

**External Review: Department of Cinema and  
Television Arts**

**California State University, Fullerton**

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External Reviewers

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**Introduction and Overview**

We would like to thank the Department of Cinema and Television Arts faculty for inviting us to provide an external review of their Department and for hosting our onsite visit on November 19, 2016. The day we spent was enjoyable and informative, beginning with a meeting with the CTVA chair, Garry Hart, followed by a tour and subsequent meetings with a number of of the Department's full-time faculty and students. We also met with the then Associate Dean of the College of Communications (now Interim Dean, congratulations!), Ed Fink. We toured the CTVA Department's production facilities in the basement of the Library, and enjoyed a lecture from Assistant Professor Hunter Hargraves while visiting the CTVA 302 Critical Studies Television class.

The department embodies an energy, dynamic, and passion for film, television, and media production. The faculty impressed us with their diverse interests and accomplishments as well as their extensive connections to the entertainment community. The students were enthusiastic, the curriculum well considered and reflective of the departments awareness of the history of film and media production, while maintaining currency in this rapidly changing industry. The provided self-study highlighted the significant and ongoing work the department has pursued in providing the best education they can as well as underscoring the frustrations and limitations with which the department struggles. Our visit and review reinforce much of the successes and limitations that the department has already identified.

Many of the recommendations and goals set at the last review have been achieved or are in process. The MFA in screenwriting, proposed in the previous review, is now a successful program in its fifth year. Curriculum has continued to be updated to maintain currency with the development of media and the University's missions and goals. Of significance, though, the facilities have not seen improvement; in fact due to the time that has passed and the continued development of media technology and changes to the accessibility and management of equipment, the situation has arguably become more problematic. Roadmaps helping to better identify the unofficial tracts have been created. The department is also to be commended on

identifying six goals to work toward as they progress.

Our review is broken down into an assessment of categories we identified as areas of success or concern.

### ***Facilities***

Inadequate facilities is an item which was addressed extensively in the previous review conducted in 2009, and has only seemed to have become exacerbated since that time.

Watching a film is an experience which engages the viewer, immersing the audience in the world of the film. Careful control of image and sound are a fundamental part of the cinematic experience. In order to adequately educate budding filmmakers, the experience of seeing their work and the films they study need to be experienced in a space which allows for control of the viewing experience. The CTVA department lacks proper projection facilities and reliance on smart white boards to screen films is unacceptable.

The faculty are very aware of the limitations within which they must work and have committed significant sweat equity and their own time to addressing the limitations of the facilities as best as they can, but there is only so much they can do to address the shortcomings of the current facilities without further resources and commitment from the College and University.

In one of the classrooms a faculty person had invested personal time and funds installing sound reducing materials and other features in an attempt to provide as effective a sound design space as possible. Another classroom was significantly compromised by a pillar in the middle of the room, inhibiting the use of the space; lack of storage also resulted in piles of boxes having filling a corner of this room.

The existing studio has an inadequate space to teach proper studio techniques. The ceilings are far too low for required lighting angles and prohibit the permanent hanging of lights and a grid. There is no sound stage, so teaching proper studio audio is nearly impossible. The space is small and cramped. Digital technology has advanced far beyond the standard definition equipment in use. HD technology has been the standard for some time and new standards such as 4K are being embraced.

Storage proved another issue, with there being little to no space in which to store needed materials and equipment. The stock room is shared with broadcast journalism a less than ideal situation.

Safety concerns: The reviewers strongly recommended that an equipment safety check out process be implemented ensuring students have been provided with the appropriate safety precautions before using the stage or filmmaking equipment.

Recommend the University actively pursue establishing the separate "School of Cinema and Television Arts discussed in the self-study.

Recommended that the CTVA department and University investigate the possibility of developing

an *Entertainment Media Center*, providing a resource and opportunities for the various entertainment related degree programs dispersed throughout the University to collaborate and share resources. Business, the Arts, Computer Science, and possibly more opportunities exist to bring together student and faculty filmmakers, actors, animator, illustrators, video game developers, from the various Colleges and Departments to work together and to share resources.

