Film and New Media Studies (FNMS) – the immediate future.

FNMS needs a new fulltime position as of 1 January 2014. Without this, the Program will be forced to offer a specialization minor only.

1) Position overview:

We are seeking an excellent researcher and teacher in the area of Film and New Media Studies, with a preference for an applicant with experience in Film Theory and/or Documentary Studies. The appointee should be cognizant of and enthusiastic about digital cinema. Experience in filmmaking will be an added advantage, but not essential.

2) Brief rationale:

To consolidate the position of Film Studies and New Media Studies across the University, the coherence provided by the existing FNMS major needs to be ongoing. If the position is not filled, the University loses this given interdisciplinary focal point.

3) Present position:

Film and New Media Studies, a relatively recent conjunction, have still more recently been aligned with Art History to form a ‘pillar’ within SCI. The School awaits a clearer outlook beyond the recommended amalgamation of SCI with SLS, and the hiving off of Art History to another area, but clearly both will impact on FNMS.

The FNMS Program currently has a single fulltime post, and 2.1 posts altogether. Present staff plans for phasing into retirement see that reduce to 1.6 teaching posts by the beginning of 2014, and to 1.0 by the beginning of 2015. To maintain the status quo of a major and a minor, addressing the staffing situation is urgent. The provisional list of course offerings for this triennium does not include the sole core course, FILM1002,
beyond the current semester. The School itself has confirmed at a staff meeting that it strongly wishes the major to continue, not least because of its close connections to other disciplines taught within SCI.

4) Brief background:

Film Studies to date has been perhaps the most interdisciplinary of all Humanities subject areas, and more and more disciplines, beyond the university teaching context, have seen the need to engage with it. With the shift to the digital era, the evolution from earlier film formats and aesthetics is already explored in our courses, and needs development.

Our postgrad students have had success, with our first PhD becoming a colleague, and our first MPhil student having her thesis published (McFarland, N. Carolina). Many of our students have been and are becoming active filmmakers. For example an honours student from 2011 is now studying documentary filmmaking at the Australian Film Television and Radio School in Sydney. The Head of Screen Music at AFTRS is enrolling in an ANU PhD, with Hillman on his panel. **We currently have 9 postgraduate students, with 2 in the process of examination.** Through Summerhayes, the FNMS Program is involved in graduate coursework (e.g. the MA in Social Research).

A strong link to the National Film and Sound Archive, and also to the Australian War Memorial and AITSIS, were established through our internship program. Students’ projects explored important curatorial areas, and have contributed to the research capacity of the Archive (websites, databases, floor talks, etc.). For example a 2006 ‘internee’ even made a discovery of national significance for the Australian film industry while working at the NFSA. **The Memo of Understanding between CASS and the NFSA sees the FNMS Program again poised in a crucial position.**

Indeed in December 2012, Summerhayes convened the international Visible Evidence Documentary Studies Conference: a collaboration between the ANU and the NFSA that was claimed by the Dean and Director of CASS and the CEO of the NFSA as the first major undertaking under the MoU. This conference was convened as a direct
consequence of the FNMS’s presence at ANU, especially in the context of teaching and research in Documentary Studies.

5) Staffing:

Student numbers have never been a problem for this Program; staff numbers, and particularly this piecemeal configuration, have limited our capacity for expanding the Program further, for instance into a Masters by coursework degree. However, students taking the Graduate Certificate in Liberal Arts can take half their required courses in our area, relevant to AQF level 8 discussions at present.

We need to be able to offer more than one FILM/NEWM- prefix option/semester to maintain a viable profile. Just to mount our first-year course and one of the bigger options (e.g. U. S. Cinema, or Documentary) requires 10-11 hours’ weekly teaching plus 4 of screenings, i.e. at least a full u/g load for 1.5 posts.

6) Research:

Across the 3 current staff members, research radiates out from Film Studies without being confined to it. This is not surprising, considering our backgrounds. But it does keep coming back to Film Studies; each of us has seen at least one book completed, alongside other publications, within the last 8 years. Parallel to the evolution of the Program has come an impressive accumulation of University Library holdings, built up virtually from zero, and a visual library located in the A. D. Hope Bldg. One of us has assessed ARC applications in the Film Studies area, and we have been strongly represented at local and international conferences.

7) Outside links:

Close links exist to other universities, e.g. to Berkeley, for both staff and student exchange. The greater proximity in CASS of the RSHA, not least its world-ranking filmmakers and film-academics from the former CCCR, has been welcome in itself. But the ANU’s strengths have remained more discrete than we would have liked. Both I-HuG and visual anthropology and ethnographic film have remained largely separate. Within
the FNMS Program there is a strong hinge to these areas, with RSHA fellows already teaching into our Documentary course.

8) The future:

1) We hope for further clarity, both in staff profiles and in the Graduate School, of the relation of Film Studies to other ANU areas. The forthcoming SCI/SLS amalgamation opens new perspectives, as does the relocation of Art History, with the possible tandem movement of FNMS.

2) The Program’s signature and innovative expansion into the area of New Media Studies automatically offers links with the School of Art and ANU’s Digital Hub. Worldwide, cinema studies has moved into the digital realm in teaching, research and practice-oriented research with highly respected scholars such as Thomas Elsaesser now commenting on and researching the area of digital cinema. We see the future as expanding into this area of teaching, with Summerhayes already publishing in the area of digital documentary (New Documentary Ecologies Palgrave December 2013).

3) Another link capable of further innovation is with the original home of Film Studies, the then equivalent of SLS. One distinctive feature of our Program, probably unique in Australia, is its strong profile in European Cinemas, with native speaker competence. Italian Cinema and German Cinema have long been offered across both Schools, a French-language French Cinema course also exists, and a Spanish Cinema course would be welcome, with a strong language student base to draw on. European Cinema courses lend themselves to the SLS ‘common option’ pattern across languages. At least 3 of the current SLS staff are research-active in Film Studies.

4) The Film and Music course has in the past featured team teaching from both areas, which originally was unique in Australia (and may still be?). This too is an expanding area of academic interest and research. In the wake of last year’s upheaval at the CSM, it is currently being taught solo, for the first time; the sooner the severed link is recreated, the better.
5) Recent students have found positions at NFSA, the Los Angeles Academy Archive, and AFTRS, while others have made prize-winning short films. Part of our vision must include these success stories, whether as research assistants, guest lecturers, or else to showcase their work. 2 postgrads have already taught at undergrad level with considerable success through the Pinnacle Program.