Survey seeks faculty clues about future of universities

By Greg Brown

Should a university: Foster creativity? Require proficiency of a set of accepted academic skills? Be an instrument for social change?

This week, the faculty will be surveyed for its opinion on the values and themes that should guide university teaching and research in the next decade and beyond.

The collective responses will be used to stimulate dialogue during the conference on “The University of the Future,” to be held at Ohio State May 7-9. The conference, which is open to the entire community, is organized by the Center for Comparative Studies on behalf of the College of Humanities.

The scope of the symposium agenda is vast regarding academic and social issues. Speakers will probe the relationships of American universities to science and technology, the marketplace, creative thinking, and how values are established through education.

National leaders in education and related professions are scheduled to make presentations at the conference. They include: Jonas Salk, who discovered the polio vaccine; Robert Payton, president of the Exxon Educational Foundation; Germaine Brée, scholar from Wake Forest University who specializes in French literature and the humanistic values of education; Kenneth Keller, president of the University of Minnesota; and Lewis Branscomb, former director of research at IBM.

“One of the primary needs in preparation for this conference is to find out what professionals in the field think higher education should be,” says Richard Bjornson, professor of Romance languages and literatures. He is co-chair of the conference along with Marilyn Waldman, associate professor of history and director of the comparative studies center.

“Ohio State is a particularly good setting for such a survey because of the breadth and sheer numbers of our faculty. Everything is represented here,” says Bjornson.

The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to answer, Bjornson estimates. It focuses mainly on the general goals higher education should advance, rather than on specific tasks to be accomplished.

For example, the survey asks if a uni-

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The board established the Division of Comparative Studies in the Humanities, effective immediately. The academic unit was requested by faculty members of the College of Humanities associated with the Center for Comparative Studies who felt that the center's administrative structure did not allow for suitable program development. Trustees noted that divisional status for the center will allow it to develop innovative programs in the areas of comparative literature, religious studies, and values, science and technology.
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NEWS

COLUMBUS -- The Ohio State University Board of Trustees met Friday (6/3) and acted on the following matters:

Master of Arts degree

The board renamed the Master of Liberal Studies degree as the Master of Arts in Comparative Studies. The change was made to better describe the nature of the degree and provide greater continuity with the academic program of the Division of Comparative Studies in the College of Humanities. The degree is the only one of its kind in Ohio, according to trustees. The University Senate approved the change on May 7.
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About Undergraduate Programs

We offer a major in Comparative Studies, a major in World Literature and minors in American Studies, Folklore and Religious Studies. As a Comparative Studies major, you will learn more about the variety of ways people have developed to understand and describe the world, their place within it, and their relationship to others. Understanding cultural similarities and differences is at the heart of the Comparative Studies program. Comparative Studies raises questions that help us understand how culture shapes the lives of individuals and groups. How, for example, does religion influence social change and stability in different cultures? How do different people express themselves and their concerns through literature and the arts? How do science and technology reflect cultural values and beliefs?

While Comparative Studies is most broadly concerned with the study of culture and cultural differences, individual faculty and students develop particular areas of expertise. The six areas of concentration for majors are:

Comparative Cultural Studies
Comparative Ethnic & American Studies
Comparative Literature
Folklore
Religious Studies
Science Studies

Unlike many Arts and Sciences majors, the Comparative Studies major is interdisciplinary, which means that you will be taking courses in several departments to satisfy the requirements. Once you’ve chosen an area of concentration, you and your adviser can begin to put together the set of courses that best reflects your particular interests and also satisfies the requirements of that area. Comparative Studies maintains lists of courses in other departments that count for major credit in each area. As a Comparative Studies major, you will take an active role in planning the program that best accommodates your academic goals.

Comparative Studies also offers the undergraduate minor in the following fields:

American Studies Minor Program
Folklore Studies Minor Program
Religious Studies Minor Program

The major in World Literatures is a new interdepartmental humanities major administered through the Department of Comparative Studies. Designed for students who are interested in both literature and globalization, the World Literatures major encourages students to explore literary texts in translation produced across global geo-political regions. Students in this major will develop critical and analytical skills through close readings of representative literary texts and also through the study of historical and theoretical questions related to

1. the translation and transmission of literary works,
2. the cultural and historical contexts of literary production,
3. the roles of literature in the contemporary world.

This major will help students develop the knowledge they will need to better understand complex interrelationships among societies with very different modes and habits of cultural expression, as well as within nations such as the U.S. that are themselves broadly multicultural. As students begin to understand the distinctive literary and cultural histories of the world's regions, they will expand their ability to respond to the future challenges of an inextricably interdependent and conflicted world.

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OSU Department of Comparative Studies Graduate Programs

Prospective students are encouraged to explore this Web site extensively to learn more about the department, especially about our core faculty and associated graduate faculty, and the graduate courses regularly offered by the department. They may also want to review our student pages and learn about recent MA alumni.

Please direct queries to the academic program coordinator, Marge Lynd, or the Graduate Studies Committee Chair, Ruby Tapia, or contact the department (614-292-2559), 451 Hagerty Hall, 1775 College Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1340.

The Department of Comparative Studies offers the Ph.D. and the Master of Arts in Comparative Studies. For students in other graduate programs at Ohio State, the department offers the Graduate Minor in Comparative Cultural Studies.

Graduate work in Comparative Studies is interdisciplinary and cross-cultural, and explores comparative perspectives on a wide range of cultural and historical discourses and practices: literary, aesthetic, technological, scientific, religious, political, material. Research and scholarship in comparative studies addresses the processes of cultural change, stability, and interaction, with particular attention to the construction of knowledge and the dynamics of power and authority. Questions of difference—racial, gender, sexual, class, ethnic, national—and the ways in which those categorizations inform and are informed by other discourses and practices are central to scholarship in comparative studies.

Such an interdisciplinary, comparative approach to the study of culture assumes both flexibility and rigor in terms of theory, methodology, and object of study. Each graduate student, with the help of faculty advisers, designs an individualized academic program to meet specific research interests that cut across departmental and college boundaries. As a part of this process, students are encouraged to question the configuration of disciplinary boundaries and to place in historical context the development of disciplinary structures and their objects of study.

The element of comparison, both within and across cultures, is important to faculty and student research. Comparisons may be drawn among the several discourses and practices of a single society, group of people, geographical region, or historical era. Research projects may also involve the comparison of specific genres and media—textual, performative, material—across cultures. Both approaches to comparative work are encouraged; most projects will involve elements of both, since contextualization is integral to all such studies. The function of comparison is not to discover differences and similarities, but to understand more comprehensively the political, social, economic, and aesthetic dimensions of the various discourses and practices that constitute social and individual life.