Digital technology has provided access to media making tools at much more affordable costs and in much accessible packages. Access to the digital editing facility is far too limited and the reviewers recommend that the department and University investigate possible ways to address providing access to the students beyond the current 9:00 AM-5:00 PM schedule. Frustration at a lack of responsiveness from the University IT division in failing to recognize the specific needs and requests of the department in addressing the kinds of digital tools needed was also expressed. The reviewers suggest that a line of communication be codified ensuring the significant and specialized needs a department handling high-end digital production requires. Further exacerbating the digital technology challenges, the TV studio is currently equipped with standard resolution equipment. Current industry standards have long since left NTSC standard resolution in the past and are now moving beyond the HD to Ultra HD, using 4K to 8K resolution. It is recommended that the department address this shortcoming and adopt tools with the capacity to handle Ultra HD video.

It is strongly recommended that the University invest in the program commensurate with the promise of the high caliber faculty and significant student interest. Film and TV production are SoCal based industries the University is well placed to participate in serving. Faculty and students are here, but the University has failed to follow through in providing the minimum required resources and facilities necessary to support the program. Significant capital investment and ongoing support is required and appropriate.

### ***Curriculum***

The CTVA department is to be commended for their attentiveness to the content and quality of their curriculum – demonstrated by their awareness of the dynamic state of media production and consumption as reflected in the courses they have introduced, addressing the very contemporary issues of globalization and diversity. The Student Learning Outcomes are in process of revision, refining the focus of the department to be in accord with the University's assessment goals and the department demonstrates better than average graduation rates. The self-study and time spent speaking with the faculty and students reinforced the evident passion and awareness the faculty maintains in regards to currency in film and television production.

An identified goal listed in the previous review was the creation of a graduate screenwriting program, significantly, this goal has been achieved.

Student concerns seemed focused on the time it took to actually get to make films. One student bemoaned that he had been making films for two years while a Community College Student, but had yet to touch a camera since he had transferred to CSU Fullerton. It soon became evident that CTVA 300 as the required prerequisite for production classes was identified by the students as the impediment to moving forward in their studies. We enjoyed speaking with a number of enthusiastic CTVA students, but one thing that stood out was the challenge the students had to get to the point in their academic career where they could make films. Faculty suggested to the reviewers that

CTVA 300 could actually be taken as early as the freshman year, facilitating a student's gaining access to the various production classes that much sooner. We recommend CTVA 300 be reconsidered as a 100 or 200 level course. Completion of this class at the lower division and opportunity for articulation with Community College programs will help to get the students making films sooner.

Evidence of student accomplishment would have been nice to see. We were not provided the opportunity to experience student work and discussion as to what kind of production or screenwriting experience the students would be able to showcase upon graduation was elusive. Consideration given to a capstone experience, providing the students with an opportunity to build a reel, complete a film, or have a polished screenplay showcasing who they are as a filmmaker is a recommendation the reviewers believe worth contemplating. The micro budget feature film experience described in the self-study suggests an approach to consider in giving thought to the capstone experience.

The goals identified in the self-study are well considered and, with support from the College and University, achievable, and provide further evidence of the commitment the department demonstrates to providing the most effective and up to date education possible.

### ***Faculty***

A significant strength of the CTVA department at CSUF is clearly the faculty. Representing a diverse array of experiences and backgrounds, the faculty can boast of significant accomplishments in both the Academy and entertainment industry, as represented by the impressive list of faculty endeavors including numerous production credits, grants, and publications, submitted in the Performance Review. The conversation the reviewers enjoyed with the faculty provided these bright and articulate individuals an opportunity to discuss the program, express frustrations, and share their successes. Our impression was that the faculty appeared to be collegial and supportive of each other, with a student centered perspective. A repeated concern expressed by the faculty revolved around the workload they manage. The performance review addresses concerns that the student enrollment has increased significantly, but without a commensurate increase in full time faculty. The teaching schedule was a matter often cited as a concern, and the reviewers were particularly concerned in regards to the demands of teaching screenwriting courses serving 20 students. Other concerns of note include a repeated expression of frustration that the CTVA department is the step-child of the Communications Department and the perception that resources and funding are not allocated to the CTVA department proportionate to their need. The University's focus on assessment also generated concern that the numbers too often are made more important than the students. Morale is a concern as the faculty also expressed dismay at lack of recognition for accomplishments of the department, the faculty expressed numerous and heart felt frustrations that their voice was not heard in regards to facilities use and design, IT equipment and expenditures, consolidation of resources with other departments, the failure of the College/University to address the very clear and long evident facilities problems, etc.

