

**The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Information and Media Studies**

by
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(Written in 2006)**

I. Historical Background

On June 27, 1996, the Senate and the Board of Governors approved the merger of three existing units into a new Faculty. The three units were i) the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (LIS), ii) the Graduate School of Journalism and iii) the Faculty of Part-time and Continuing Education. The latter was removed from the Faculty shortly thereafter and was incorporated into a more appropriate home, that being a newly created unit called The Centre for Continuing Studies. For all intents and purposes, then, the two founding entities of the current Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) were the former graduate schools of LIS and Journalism. The new Faculty was established in newly renovated quarters in Middlesex College, where the former Graduate School of Journalism had been located.

When FIMS was formed in July 1997, there were three well-established graduate programs: the MA in Journalism (MAJ) program, the Master in Library and Information Science (MLIS) program, and the doctoral program in LIS. The goal was to build on this existing academic strength by creating something new at Western - innovative academic programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels that examined information and media industries, cultures and technologies from a number of disciplinary perspectives. Accordingly, a strong priority for the Faculty of Information and Media Studies has been the development of new programs in an area of interdisciplinary knowledge previously untapped at Western.

The new programs that have been developed by the Faculty include (and discussed more extensively in section II.b following):

- the undergraduate program in *Media, Information and Technoculture (MIT)*, launched in 1997. Within its first seven years, MIT has already reached a steady-state enrolment of about 700 students, surpassing all expectations regarding growth and student demand;
- an undergraduate *Degree/Diploma in Media Theory and Production (MTP)* offered jointly as of 2002 with Fanshawe College (taking 40 students per year);
- a *Master's program in Media Studies* (admitting about 10 students per year), also begun in 2002;
- a more specialized undergraduate program in *Media and the Public Interest (MPI)* was developed in 2004 to complement and extend the MIT program, admitting a maximum of 20 each year;
- the new *PhD program in Media Studies* admitted its first cohort in fall 2005, with plans to admit about 5 new students each fall thereafter.

To respond to the increasing student demand for our popular academic programs, the Faculty has made a concerted effort to recruit new faculty members with teaching and research specializations that complement, but significantly extend, the range possessed by the founding faculty.

Areas where recruited faculty have brought additional strength include cultural theory, communications theory, health informatics, information systems, intellectual property, ICTs and development, learning technologies, news

and media representations, political economy, popular music, interactive multimedia, advertising, film and television studies, and the cultural and entertainment industries. Recognizing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, the Faculty has forged collaborative relationships with other units across the university, notably through the creation of joint appointments with FIMS and other units: Law (2 joint appointments), Sociology, Computer Science, Visual Arts, Music, and Women's Studies.

As well as new faculty appointments, FIMS also has made additional staff appointments to provide for the increasing infrastructure needed to run the Faculty and to provide support for the academic programs. At the time that FIMS was formed, there were 14 staff. Currently, there are 19 full-time and 1 half-time staff members, with several more full-time appointments either in process or expected.

Because of the relatively rapid growth of the Faculty, the Middlesex College quarters soon were outgrown and FIMS was relocated again in 2004 to the new North Campus Building. This move enabled FIMS to consolidate its space and to provide for better facilities for the graduate programs in particular, including a more effective layout for the computing labs, the radio and TV studios and the Graduate Resource Centre (which houses a small monograph and journal collection as well as providing access to a large number of electronic resources).

II. Faculty and Research

The mission statement of FIMS states that the Faculty of Information and Media Studies is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about media, communications, information and their technologies. Through teaching and research, the Faculty examines the cultural industries, institutions, and practices that produce news, information and entertainment. It investigates the creation and operation of the technologies of communication and their interactions with individuals and society. The Faculty interweaves theory and practice in professional and scholarly contexts.

In the Faculty's Academic Plan, particular research strengths and priorities have been identified. Key areas of research for the Faculty include

- Cultural industries and institutions
- Communication, consumption, and culture
- The social construction and use of media and information
- Information and media policy
- The organization and management of information
- Computer-based systems and environments.

In the spirit of Western's goal to achieve "a place in the first rank of major Canadian universities and, in selected areas, be the leader," the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) has identified three areas of particular strength that are priorities in planning:

- Interdisciplinary research and teaching
- Attention to information and communication technologies (ICTs), including their social, cultural, and political contexts
- Integration of theory and practice.