motivation for this project is my desire to think deeply and experimentally about my department's core investment in "blending a liberal arts education with the collaborative and creative skills of digital filmmaking" by finding new ways of doing that kind of work across our curriculum. So, the approach I'm developing in the course will have implications for other CINE courses, an exciting potential especially given the interest of many of my colleagues in exploring new ways of integrating creative practice in the context of critical studies classes. The project also takes advantage of the authentic interdisciplinarity of cinema studies and challenges students to think across sometimes separated areas in the discipline—critical studies and production—as well as farther afield to art history, art and design, and comics and cartoon studies here at UO. Moreover, my goal in organizing workshops led by guests from outside of the university is to help students connect their classroom learning to artists and industry professionals who can offer valuable insights into the myriad ways that the topics students study translate to contexts beyond the classroom.

7. We recognize that it is within the typical job expectations for faculty to design new courses or update current courses, and for the department to support regular curriculum changes. Based on this, how is the project you are proposing unique or in need of Williams Council funds to happen?

For several years, I have been drawing on my own scholarly research into media art and the long history of film's relationship with visual education to inform my pedagogy. Thus far I have completed several publications on the topic and have experimented in small and unsystematic ways in my classrooms with some of the ideas that are at the heart of this project. I have not yet had the opportunity or the support to develop a course from the ground up that can serve as a concrete starting point for the long-term pedagogical

innovations that I hope to do here at UO. The Williams Council funds would help me carve out dedicated, uninterrupted time this summer (2024) to do intensive course design and to strategize with my colleagues and collaborators on the workshop planning and wider curricular implications of the project at the departmental level before I offer it in Spring 2025. It would also allow me to support the proposed guest speaker visits, which are necessary to the course's pedagogical goals and my assessment of outcomes described below.

Assessment/ Evaluation

8. Based on the specific problem you will address with this project, how and when will you assess whether or not you were successful? Will you include a pre-experience/post-experience assessment tool? Will you survey participants? What are your intended outcomes, and how will you measure your degree of success in meeting those outcomes?
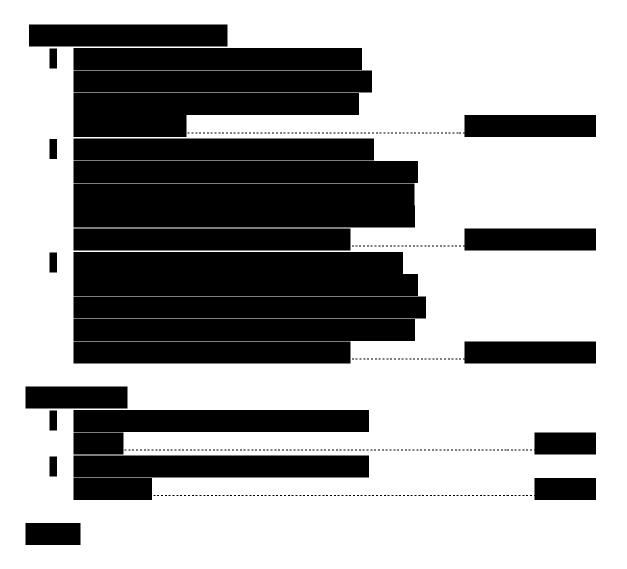
My intended outcomes are:

1) *Feasibility and Engagement of the Approach: This will be measured by tracking student enrollment and regular attendance in class sessions and workshops, as well as having the guest artists and a peer faculty observer rate student engagement with the workshop sessions.*
2) *Student Learning: This will be measured by midpoint and end of course student surveys that target how students see the accessibility and effectiveness of the course's hands-on approach and their comfort levels and engagements with the course content.*
3) *Student Work: The assignments will include a series of small original research and creative practice exercises linked to the workshops that students will compile into small group digital research exhibitions/portfolios at the end of the term. The culminating project will include a reflections piece, comparable to an artist's statement, wherein students will evaluate the hands-on collaborative approach in relation to their own work. That feedback will be used to identify areas of success and gaps in the approach that I can use for future iterations of the course.*
4) *Best Practices: To identify successful aspects of the project that can be made portable beyond this course I will conduct a post-course session with the visiting artists and faculty colleagues focused on reviewing student feedback and generating ideas for adapting the lessons-learned to other teaching contexts.*

Budget/Resources

The Williams Council has set a common stipend of $1000+33%OPE per faculty per week for any summer work included. When summer course development is requested, we gravitate toward a two-week standard and go above that—typically to four—when faculty advocate for this need. The common stipend for guest speaker travel and hosting is $2000. Please use these amounts when building your budget, if relevant. Please also consider that last year's funded proposals ranged from $5,230 to $17,760, although any amount can be proposed up to the approximate $100,000 available.

9. What amount of financial support from the Williams Council would make this project possible, and for what purposes would the funding be used (e.g. travel, equipment, staff support etc.)? It should be clear that the funding requested goes beyond summer stipends for course preparation. If you are asking for funds to purchase equipment, please inquire into the availability of existing campus resources.

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10. Are you seeking additional financial support or resources for this proposal? If so, please describe.

I am not seeking additional financial support or resources for this proposal.

Lasting Impact

11. If this project proves successful, how could you foresee its continuation and persisting impact after the period of the Williams Council funding?

I plan for this course to be rotated through my regular offerings such that it becomes a core class in my repertoire that I can continue to build on and refine year to year. What excites me about it is that the project's goal is to develop a "model," the subject of which can be changed easily so that I'm not simply repeating content, and so that other faculty members can adapt it to their areas of expertise. I also expect, as the course develops, to use it as a basis for collaborating more broadly across UO, for instance by organizing a future iteration of it around a public-facing student showcase developed in conversation with the Museum of Art and the hands-on learning opportunities in Comics and Cartoon Studies at the university. And finally, I plan for the project's lessons-learned to become a resource for curriculum development in my department and in a wide range of area studies across campus. To that end I plan to build a website that will host student work and make a set of pedagogical resources available to the university community that will grow with each iteration of the course. In the long-term, I expect this to scale up into a much larger pedagogical resource for communities outside of UO.