

# Proposal for an Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Minor in British Studies

University of Utah

2006-2007

## 1. Request

Because of manifold changes in the way major cultural traditions are approached in the academy today, the time is ripe for a reevaluation of the study of British literature, culture, and society within the university. The proposed minor in British Studies, though a very small step toward this end, offers one model for doing so. The primary goal is to provide students with a complex and multifaceted understanding of Britain and the former British Empire by requiring related course work across disciplinary boundaries and fostering independent research using methods that combine two or more disciplines. The hope is that, in this way, students who may no longer concentrate (even within English departments) on specifically British themes would still be able to gain a rich and nuanced appreciation of a culture that historically has been one of the major forces shaping the world we have inherited.

### A. Program of Study

The program of study draws almost entirely from existing course offerings in six related departments: English, Film, History, Philosophy, Political Science, and Theatre. (It is assumed that other departments, such as Art History, Sociology, and Music, may at a later date join the set of participating departments were they to schedule courses related to British society and culture.) The content of approved courses would draw substantially from British society and culture, including the society and culture of former colonies of the British Empire in its various phases. Only one course, already offered in the English Department, would have a section structured to function as a capstone Interdisciplinary Seminar in British Studies, in which independent research and a longer research paper would be mentored by the instructor. (In the ideal, this course could be team-taught by scholars from two different disciplines.)

The course work for the minor would require a balance of courses in three broad areas: (A) the cultural/aesthetic (courses in literature, film, and theatre); (B) the socio-historical (courses in History and Political Science); and (C) the world of ideas (courses in Philosophy). A candidate for the minor in British Studies would be required to take at least two courses in each of areas A and B, and at least one course in area C. The candidate would also choose one elective from the three areas, and enroll in the capstone Interdisciplinary Seminar in British Studies. The total number of courses required for the

minor would thus be 7, or 21 credit hours, at the 3000-level or above, including the capstone Interdisciplinary Seminar.

## B. Requirements

The basic outlines of the proposed minor would thus be as follows:

- 7 courses (21 credit hours) at the 3000-level or above with substantial content drawn from British society and culture, including areas of the former British Empire. Courses could be chosen from the list of approved courses posted on a British Studies web site before each semester, but could also be approved by petition submitted to the Committee on British Studies.
- At least 2 courses each from areas A (Literature, Film, Theatre) and B (History, Political Science); and at least 1 course from area C (Philosophy).
- Prerequisite for all courses in the minor: Writing 2010. (This course does not count toward the 21 credit hour requirement for the minor.)
- Capstone: At present, English 5630 (“Advanced Seminar in British Studies”). This course will have a section titled “Interdisciplinary Seminar in British Studies.” It will be open to all students in the minor. The normal prerequisite for this course, English 2600, will be waived for British Studies Minor candidates with majors other than English. The course may count as satisfying an area A requirement. This capstone course is expected to migrate to other departments in future years (e.g., a section of History 4990, Senior Seminar).

Examples of eligible courses:

### Area A

- English 3701. Introduction to Literary History I
- English 3702. Introduction to Literary History II
- English 3703. Introduction to Literary History III
- English 3710. Studies in British Literature
- English 3780. Global/Transnational Literature
- English \_\_\_\_\_. (Courses taken as part of British Studies in London program)

With additional prerequisite English 2600 (Critical Introduction to Literary Forms) waived at discretion of instructor:

- English 5620. Honors Seminar-Special Topics (when there is substantial treatment of British literature; open to all minors)
- English 5700. Studies in Medieval Literature
- English 5701. Chaucer
- English 5710. Studies in Renaissance Literature
- English 5711. Shakespeare

English 5720. Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature  
 English 5721. Milton  
 English 5740. Studies in British Romanticism  
 English 5760. Studies in Victorian Literature  
 English 5770. Studies in Twentieth-Century British Literature  
 English 5790. Studies in Modernism (when there is substantial treatment of  
 British literature)  
 English 5860. Studies in Post-colonial Literature  
 English 5870. Individual Authors (when British)

Film 3750. Third World Cinema (when there is substantial treatment of cinema  
 from former colonies of British empire)  
 Film 3760. Film and Culture (when there is substantial treatment of cinema  
 from Britain and former colonies of British empire)  
 Film 4220. Film Study (when there is substantial treatment of cinema  
 from Britain and former colonies of British empire)

Theatre 4010. Shakespeare in Performance (Study Abroad Program)  
 Theatre 4020. Dramatic Genres (Study Abroad Program)  
 Theatre 4030. Contemporary Drama (Study Abroad Program)