### ***Course Relief***

In the one-day visit to the CTVA program the most recurring theme was the intensive workload of the Faculty, not only in course load (at the Full time Faculty level), but in class size, and general

increase in student to faculty ratios. As mentioned previously, CTVA has a strong core faculty, but increased student enrollment and the added faculty involvement it requires prioritizes the agenda for a plan of relief for fulltime faculty. We were most impressed by the faculty's devotion to their students in all Program focuses, i.e. Production, Writing, Management, and Critical Studies, but were also quite aware of their concern that the amount of individual course and work load could ultimately harm the high standard that has been established and nurtured by CTVA Faculty and Administration.

There seems to be no easy short-term fix for this issue without diminishing curriculum and/or CTVA classes across the board that continue to be in high demand. As the Program moves towards bringing aboard a new full time Professorship in Production, which will be a welcome addition if not some workload relief, it seems incumbent on the Program to strongly prioritize adding faculty, both part time and ideally full time, to keep up with the increased CTVA student population. That priority is exacerbated by the ebb and flow of full time Faculty who are on sanctioned leave or on a work leave for a current Industry project. (Per the Faculty office hours page there were two such full time faculty absences this past Fall 2016 term.) We would strongly urge that Administration continue to search for and research means to unburden an outstanding and dedicated Full-time faculty.

### ***Student Advisement***

Clearly the CTVA department's highly qualified and committed faculty is the critical component of the program's efforts to produce positive outcomes for students, but student advisement is another factor that can have a significant influence on students' ability to capitalize on the school's offerings.

We commend the steps that have already been taken by the department to make improvements in this area. The self-study (pages 18 and 19) explains that advisement had been shifted from departmental faculty to peers/students working in the college's Advisement Center. The result was questionable advice for CTVA students from peers who often had no association at all with CTVA. In response to this unfortunate situation, the department opened its own advisement office in 2015, and guidance for departmental students was returned to the department. We believe this was a very positive development.

But we have questions about the way that the departmental advising office has been set up, with all the advising to be done by one member of the faculty. Professor Monti has accepted the responsibility of handling advisement for all 700+ majors and minors. And she bears this burden on top of her class load of three courses—given that she has been granted a single-course release. This seems like much too heavy a load for any one person to handle, especially as what amounts to one-fourth of her professional workload.

We recommend that the department consider returning to the arrangement that existed before the college opened its center, that is, back to the time when "all full-time CTVA faculty served as advisors for majors and minors." (Self-study, p. 18) Such a change would ensure that the greatest number of students would benefit from informed counsel about course selection and other issues in navigating their way through the department.

In that same vein, we understand that advisement is not currently mandatory for students. We believe that is a policy that should be reconsidered. Mandatory advisement would give much more weight to this extremely important part of a student's education than Professor Monti's recommendation "that students meet with her each semester." (p.18) Good advice at critical moments in a student's educational career can make a tremendous difference, and we suspect that the students who might not seek out that guidance voluntarily are the students who might most benefit from it. They are the ones who most need mandatory advisement.

The mandatory orientation sessions for freshman and new transfers that are described in the self-study (p.19) are a step in the right direction. And we understand that the department has been successful, as noted earlier, in improving upon university-wide graduation rates for its students. But we believe that mandatory advisement, drawing on the experience and knowledge of all full-time faculty, would have very beneficial effects for students, possibly even including a further improvement in graduation rates.

### *Internships*

For any university located in Southern California that offers a program in cinema or television, internships need to be right at the top of the list of priorities. Many students studying these subjects are looking to make careers for themselves as professionals in these fields. And in Southern California...they are in the right place.

