

**Department of Cinema and Television Arts
(CTVA) California State University, Fullerton
2024**

**Program Performance Review
Bachelor of Arts degree, Cinema and
Television Arts
Master of Fine Arts degree, Screenwriting**

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Section 1: CTVA Self Study

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External Review: Department of Cinema and Television Arts California State University, Fullerton July 1, 2024

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Introduction and Overview

We would like to thank the Department of Cinema and Television Arts faculty and staff for inviting us to provide an external review of their department and for hosting our onsite visit on May 2, 2024. It was an informative and enlightening experience meeting with CTVA Chair, Garry Hart, followed by a tour of the Department's teaching facilities, a lunch with members of the full-time faculty and a sit down with several graduating students for a discussion covering the range of their academic experience and their critique of the CTVA program and hopes for its future.

The CTVA Department very clearly houses a faculty, administration and staff that is dedicated to providing a learning environment and instructional flexibility that allows its student body to explore and experience the best artistic practices and range of career opportunities in the screen industry. There is also a strong ethic within the faculty to not overlook or skimp on the foundational standards and conventions of visual storytelling. We were pleased to note that the faculty also bring diversity to their teaching along with wide industry experience and artistic currency, which is vital in a rapidly evolving trade. The students we met as representatives were enthusiastic, engaged in their final projects and most willing to share their successes as well as critiques which were pointed more at issues of facility access and curriculum continuity than any dissatisfaction with their overall experience.

We were also appreciative of receiving the most recent inhouse program review (2024) that provided significant detail of the successful efforts to improve the teaching mission, as well as underscoring the areas still requiring attention to contemporize and outfit the program moving forward. Our visit and review will reinforce the successes as well as point to the needed resources and curricular advancements that the Department has covered in its review. We will also suggest a foundational change that we believe might allow the Department of Cinema and Television Arts to be more autonomous and effective in its teaching mission.

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

Those include:

- **Facilities**
- **Curriculum**
- **Faculty**
- **Student Assessment and Advisement**
- **Strategic Departmental Organization and Location**

Facilities

Facilities were a major focus of the external 2016 program review. It appears that little has changed in the 8 years since that evaluation. The department – its students and staff – remain underserved by woefully inadequate space and equipment with which to make themselves competitive in today’s content creation marketplace. CTVA shares space and resources with Journalism and Communications in the basement of the library and, despite significant student demand for hands-on production courses and the requisite needs of space and equipment that those courses require, CTVA is neglected and left with the spoils. Examples of this situation include:

Studio Space

One of the most important production techniques being taught at film schools throughout Southern California and the US (including at other CSU campuses) is “Virtual Production.” Filmmakers use a state-of-the-art LED wall and worldbuilding software like Unreal Engine to create virtual sets, a technique first explored by the sci-fi tv series *The Mandalorian*. While cinema and television students on other campuses are learning this technique and equipment (CSUN, USC, Chapman, ASU, etc), the LED wall at CSUF is in the College’s communications studio being used as a news backdrop, in a space that is inadequate for the production of narrative stories. With a very small space and pillars impeding movement, it would be near impossible to teach and execute proper use of the LED wall for scripted fiction storytelling in this space.

Other studio spaces in the library basement are equally inadequate. The ceilings are too low for proper sets and lighting, the spaces too small for sets and camera movement, and the equipment in those spaces is woefully out of date. These spaces appear to be inadequately retrofitted from some other intended use.

Equipment Room

The equipment room, though reasonably well organized, is tiny and shared with the Communications department. There is no space for students to properly learn how to check out and return equipment, a necessary skill for entry-level film and television production roles. In addition, there is virtually no space for those working in the room to inspect and organize equipment as it leaves and enters the room. Production courses are equipment-intensive and if CSUF is to make a commitment to CTVA learning objectives, it must invest in the space and updated gear to give students 21st century skills.

