UCC Program Review Committee summary of review

Program – Film

This program includes the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- M.F.A. Film
- M.A. Film Studies
- B.A. Film, Honors Tutorial College
- Film minor

Recommendation

This program is found to be viable, see the report that follows for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

Date of last review – AY 2008

Date of this review – AY 2017

This review has been sent to program director and the dean. Their corrections have been included in the report. A letter commenting on the review from the dean is attached.

This review has been sent to the Graduate Council for their comments. They had “No additional comments on this excellent review.”
Ohio University Curriculum Committee
External/Internal Academic Program Review

Film Division
School of Dance, Film, and Theater
MFA and MA Graduate Programs
College of Fine Arts
Ohio University

Professor Melinda Levin, External Reviewer, Department of Media Arts, University of North Texas
Dr. Lauren McMills, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Dr. Herta Rodina, Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages
Dr. Robert L. Williams II, Professor, Mechanical Engineering Department

February 8, 2017

Executive Summary
VIABLE
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Introduction & Process Overview

The Film Division in the School of Dance, Film, and Theater in the College of Fine Arts at Ohio University underwent an external/internal academic program review in January 2017. The Academic Program Review Committee was comprised of Professor Melinda Levin, External Reviewer, Department of Media Arts (focusing on Documentary Production, International, Environmental, Multi-platform Production, Interdisciplinary, Ethnography, and Cultural Analysis), University of North Texas, and three internal reviewers, Dr. Lauren McMills (Chemistry and Biochemistry), Dr. Herta Rodina (Modern Languages), and Dr. Robert L. Williams II (Mechanical Engineering).

Over the course of two days (January 30 and 31, 2017), the team met privately and independently with Associate Provost Howard Dewald; Interim Dean of the College of Fine Arts Elizabeth Sayrs; Film Division Director Steven Ross, Eminent Scholar Rajko Grlic, tenured Group I faculty, untenured Group I faculty, Group II faculty, Group IV faculty, staff, MFA and MA graduate students, and BFA HTC undergraduate students. The team also toured the Film Division studios and labs in the Central Classroom and in the basement of 31 S. Court Street (the old Woolworth’s building).

Ohio University’s Film Division is a viable program as evidenced by a dedicated faculty, a clearly collaborative and collegial environment, engaged and strongly motivated students who are well-prepared for jobs in both the film industry and academia, and further graduate study (Ph.D. in the case of some MA candidates).

This report is divided into seven sections, directly organized as requested by the Ohio University Academic Program Review effort.
1. The Program as a Whole

a. Is the current number and distribution of faculty sufficient to carry out the broad overall mission of the Department?

The Film Division currently has 6 Group I faculty, 2 Group II faculty, 2 Group IV faculty and an Eminent Scholar. The division is composed of two programs: Film Studies and Filmmaking. The Film Studies program has 2 Group I faculty and 1 Group IV faculty. Two faculty members have split positions with other departments. The Filmmaking program has 4 Group I faculty, 2 Group II faculty, 1 Group IV faculty. One Group II has a half time administrative appointment.

Over the past several years, 2 Group I positions have been changed over to Group IV positions and one person with administrative status has taught in the Filmmaking program. Converting the Group IV positions back to Group I as well as converting the administrative position to a Group II position would improve stability in terms of teaching within the division which, in turn, would improve recruitment.

b. Is the level of the Department’s RSCA appropriate for the program given the size of the faculty and the resources available to the Department? Is the Department’s level of external funding at an appropriate level?

All faculty within the Division are actively engaged and productive in research and scholarship. Their ability to integrate their specific scholarly interests with their teaching gives students access to current developments in the field.

The Division has been successful in securing both internal and external grants through the 1804 Fund, The Baker Fund, OURC and the Greater Columbus Arts Council Media Arts Fellowship.

The MFA Faculty are expected to generate performance (making of independent films, as opposed to research), and external funding is not common in this endeavor nationwide in similar programs. However, faculty must raise substantial funds for their productions, and succeed in this.

c. Is the level of service, outside of teaching, appropriate for the program given its size and the role that it plays in the University and broader communities it interacts with? Is the Department able to fulfill its service mission?