The proximity of the industry in "Hollywood" and the surrounding areas makes possible all sorts of connections for students in the CTV department, and the department has rightfully emphasized them in its self-study. That document (Section V.B., pp 19,20) highlights various opportunities for student interaction with the industry ranging from guest lecturers to mentorships to TV Academy archive access. Internships are the central element of this discussion, and the department is rightfully proud of what it has to offer. Indeed, the external review conducted in 2009 praised the "extremely effective internship program." (Appendix IX, p.46)

As the program is now structured, all CTV majors must complete at least one internship during their junior or senior years. The internship counts as a core course in the program, CTV 495. The concern that we had with the internship program sprang from our meeting with the faculty itself. It was confirmed that all majors did an internship, and that a faculty member had to sign off on an internship before the student could begin. But otherwise, the CTV faculty seemed completely disconnected from this program, which is run by an administrator at the college, not by someone who is a part of the department.

Based on the college's website, there is some oversight of the internships. This includes a step-by-step plan for completing pre-requisites for the internship, for applying, and even for providing feedback. Students must also complete a "Titanium Curriculum," which includes providing timesheets proving the internship has been completed, as well as writing reports on how the internship has gone. But apparently none of this is shared with the CTV department and its faculty.

Our suggestion is that the internships should be more fully integrated into the department. At the very least there should be some faculty oversight of the progress of the internship. And the faculty should be taking advantage of the industry contacts who are offering the internships. In some cases, students may have found their internships themselves; such instances would provide chances for the department to build stronger and more extensive relationships with industry partners.

It might even be possible to set up the internships as a class within the department, with sporadic meetings, and summaries of the experience that are available to all professors. These in turn could be taken into account when future students are arranging for their internships.

### *CTVA Website*

Review and updating the current CTVA website was a recurring theme during conversations with faculty, administration and students. Given that the site is a major window into the CTVA Program and a promotion and information tool there is a strong imperative to redesign the look and utility.

While the current configuration of the website is comprehensive, i.e. course catalogue, campus life, and easy enough to navigate, the design and some content could be upgraded to better reflect the modernity of the overall program and how the school provides practical training for a career in entertainment media.

A physical and content redesign would also be a practical short-term goal to both upgrade the site and keep alums, students and future students informed as more long range changes, i.e. facilities, curriculum, begin to move forward.

### *Design*

The current main page design is functional at a minimum, but rather sterile. It does not give a strong first impression of what the overall CTVA Program has to offer for prospective students. An upgrade in the main page design could add content that includes evolving photo stills and more visuals of students in the midst of Production, Post Production, classroom work and photo references to both traditional and new media subject matter.

In addition the page, as it currently exists, has no statement, mission or otherwise, of the long term curricular intent of the program. In comparing the main page to other sites throughout CSUF and other Universities with comparable Cinema programs, we found a short statement that outlines the philosophy and modernity of the program. With the proliferation of Cinema and Entertainment Media schools around the country, it would help to immediately express the uniqueness and goals of the CSUF CTVA program.

There is the Virtual Tour of the Production Facilities available on the main page, and while it lays out availability of practical learning and “testimony from students” it feels a bit by the numbers. By adding a small sampling of students (and instructors) talking about individual projects and possibly short excerpts of their work, the virtual tour would give more of a contemporary view of how facility translates to process and product. This could also be accomplished by adding a student-generated tour when a site visitor chooses to explore “Facilities and Labs”.

While there is a comprehensive listing of all CTVA Faculty their CV's and professional accomplishments, a visitor to the web-site has to find that information by clicking "Prospective Students" on the Home Page info bar. We believe that for several reasons including ease of access, importance of Faculty to the program, and Faculty morale it would help to move CTVA Faculty to a more prominent place on the Home Page to make it a major destination.

As a website visitor chooses individual discipline sub-sites, CTVA Living and Learning Community, there are photos that give a general sense of what opportunities are available, but, once again to stress the uniqueness of the CTVA program, it might serve to create a short video shot amid campus and CTVA life, featuring students and faculty, that gives more specifics of the closeness and interactivity of the program.

In the current Industry marketplace, where content is being created for numerous media platforms at an accelerated pace, it would seem to be a boon to the Program to better advertise its Industry awareness and teaching flexibility in a fast growing and changing market. That is an aspect that also feels underdeveloped in the current design.

