APC Resolution Regarding the CMAC PhD Proposal
Academic Programs Committee Meeting (Subcommittee A)
March 23, 2016

I. Introduction

a. Overview:

The APC Subcommitte A considered the proposal for a PhD in Computational Media, Arts and Culture, proposed by members of the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies, the Program of Literature and the Information of Science +Studies Program. The main authors of the proposal are Victoria Szabo (AAHVS), Mark Hansen (Literature), and Deborah Jenson (Director, Franklin Humanities Institute and Romance Studies). The committee met with Victoria Zsabo and Mark Hansen on March 23, 2016 to discuss the proposal. This proposal is the outcome of many years of collaborative work among these departments, which was made possible by several important and generous grants. The current proposal has also undergone several major revisions before coming to the APC. Articulating a PhD is seen as the next, and more important step for this group of faculty members, following the success of several other well known initiatives around the issues of art, humanities and the digital turn, including the creation of the Information of Science + Studies program itself. The growth of digital, computational or media theory programs in higher learning institutions nationally and internationally makes the efforts of this iniative more urgent. The proponents explored the field and articulated a proposal that builds on the strengths Duke has, highlighting the work that has already been done. The proposal for a PhD program is innovative, interdisciplinary and bold, but still confronts many challenges.

b. Summary of APC discussion:

The committee was in agreement about the importance of fostering the incorporation of computational media in the arts and humanities, and recognized the work done by the members of this initiative in terms of establishing Duke's presence in this growing field.

i. Topics raised and brought to closure:

The discussion of the committee focused on the nature and objectives of the proposal, which was described as both very ambitious and very narrow at the same time. Ambitious in so far as it intended to tackle the challenges posed by the digital turn in the humanities; narrow, in so far as this response was finally condensed in a small Ph.D. program on computational art. Members of the committee raised concerns that the creation of this Ph.D. program might mean a substantial investment that may not be justified by the relatively small number of students. The

committee discussed this but concluded that the high potential value of the Ph.D. students to the overall program justified the investment.

The committee also discussed the unusual length of the proposal which, when including the attached documents, is about 300 pages. This is, probably, the result of this proposal having gone through many different versions. A more streamlined proposal, having redundancies eliminated and compressing the line of argumentation, might help readers understand with more clarity the core of the project.

ii. Issues Raised that merit future consideration by the Administration:

The Committee was concerned about the different paths that the computational dimension in the humanities might have in the future. There is actually not yet clarity in terms of what direction this collaboration will have. What this proposal is presenting is one path among many, one that perhaps is not the most innovative or overarching.

The committee pointed out the lack of diversity, or any kind of international dimension in the proposal. This concern goes further, as the articulation of the digital or computational itself is something that is fraught with ethnic, racial and gender assymetrical relations. In fact, this is a topic that has been widely discussed and that should be a component of any new program instituted in that field.

II. Resolution

Despite these concerns, the committee expressed confidence that the leaders of this initiative will be able to overcome them. This is a group of very committed faculty who is already recognized in the field, and their work is an important point of reference for scholars. They have already been able to establish their presence. Further, several graduate students who have benefited from the program in its current form, now have excellent jobs at peer universities. Establishing this graduate Ph.D. program is the only way in which the initiative will be able to continue their work.

Therefore the APC supports the creation of a Ph.D. in Computational Media, Arts and Cultures.

III. Vote on April 11, 2016

APC-Subcommittee A voted to support this proposal, with the count as follows: 10 approve, 2 abstain, 1 missing.