#### Area B

History 3040. Medieval England  
 History 3140. Victorian Britain  
 History 3200. Age of Imperialism (when there is substantial treatment of British  
 empire)  
 History 3210. Age of Total War (when there is substantial treatment of Britain or  
 British Empire)  
 History 3240. Twentieth Century Britain  
 History 3560. Modern India  
 History 3700. Colonial America  
 History 4095. The Body and the State in Modern Britain  
 History 4150. Modern London  
 History 4250. Topics in European Social/Cultural History (when there is  
 substantial treatment of British society/culture)  
 History 4440. British and French Colonialism in the Middle East  
 History 4701. The Darwinian Revolution  
 History 4990. Senior Seminar (when there is substantial treatment of British  
 society/culture or empire)

Political Science 5010. Political Thought from Machiavelli (when there is  
 substantial treatment of British political thought)

#### Area C

- Philosophy 3820. The Meaning of Life (when there is substantial treatment of British philosophy)
- Philosophy 4120. Early Modern Philosophy (when there is substantial treatment of British philosophy)
- Philosophy 4130. Nineteenth-Century Philosophy (when there is substantial treatment of British philosophy)
- Philosophy 5120. Modern and Recent Philosophy (when there is substantial treatment of British philosophy)
- Philosophy 5191/2. Philosophy of \_\_\_\_\_ (when figure or movement addressed is primarily British)

### C. Advising and admission to the minor

Advising will be conducted by the Committee on British Studies, made up of one representative from each of the six departments involved in the minor, under the auspices of the College of Humanities. It is assumed that the bulk of student advising in the early years will be done by the Director of British Studies, Vincent Pecora. As the minor grows, it is expected that the advising of students from different departments will be done by the faculty member from that department currently sitting on the Committee. Students considering declaring the minor will be required to meet individually with the Director of British Studies in order to discuss the constitution of their program. They will be encouraged to do this as early as possible in their undergraduate career, though it is to be expected that some students will also construct a minor after they have taken a number of eligible courses. All students declaring the minor will meet with their advisor two semesters in advance of their graduation date, as is required by the University's graduation procedures. In all cases, students will receive advanced counseling on the research project they intend to pursue in the Interdisciplinary Seminar in British Studies. It is also the case that, as the program evolves, other departments (for example, Art History, Sociology, and Music) might be added to the set of participating disciplines, and these departments would also have a representative on the Committee.

### D. Independent research

As part of the Minor in British Studies, students will enroll in the capstone Interdisciplinary Seminar in British Studies (currently, a special section of English 5600, though in future years the seminar can be located in other participating departments), normally in their last year. This course will be organized around a theme broadly related to British literature, culture, and society, and chosen by the instructor. However, the students in this course will be asked to conduct interdisciplinary research for a substantial essay (15-20 pages) on a topic of their choosing. The topic should develop out of the work they have done previously in the minor, and could be related in some way to their major area of concentration. Hence, history majors might choose a topic that requires them to look closely at the literature of an era, and English majors might write on questions of philosophy or political science that form the background to some of the

literature they have read. The course instructor would function as the primary mentor for this research project, but students would be encouraged to seek out other advisors as well (such as members of the Committee on British Studies).

#### E. Administration of the minor

The Minor will be housed in the College of Humanities, will be interdisciplinary in nature, and thus will be independent of any particular department. The Committee on British Studies would be responsible for overseeing and evaluating the minor, under the auspices of the College of Humanities. The Committee would approve all changes to the program, would monitor the lists of approved courses and the functioning of the Interdisciplinary Seminar in British Studies, and would assess the effectiveness of student advising. The Committee would meet once every year to evaluate the program as a whole and to decide upon any broad changes. The Committee would also meet in a timely manner to consider any additions to the program, such as an expansion of the set of participating departments and courses, in order to meet University and College curriculum committee deadlines. The Committee would have overall responsibility for maintaining the quality of the minor and addressing the concerns of students as they may arise.

#### F. Submitting new courses for the approved list

A list of courses approved in advance would be posted on a British Studies web site before the beginning of each semester. These lists will be archived on the website by semester and year for the use of both the Program and students. Every effort will be made before the beginning of each semester to contact instructors of courses where course content may vary considerably from semester to semester in order to determine if the scheduled course meets British Studies criteria. However, because the content of courses inevitably varies from semester to semester and course titles do not always reflect course content, students may petition the Committee on British Studies for approval of a course not on the list. Students would submit the course syllabus with their petitions. They would be encouraged to do so at the very beginning of the course to avoid confusion and could expect a speedy response. But they may do so at any time afterwards with the caveat that not all such petitions will be approved.