Access to Facilities

From both faculty and students, we heard that access to production and post-production facilities in the library basement was nearly impossible outside of regular business hours. And yet, this is when the focused ‘lab time’ is necessary. Media creation is a very time-intensive discipline, with long hours and collaborative activity required to achieve a modicum of professional output.

The basement of the library is by all measures inadequate for a serious cinema and television arts production program. This leads back to the discussion of CTVA being misplaced in the College of Communications. “Arts” is baked into the department’s name. The issue has been raised for years and it is time that territory and politics be set aside and the challenge of having CTVA in a proper home be addressed, so the department can deliver on its potential and take advantage of the strong and dedicated faculty and the highly motivated students.

A Proper Projection Space / Screening Room

As stated in the comprehensive self-review, CTVA's... *"mission is reflected in the department's twin curricular foci: the creation of and the study of narrative, documentary, and experimental cinema, television, and other digital media. Much like science classrooms need up to date computer and lab equipment, it is impossible to prepare students for either the creation or study of digital media without proper equipment."*

In terms of film study, CTVA has no proper screening spaces to see and experience films the way they were intended. To coincide with the current trend of individualized viewing on personal devices it is important that we build community by creating gathering spaces to build our communication and critical thinking skills. A dedicated cinema/theater screening space could become a focal point for CTVA and the campus at large, inviting the community in to counteract our social isolation and the deterioration of interpersonal communication.

Curriculum

The curriculum in the Cinema and Television Arts department, helmed by its capable faculty and staff, is robust and rigorous but not without challenges at the departmental and college level. According to the CSUF catalog, the department has as its central mission creating "a comprehensive curriculum and active learning environment [that] prepare[s] students for meaningful careers in film and television." We have identified two important aspects that advance the curricular mission:

Closing Curriculum Gaps

Situated within the College of Communications along with Communication Sciences and Disorders, Human Communication Studies, and Communication Studies, the focus of the Cinema and Television Arts department pedagogy is oriented towards the study of the art and craft of the cinematic arts. The University Catalog describes the focus of the CTVA BA curriculum as "courses in critical studies, management, production, and writing that examines many aspects of film and television." The CTVA Screenwriting MFA is described in the catalog as an "intensive, two-year program focusing on writing for film, television, and other narrative media." As such, the curriculum offered demonstrates an important commitment to the critical study and history of the cinematic arts, as well as the production, management, and business of film and media creation. This speaks to the department's important goal of encouraging the growth of students' knowledge and skills "through intellectual inquiry and creative projects encouraging them to become critical and ethical media content creators and consumers." This committee finds that the CTVA curricular goals and mission align well with those of similar cinema and television schools. In addition, we find that changes to some introductory production courses like CTVA 300 and 425 could assist in the implementation of departmental and college goals. Moreover, relocation of the Cinema and Television Arts department to a college with similar curricular goals (for example a college of the arts) may be the most effective change for the curriculum and student outcomes.

The committee noted a great student interest in working on productions, for which many had to wait until they could take CTVA 300 - Language of Film, which is the introductory and prerequisite production class. The inclusion of a lower-division intro to production class would help to close that curricular gap. It would also serve to level the playing field in terms of student experience and levels of preparedness for the rigors of production. A "ramp-up" class at the 100 or 200 level would serve to bring students into CTVA 325 at similar levels of experience and bring eager first and second-year students into production earlier, where they could gain experience and possibly crew on upper-division projects. A lower-division class like this could also serve to cover production safety, best practices, and ethics in production, thus further emphasizing the departmental commitments to these goals.

The 2016 program evaluation had a similar recommendation:

“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 that CTVA 300 be reconsidered as a 100 or 200-level course. Completion of this class at the lower division and the opportunity for articulation with Community College programs will help to get the students making films sooner.”

The addition of more curriculum in the foundational classes in Game creation and creating study in new technology like AI and Virtual Production would also help to keep the material current and relevant as well as expand the application of the foundational production and screenwriting curriculum.

