

Media culture new liberal arts education

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It's been just over a year since Thomas Carmichael walked through the doors of the North Campus Building into his role as dean of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies and, to hear him tell it, it's been an exciting time for the booming faculty.



Carmichael has been at The University of Western Ontario for almost 20 years, having come to the campus in 1990 as a recruit to the Department of English. He was Acting Director of the Centre of Theory and Criticism in 2001, the same year he was made Associate Dean (Research) for the Department of Arts and Humanities.

He lives in London with his wife Michal Goode and daughter Ursala.

Western News caught up with Carmichael to find out how his first year has gone.

Western News: You were appointed dean of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) about a year ago. How has your first year in that role been?

Thomas Carmichael: It's been wonderful. It's been an exciting year; this is a dynamic faculty full of internationally recognized scholars and we have dynamic programs both long standing and newer programs. It's been a real exciting year coordinating these programs and encouraging them to

work together.

WN: Since its inception in 1997, the Faculty of Information and Media Studies has grown dramatically. Is more growth planned for the faculty and if so, in what areas?

Carmichael: Our undergraduate M.I.T. program has grown exponentially, going from zero to 900 students. I think we are at a level that is comfortable for the faculty and optimum for the academic program we want to present. I think we probably won't see growth in the undergraduate side but we will see a concentration on developing the program in working on its interdisciplinary emphasis.

On the graduate side there will be growth which is consistent with the university's initiative to grow graduate education at Western and FIMS is very much on side with that aspiration to raise the research intensity of the campus culture overall. We've already grown in the MLIS (Masters of Information and Library Science) program. We added an entire new cohort the year before I came so we're running over 200 in a MLIS program at any one time. Where we will grow is in our media studies program both at the Master's and PhD levels. We are also very pleased with the introduction of our new joint program in

popular music and culture. It's a joint offering with the music faculty. It was initiated in September and we've had a very strong uptake in this cycle.

WN: What do you think is pulling students to FIMS?

Carmichael: I think FIMS represents in many ways what can be seen as the mainstream of what has sometimes been called the liberal arts education of the 20th century. Media culture is essential to the fabric of lived experience for everyone. Certainly in North America the critique of media culture and an understanding of the culture that surrounds production and consumption of media is something that everybody recognizes as being essential to a current understanding of social cultural economic realities. I think FIMS really responds to what is a pressing imperative and a central preoccupation of students and also I think of informed citizens currently in Canada, the U.S. and throughout Europe.

WN: Many of the key principles in the FIMS Academic Plan have to do with collaboration. Is this an intentional strategy?

Carmichael: I think so. When looking at FIMS you might want to look at it under the terms of information and communication. There is a common thread that run though our work, whether it be in the use of critical theory to address questions of documentation or whether it be a concern of users in the library context or copyright concerns and that's shaped over into a concern with media, labour and production in media, questions of presentation which then shade over into a kind of continuum into questions of representation and discourse in journalism and practices in journals.

So I think there is a continuity that revolves around recognizing that we have distinct programs certainly, but I think they recognize constantly that they work in an interdisciplinary environment that is productive and essential to the future of those disciplines. So this is a faculty that has strong programs with a strong commitment to the interdisciplinary.

This is very much a part of FIMS culture and one that I'm happy to take up and embrace and help to advance. FIMS is very much a collective work and I think that everybody in the faculty recognizes the importance of interdisciplinary and the commitment to that is part of the academic mission of the faculty.

WN: There's been talk that FIMS may be outgrowing the North Campus Building and is looking to move.

Carmichael: I've heard that one as well. Space has certainly become a crucial question for us and so we're looking towards moving, to revamp and renovate the physical plant (Services) building when they move out. We recognize that we have grown substantially, that we need more space for faculty staff and students, we need more public space and we need for the collective of the faculty to have a space that is ours and a public space that is ours.