### *Alumni Outreach*

A key element that is missing in the Website Video Tour of the CNTV Program are interviews with CNTV alums, particularly recent alums who are working and progressing throughout the industry in all platforms. The current Website blurbs with enrolled students extolling the learning and internship opportunities are welcoming and affecting. However, both prospective students and their parents would also be served and better informed about the practical value of the CTVA program by hearing from working CSUF graduates who can echo the praises of current student advocates and thumbnail their own valuable experience.

In addition there could also be a popup listing of notable alumni of the program, their date of graduation and their Industry credits. The CTVA faculty effort, led by Professor Jenkins, has worked hard to compile a dedicated list of alums that could make up the core of this online list. It could also add a vital networking aspect that informs students of where there might be opportunities to interact with Industry Alums. Per the Self Study, pg. 16, "as mentioned in section I.C., one of the department's priorities is to initiate a Departmental alumni tracking program." Addressing that priority through the website would be an effective first step in initiating this vital outreach.

### *The Opportunity of Digital Media*

The emergence of the Digital Media marketplace as evidenced by the success of You Tube, Facebook, Funny or Die, New Forms Digital, just to name a varied sample of online providers, has clearly changed the traditional practice and economic matrix of production and distribution. The ability to producing content at minimal cost and distribute virally, virtually for free, has created an outlet for writers and filmmakers to have their work connect with a larger marketplace always on the look for new talent.



The awareness of these opportunities is clearly stated in the Program Performance Review, Sec. B, *Media Convergence*, pg. 4. As stated, Screenwriting faculty have already begun to “emphasize” the practicum of creating webisodes in CTVA 250, Writing Short Scripts. While this is a strong first step in creating an initiative for students to study, practice and distribute digital media, there are many reasons for the CTVA program to create more curriculum in New Media.

#### Practice

While Digital Media implies a shorter, faster paced, lower cost, verite product, there remains the imperative of writing, directing and producing well-made content. The CTVA program is already well suited towards providing its students, through core courses like CTVA 300, The Language of Film, CTVA 250, Writing Short Scripts, not to mention other courses in cinema craft itself, a base in creating professional level product even if need be on their personal digital devices. The curriculum contribution cannot be overstated and yet the growing ubiquity of the digital marketplace seems to require more knowledge in how to write, produce, effectively distribute and market a web-series. That goal could be facilitated by creating a separate CTVA course dedicated solely to creating web content. Its objective would be the best practice of creating and producing a completed web-series pilot episode, or, depending on time and class size, a “sizzle reel” which excerpts the subject and general theme of the prospective web series. Along the way the course could highlight the business model of digital production, an overview of the current marketplace itself and visits by notables in New Media to supplement and perhaps critique class work in progress. A course that could cover a lot of creative and practical ground.

#### *Student Opportunity*

In addition to learning a vital new form, Digital Media product provides students a very viable, practical option for their creative portfolio as they begin to move out into the Industry. Traditionally a “film school” graduate had a limited creative portfolio and little or no way to employ their product to access work in the Industry. Prospective Screen and TV writers had, and indeed still have, a time and money advantage since they can turn out a portfolio with only the investment of time. A young filmmaker’s creative turnout was more limited by time and funds. Digital has of course completely changed the game. It allows a filmmaker to create more product quicker and with a far better presentation quality. There is also more time spent in actual production and on varied subject matter. We believe its benefits are numerable.

Perhaps most importantly, Digital media allows a student filmmaker an opportunity to exhibit their work virally. The obvious next step for any CTVA graduate is getting their portfolio out into the marketplace, i.e, the search for agency representation or at the least an advocate who could disseminate their work on a larger scale. Once again, traditionally that was a process that could take years of networking and word of mouth. To be able to exhibit work virally, to know where to submit and link, how to thumbnail subject matter at the minimum, gives students and graduates a more useful, certainly faster way for eyes to be on their work. Major media companies dedicate resources just to assess the Digital world looking for content and talent. In the short and long term adding a comprehensive Digital content class (e.g. Webisodes) and more Media Convergence curriculum throughout the CTVA Program would provide a very valuable outcome for all students.