Re-evaluating the Capstone Production Experience

As articulated in the 2024 self-study, the loss of the CTVA feature film project in the recent academic cycle due to funding and college-level commitments in other directions is a major loss for the talented students that we met in our tour of the department. The inability of the college to allocate IRA and Golden Globe Foundation monies to their promised objectives is lamentable. It is imperative that the University solve these problems so that students can again take advantage of this unique high-impact offering.

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 CTVA department demonstrates to providing the most effective and up-to-date education possible.

Faculty

Our luncheon visit with CTVA faculty representatives was an enlightening dialogue that ran along two main themes. First, that the commitment from faculty to provide students a solid foundation in the screen arts is as strong as ever, and secondly, that improving and expanding the relevance and modernity of the program remains the greatest challenge to their teaching mission.

The faculty representatives were eager to point out the various entertainment industry and scholarly accomplishments of their CTVA colleagues as well as the professional currency that so many of them bring to the large array of courses. In terms of relevancy, there was real gratification that the demographic makeup of the full-time faculty has continued to evolve. The most tangible evidence of advancement along those lines has been the recent tenure track hires noted in the 2024 Performance Review. Professor Anthony Sparks, a multi-award-winning writer/producer and showrunner of the Oprah Winfrey series *Queen Sugar*. Professor Hunter Hargraves, a noted scholar of Pop Culture content dealing with questions of race and sexuality. Professor Mun Chee Yung, an international documentary and TV producer and director and Professor Nils Longueira Borrego, scholar of Latin American Cinema. We agree that these are groundbreaking as well as timely hires that reflect the substantial diversity makeup of the CTVA student body. The CTVA Faculty, its Tenure Track Hiring Committee, The College of Communications and the University should be commended for their success in adding depth to the Full-time teaching cohort and continuing to elevate the program in lieu of recent and upcoming retirements of long-time faculty.

While the faculty representatives were in full agreement that a heavy course teaching load is an ongoing challenge to fully effective course management, they were most proud of ongoing course creation that has reflected both the growth of varied screen platforms (e.g., CTVA Video Games and Storytelling) and the diversity of narrative content (e.g., CTVA 369 Border Cinema). In general, they felt that the administrative leadership of the Department was doing all they could to keep the program moving forward in spite of the aforementioned teaching challenges that have thus far been hard to tackle, yet alone, overcome.

The faculty representatives spoke specifically of concern that with full time faculty teaching 4 and 4 course loads, a number of core courses still need to be manned by adjuncts, some of whom have not had the classroom or institutional experience in the University system. Even with the recent tenure track hires, the

Full-time faculty number is still below an acceptable level of instructors to cover core classes as well as departmental service.

The teaching issue which engendered the most frustration was the limited access to and use of production and post-production facilities. Since most of prospective students are drawn to the CTVA program to study various aspects of film and TV production, it seems counter-productive that the physical facilities have seen little improvement. Moreover, student access to IT editing bays, the sound mixing, and color correction rooms and the new LED screen facility are very limited by shorter operational hours. As stressed in other areas of this review, collaboration is a vital instructional aspect of production. Therefore, the small window that students have to interact and work together on their projects does not balance with the practical information and guidance they experience in the classroom.

Student Assessment and Advisement

The afternoon of our visit focused on Student Assessment. We were able to meet with five CTVA students who were about to graduate. We found them all to be very forthcoming about their experiences as CTVA Majors (one a dual major) and all were complimentary of the effectiveness of the faculty and curriculum in preparing them for their future in the screen industry. They expressed similar frustrations as faculty about the quality and narrow access of production which was a recurring theme.

The major issue that all our student interviewees seemed in experiential agreement on was the need for more consistency and depth in student advisement within the CTVA program. There was a consensus that while Faculty advisement from within was CTVA was more helpful and relevant than the top-down general advisement provided by the College of Communications itself, it still was not always readily available or consistent in terms of decision making and what courses to take based on prior instructional experience, i.e. pre-requisites.

