

## Dean's Summary and Recommendations

Program Performance Review  
Department of Cinema and Television Arts  
California State University, Fullerton  
February 10, 2025

The Department of Cinema and Television Arts (CTVA) at California State University, Fullerton, conducted a Program Performance Review (PPR) in AY 2023-2024.<sup>1</sup> The department offers a B.A. in Cinema and Television Arts and an M.F.A. in Screenwriting. This memo provides a “Dean’s Summary and Recommendations” based on the department self-study, the external PPR committee report, and the chair’s response to the external review. Through a comprehensive curriculum, the department has successfully positioned itself as a leader in cinema and television education. This memo evaluates the department’s progress in key areas, highlights accomplishments, identifies challenges, and provides recommendations for areas of growth over the next five years.

### Program Strengths

**Clear mission.** The CTVA Department’s mission is to provide a “comprehensive curriculum and active learning environment [that] prepare[s] students for meaningful careers in film and television.” This mission is reflected in the department’s twin curricular foci: the creation and study of narrative, documentary, and experimental cinema, television, and other digital media. The CTVA department’s mission aligns with CSUF’s broader commitment to fostering critical inquiry, creative expression, and social responsibility.

**Comprehensive curriculum.** The program effectively balances theory and practice across production, critical studies, screenwriting, and media business, preparing students for careers in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

**Required internships.** All CTVA majors are required to complete at least one 150-hour internship during their junior or senior year. CSUF’s proximity to the Los Angeles media center provides students access to major studios, production companies, networks, casting agencies, talent agencies, post-production houses, and commercial agencies, or individual film and television productions. Regular internship sites include Disney/ABC, Paramount, NBC/Universal, Warner Bros. Discovery, Sony Pictures Television, Creative Artists Agency, ESPN, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, the Academy of Motion

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<sup>1</sup> The self-study was completed on April 22, 2024 and the external site team visited on May 2, 2024. Both of these occurred prior to my appointment as Interim Dean of the College of Communications on June 1, 2024.

Picture Arts and Sciences, Bunim-Murray Productions, and Image Movers (Robert Zemeckis), among others. The program is coordinated by veteran full-time lecturer Shelly Murray.

**Faculty committed to professional and scholarly success.** Faculty accomplishments during this review period highlight a productive and engaged faculty committed to both their professional and scholarly contributions. Notable achievements include: Dr. Anthony Sparks receiving the Television Academy Honors Award for his work as a showrunner, executive producer, and head writer on the fourth season of “Queen Sugar;” Dr. Hunter Hargraves publishing *Uncomfortable Television* through Duke University Press; and Mun Chee Yong producing two short films, including “4 Sundays in September,” which was nominated for Best Live Action Short Film at the 61st Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan.

**Commitment to diversity and representation.** The curriculum and faculty hires reflect a strong emphasis on diverse voices and perspectives, which is particularly beneficial given CSUF’s diverse student body. Course offerings such as Queer Film and Television, Border Cinema, and Race in Film Theory ensure that students engage in critical discussions on representation. Faculty members actively incorporate inclusive teaching practices, integrating diverse perspectives in both historical analysis and contemporary media studies. Additionally, partnerships such as with the Latino Communications Initiative provide students with opportunities to connect with underrepresented communities and industry leaders, further enhancing their understanding of media diversity.

**Steady undergraduate student enrollment.** CTVA continues to attract a steady stream of undergraduate students, demonstrating demand for its programs. Enrollment figures have remained steady, with both first-time freshmen and transfer students choosing CTVA as their academic path. The self-study reports that applications for admission from freshmen averaged 584 annually between 2017 and 2022, fluctuating from a high of 660 in 2018 to a low of 480 in 2021. Applications for upper-division transfer students averaged 380 annually, with a peak of 472 in 2020 and a low of 347 in 2021. The number of declared CTVA majors has fluctuated, decreasing from 642 in 2016-2017 to 536 in 2022-2023, but rebounding to 574 in Fall 2024.

**Strong retention and graduation rates.** CTVA students graduate at rates that exceed university-wide averages, reflecting the department’s commitment to student success. The self-study reports that 46% of first-time freshmen graduate within four years, and 71% within six years. Transfer students also perform well, with 49% completing their degrees within two years and 83% within four years.

**Location and proximity to Hollywood.** As noted in the self-study, “CSUF is uniquely positioned to contribute to positive change in one of Southern California’s biggest industries.” The university’s proximity to Hollywood provides students with unparalleled networking opportunities while also enabling the entertainment industry to access a diverse talent pipeline.