#### G. Selected Faculty

##### *English Department:*

Scott Black (18<sup>th</sup>-Century)  
 Vincent Cheng (Post-colonial)  
 Norman Council (17<sup>th</sup>-Century)  
 Andrew Franta (Romantics)

Vincent Pecora (20<sup>th</sup>-Century)  
 Matt Potolski (19<sup>th</sup>-Century)  
 Thomas Stillinger (Medieval)  
 Kathryn Stockton (Gender Studies)  
 Barry Weller (Renaissance)

*Film Department:*

Chris Lippard (Film History)

*Theatre Department:*

Tim Slover (Theatre History)

*History Department:*

Ben Cohen (Modern India)  
 Nadja Durbach (Britain)  
 Eric Hinderaker (Early America)  
 Peter Sluglett (Modern Middle East)  
 Ron Smelser (Modern Europe)

*Political Science Department:*

Ibrahim Karawan (International Relations)  
 Chandran Kukathas (Political Theory)

*Philosophy Department:*

Elijah Millgram (British Empiricism)  
 Lex Newman (Modern Philosophy)

## II. Need

Interdisciplinary study is commonly designed to address areas or topics that seem to fall through the cracks, or lie on the margins, of ordinary disciplinary structures. Women's studies, ethnic studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies, third-world cinema, and similar academic pursuits in the humanities are good examples. But it is also the case that the study of seemingly well established areas of inquiry—such as American literature, culture, and society—have benefited enormously in the recent past from approaches that combined or worked in the interstices of traditional disciplinary and departmental models. Indeed, “American studies” was one of the first truly interdisciplinary initiatives in the modern humanities, connecting in new ways and extending research produced in departments of literature, history, sociology, art history,

philosophy, political science, and economic history. And its development in the 1960s was in part due to an explosion of scholarly interest in American society and culture, an academic renaissance of sorts in things American that was partially fueled by America's political ascendancy after World War II. If the particular interdisciplinary rubric "American studies" is somewhat less visible on university campuses today than it once was, it is in large part because the methods developed in its name have been so well absorbed at this point by traditional departments.

The study of British literature, culture, and society at the University of Utah would be greatly enhanced by a similar emphasis on the value of interdisciplinary approaches to another set of well established areas of inquiry. But the reasons are ironically almost the reverse of those behind the rise of American studies. The relative dearth of "British studies" programs in the United States is primarily a testament to the centrality that Britain as an object of study in many humanistic disciplines once held on American campuses. (For example, there is a British Studies Center at the University of California, Berkeley, but none at any other campus in the UC system.) At one time, the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton enjoyed an unparalleled primacy in English departments. At Columbia University as late as the 1980s, these were the only writers permitted as objects of study for the "Major Figures" section of the doctoral oral qualifying examination. Likewise, it would once have been unthinkable to have a History department that did not feature many courses on British history.

This is no longer the case. The rise in importance of American literature, culture, and society relative to the study of Britain is partly responsible. But so is the increasingly global perspective demanded by the world today, in which it is just as likely that the former colonies of Britain (or France, or Spain) will get as much or more attention as the former imperial center. (The study of Latin America, for example, has been growing steadily in Departments of Spanish and Portuguese, even as the study of Spain and Portugal itself shrinks.) The same is true within English Departments. While a handful of Departments of English (including that of the University of Utah) continue to emphasize a survey of the great works of British literature at the core of the English major, such a focus does not exist any longer in the English Departments of many prominent universities, and it is a tendency that affects every English Department. It has long been possible to get a BA in English concentrating only in American literature at many universities, and the trend is toward an expansion of once marginal areas—from minority literatures to creative writing to business, science, and even memoir writing. When one examines the expanded range of topics in other disciplines—in history, art history, film, and theatre—one finds similar trends opening up new areas of study and, as an inevitable consequence, lessening the emphasis on the world's once dominant national cultures. Britain, at one time an imperial power around which many colonial provinces revolved, is in the process of being provincialized in turn. In the end, as teachers and scholars, we should be concerned not so much to resist such changes (which are, in many ways, both positive and inevitable) but to find new ways of synthesizing information about old topics and areas of study, new models that will help to remake the old topics and areas of study for a new century.

### **III. Institutional Impact**

The minor would require no institutional support beyond what is currently provided. The minor is built around currently taught courses, and would make use of new courses that would come on line by normal departmental initiative. No new faculty members are required at this time, though it is hoped that an expansion of offerings in British culture might occur in departments like Art History or Music. The minor has been constructed so that there should be no net migration of SCH to any one department, and hence no financial gain or loss for any one department.

### **IV. Finances**

Since the minor is composed of existing courses taught by currently employed faculty, there is no need for additional financial resources. The maintenance of the British Studies web site will be funded by resources derived from the Gordon B. Hinckley Endowment for British Studies, housed in the College of Humanities.