Referencing the 2024 Internal Program Performance, it appears that the direct CTVA faculty to student advisement process, begun in 2017 and supervised by CTVA Professor Gloria Monti had a profoundly positive outcome, demonstrated in the uptick of the student graduation rate. In taking on the job required, Professor Monti was given an annual one course reduction. More recently that course relief was rescinded, leaving Professor Monti less available for direct meetings. This has resulted in recent CTVA student cohorts having to rely more on the College of Communications Student Center for advisement. Naturally those meetings would be more general and less helpful to students who are looking for guidance on the sequence of classes as it relates to satisfying the degree, along with which instructors and classes might best fit their area of interest. We believe that the CTVA administration consider returning to Professor Monti's earlier arrangement of receiving course relief for supervising student advisement. Given the quantitative data that accompanied that arrangement and the need for more guidance from the graduation students we interviewed, there is a definite need for more informed advisement and navigation through the program.

In the event that Professor Monti returning to the previous advisement engagement is impractical, we believe that the administration should continue to rely on full-time Faculty to supplement the general advisement process, perhaps curating a process that assigns incoming students a full-time instructor as a CTVA advisement mentor for their time in the program.

Strategic Departmental Organization & Location

Our onsite review and subsequent discussion of our findings in all the academic categories listed above lead us to an overall conclusion that would bring a profound change in the status quo of the administration of the CTVA Department but would best serve the future health and function of its academic program.

Given the gravity of our proposal we will lay out the argument from both a foundational and practical perspective.

Foundational

Historically, within academia, Cinema Departments come about in three basic ways:

- 1 – From within a College of Communications: Where cinema is a natural extension of storytelling inherent within journalism and can share the same sound, lighting, and camera equipment and studio facilities
- 2 – From within a College of Humanities: Where critical studies in cinema theory can be put into practice. These programs are universally starved of the necessary equipment and production space.
- 3 – From within a College of Arts: Where photo/video/animation facility already exist, and bringing in longer form storytelling and the rigor of cinematic technique can naturally fit into the program.

It is imperative to understand the roots of any cinematic department, for this lineage directly affects their growth, orientation, and potential. Initial support might make sense for the college's upper administration, but it can drift as the department goals move beyond the parent college's academic focus. This drift can cause a "grinding of gears" due to divergent academic interests and a lack of understanding or appreciation for specific scholarship, thus resulting in resource non-allocation. Conversely, the goals of both the college and department can align and create a mutually beneficial synergy of curricula and resource use, resulting in a growth of student enrollment and success.

CSUF created the program of Cinema and Television Arts (originally Radio-TV-Film) within the Communication Department, housed in the College of Communications. Its creation naturally expanded the department's journalism, television, and radio academic programs. Journalism has a storytelling component, leading to more feature-length documentary work, which in turn leads to cinematic-length storytelling. Using the same equipment from television journalism aligns with the exact needs of cinema. As this program grew, so did the enrollment and the need for more faculty/resources; it was a clear next step for it to become a department at the doorstep of Hollywood, which quite naturally created a need to match the peer cinema institutions (CSULA, CSULB, CSUN) on a competitive level.

By definition, students expect to learn how to make movies, and to support this, the college must make difficult choices for funding these expensive classes. However, because of the college's orientation to non-cinematic but mass media goals, these choices can be incongruent with what the college is tasked to do. Simply put, the College of Communication focuses not on art but on communication. Even its closest sibling department, the Department of Communication, contains wildly different programs than cinema, i.e., Tourism and Entertainment, Mass Communication Research and Theory, and Public Relations. Moving further afield within the school, one find studies in the communication sciences, such as a Bachelor of Science in Communication Disorders. This large range of academic programs, in turn, can cause a gap in priorities (and a simple lack of understanding of the cinematic medium). The choices a College of Communications Dean must make in these circumstances are more complex, cross-prioritized, and fraught with impossible decisions.