## **Recommendations / Areas for Growth**

**Curricular currency.** The department is encouraged to continually assess the relevance of its curriculum. While the self-study indicates that “no major curricular changes are in the works,” faculty have expressed interest in adding courses on interactive media (including videogames), global popular culture, AI and cinema, and ecology and cinema. The MFA program is also considering advanced courses in narrative design for videogames and interactive media. Additionally, faculty-led student assessment should be a foundational aspect of curricular reflection, ensuring that the curriculum remains current and responsive to industry needs.

**Assigning students to faculty advisors.** The department may wish to consider the site team’s suggestion that the department consider assigning incoming students to a full-time faculty member for curricular and career advising, to supplement the advising opportunities provided by professional advisors in the College of Communications Student Success Center.

**Prioritization of production curriculum and faculty.** The department identifies the revitalizing the department’s production sequence as the faculty’s highest priority. They note this requires funding for equipment, facilities, projects and faculty. The self-study notes the department’s full-time production faculty have gone from a high of six in the mid-2010s to one at the start of the 2024-2025 academic year. This highlights a need for strategic planning for curriculum and staffing. A search currently in progress for a production-based faculty member will help address this deficit. I agree the chair and dean should prioritize production-based faculty for any future hiring lines that become available for the department and work to identify and support a lecturer pool that provides production expertise and consistency in the meantime.

**Navigating university policies and procedures.** The self-study raises concerns about “administrative bloat,” a “corporate mentality” and challenges related to university processes. The study-study alleges that “newly established administrative offices seem to justify their existence by requiring faculty complete a multitude of ‘trainings.’” Examples of “additional work required of faculty members” cited include learning new systems for travel reimbursement and reporting of absences. While administrative requirements are an inherent part of operating within the largest public state university system in the country, it is essential for the department to proactively adapt to procedural changes and work collaboratively with others to ensure student success.

**Internal financial controls.** The self-study refers to difficulties arising from the suspension of two production faculty, an issue that undergirds much of the report. Prior to this PPR cycle, two separate investigations into the department by the university’s auditor and whistleblower investigator found substantiated allegations of misuse of university funds and conflicts of interest. An Internal Controls Review by the university auditor led to a 17-point Corrective Action Plan, requiring the department and college to institute changes in internal procedures and oversight. The department must continue implementing corrective measures to ensure compliance with university policies and fiscal procedures.

**Publicity and alumni engagement.** The department’s self-study recognizes the need to increase visibility and engagement with alumni, many of whom have found success in Hollywood. This year, the college advocated for a Communications, Marketing, and Events Specialist, who would significantly enhance alumni outreach and public relations efforts. I look forward to continued advocacy for this additional support. Finding ways to tell our story effectively and engage with our alumni are laudatory priorities that will pay important dividends in the future.


**Workload, resources, and facilities needs.** Faculty workload concerns remain ongoing, with a 4/4 teaching load limiting time for research and creative projects. These remain a university and indeed systemwide priority for faculty. While incremental improvements have been made to facilities, the department has identified needs including a dedicated production studio, a screening room, better classrooms and more equipment. Given current CSU budget constraints,<sup>2</sup> a new building is unlikely in the near term, but smaller-scale facility upgrades should remain a priority.

**Screenwriting M.A.** The two-year, cohort-model, 42-unit graduate program is designed to prepare a select number of talented writers for careers in the film, TV and other narrative-based industries. While the self-study reports that “admissions and enrollment numbers have remained steady,” data reported show that headcount has decreased from 63 in 2016-2017 to 40 in 2022-2023; new admits dropped from a high of 17 in 2015 to 10 in 2021; and total degrees awarded dropped from 30 in 2016-2017 to 19 in 2022-2023. The decrease in cohort size and the corresponding decline in class sizes will create additional financial burdens for the department’s budget. The department is encouraged to prioritize program growth or review curriculum to reduce course offerings.

## Conclusion

The Department of Cinema and Television Arts continues to provide academic and professional preparation for students in an evolving media landscape. I thank the department chair for leading this self-study and the external review team for their time in visiting and reflecting on their observations. I commend the department for its continued efforts to support our students’ success and I look forward to working together to support our collective goals and priorities in the future.

Submitted by:



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<sup>2</sup> “This is the biggest crisis that I’ve experienced since I’ve been on the board,” CSU Trustee Douglas Faigan said of pending budget cuts, in “CSU, reeling from budget cuts to classes and faculty, decries more proposed state reduction,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 2025, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-01-30/csu-leaders-decry-deep-proposed-budget-cuts#:~:text=Cal%20State%20University%20leaders%20say,Mildred%20García%20told%20the%20board>.