We want to note that neither the College of Communication nor the Department of Cinema and Television Arts is wrong in their inclination to support one curricular interest over another. It is the framework that is flawed – the needs of cinema do not fit neatly into the larger criteria of an expansive communications curriculum do not match at this level – it is a round peg in a square hole. With a diverse and passionate faculty, CTVA wants to support its students with an education that is on par with or better than their peer institutions. They have done this with the program in screenwriting, offering world-class BA and MFA programs that do not require expensive equipment and gear. However, because of the expense of the classes focusing on production, it's evident to the review team that the department needs support from the college to match the rigor established at other CSU schools properly.

Practicum

The simple answer to this issue is that CSUF's CTVA Department belongs within the Arts.

There are a number of more specific reasons for this premise.

Within the School of Arts classes are broken up into art "studios" and then art history classes. Studios allow students to learn the methods of a particular art form and focus on practice and critique. In contrast, art history covers the theory and history behind these modes of production. This natural orientation to practice and theory is core to being an artist today and aligns with what the CTVA program wishes to achieve in creating young filmmakers. They want their students to be able to write screenplays and make them a reality. This language of studio practice, deeply embedded in the arts, would alleviate one of the core misunderstandings between the admin and the department, as it is already a natural mode of education within the arts.

This synergy would improve the quality of education and rigor for not only CTVA but also for the arts as well. Screenwriting, for example, would dramatically expand the possibilities of writing for art students (which is currently lacking in the art curriculum – particularly animation). Cinema students could study storyboarding from industry storyboard artists and collaborate with illustration students on their film projects. Photo/video art students could expand their inclination to traditional cinema while cinema students could explore experimental practices and classic lineage technology such as darkroom photo development. Music students could score film productions. Acting students could act in the films. This natural academic compatibility is a "no-brainer" win for the university: it begins to solve current issues for CTVA students, expands the possibilities of current art students, and aligns the department with the academic norm for the program level it is trying to achieve.

As demonstrated throughout this review, the most significant stressor for any film program is access to equipment, facilities, and production funds – congruently, the most significant stressor for any animation, photo, and video program is the same. Outside of increasing funding directly from the university, which is universally tricky, finding ways to work together to pool and share resources is the best way to begin to solve this issue. There is no doubt that shared resources are a core sticking point regarding creating a collaboration between art and film; no one wants to give up its resources. However, if made, this mutually beneficial collaboration would be a win for cinema and art. Students within the College of Art could finally work together at a deep level, the curriculum would flow/mix, and as this happens, the negative stress and impact would resolve themselves. Moving a department is one of a university's most challenging choices.

Looking at the horizon of art and cinematic education, with problematic issues around the Hollywood Foreign Press Association/Golden Globe Foundation, traditional funding lines may dry up, and thus, thinking through new strategies that link art and cinema might be a better way to explore. Interdisciplinary practice, which fosters a collaborative approach, is a model that philanthropy outlets like to see. For a more social media, streaming, and augmented future, the programs and departments in both art and cinema, which are working together rather than apart, are clearly on the right path. These collaborative, interwoven programs, aware of the lack of boundaries outside the silos of academia, will be the ones that will attract these funds. We suggest that CSUF gets out in front of this sea change.

In conclusion, the relocation of CTVA to the College of the Arts would realign the department with a parent college that shares its core artistic goals, naturally collaborate and better share existing resources with sibling programs, integrate with curricula throughout the college, and ultimately be more competitive with peer institutions. All other CSU institutions with similar level programs, such as CSULA, CSUN, and CSULB, house their cinema departments within a college of art (note CSUN is both art and comm. but has an art department within it). Some schools will create a new school of cinema, but this is not as common (Chapman, UCLA, or USC) nor practical in the current environment. Needless to say, no cinema department of any repute is housed within a college of communications. Thus, until CTVA is in its proper place in the arts, it will never be able to fully support its students' academic needs.

We recommend the university form a committee of faculty and administration from both colleges to explore this possible move of CTVA to the Arts.