The Division is able to fulfill its service mission. Faculty are expected to serve on Division, College and University committees. Faculty are actively involved in professional organizations such as the University Film and Video Association and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. One faculty member serves as Vice-Chair of Faculty Senate and University Curriculum Council Chair.

One of the Group II faculty members is the Director of the Athens Center for Film and Video and is responsible for planning the annual Athens International Film and Video Festival.

The Division offers several general education courses that are of interest to students outside the program. These offerings include face-to-face and online courses. FILM 2010 (Introduction to Film:
History of World Cinema), FILM 2020 (Introduction to Film: Film Analysis), FILM 2030 (Introduction to Film: The Documentary) and FILM 3440J (Practice of Film Criticism) are high enrollment courses ranging in 100-180 students per section.

d. Does the Department have an appropriate level of financial resources, staff, physical facilities, library resources, and technology to fulfill its mission?

Staff. The Division has one half time administrative assistant and one administrative staff member. The number of classified staff has been reduced over the past several years (1.5 FTE to 0.5 FTE) and has resulted in faculty members taking over duties normally covered by classified staff. The Division previously had two administrative positions. The Facilities Manager position was eliminated in 2010-2011 due to budget cuts. This also resulted in loss of instruction as the Facilities Manager taught in the graduate program. The net result has been an increased load of these duties to current faculty.

Library Resources. Faculty are able to acquire resources needed for scholarship and teaching and are therefore adequately served.

Physical Facilities. The Film Division is very happy to be out of Lindley Hall and into the basement of 31 S. Court Street (the former Woolworth’s Building) and portions of the Central Classroom Building. Though neither faculty, staff, nor students raised this issue, the review committee feels that their physical facilities could be improved, especially in the Central Classroom Building ground floor level. The green-screen room is substandard in comparison to other Film Schools across the nation. Problems include occluding support columns and possible safety concerns such as lack of protective railing at the loading dock.

Technology. While Film Division faculty, staff, and students generally were satisfied with their equipment and technology, they did point out the need for better projection and sound in their screening room in 31 S. Court Street. The review committee felt that better funding for state-of-the-art equipment, including planned depreciation, is required.
2. Undergraduate Program

This section is not applicable to the current review. With the exception of a BFA through the Honors Tutorial College, there is no undergraduate degree program. Since HTC students are treated identically to graduate students in the MFA Film Program after they enter the sequence in their sophomore year, this report does not distinguish between undergraduate and graduate. The committee assumes that HTC programs will undergo separate review.


3. Graduate Program

a. Is the program attracting students likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of students appropriate for the program? Is the program attracting a diverse group of students?

Both the MFA and MA programs in the Film Division appear to be attracting highly-motivated students likely to succeed within the curricula. The number of matriculated MFA students appears appropriate given the limited number of faculty in the area, as well as the facilities and equipment available. The ethos of this program is a conservatory environment within a public institution of higher-education. The unique insertion of BFA students from the Honors Tutorial College into the MFA program (BFA students begin this 3-year curricular flow in their sophomore year) adds to the student numbers while also diversifying the population. The MA student cohort seems appropriate given the limited number of faculty and current demands on equipment and facilities, but could greatly expand if faculty lines were re-gained or added, or if the Division were to merge with another entity as a whole. The graduate student body is culturally quite diverse, with a large number of international students studying and working alongside domestic students from Ohio, the region and other states within the U.S. The students who spoke with the reviewers cited the geographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of their classmates as a strong advantage of the program. Many MFA programs in film/media production are notable for an imbalance in gender (with a higher ratio of men), but this does not currently appear to be a problem within the Film Division at Ohio University.

b. Does the graduate curriculum provide an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers following graduation? Does the program provide adequate mentoring and advising to students to prepare them for discipline-related careers?

**MFA.** This program emphasizes independent (non-corporate/governmental, principally narrative) filmmaking (as opposed to “Hollywood” film, broadcast television, etc.) This approach allows students to artistically find their own voice, specific talents within the field, and learn holistically the overall process of filmmaking. It is unlike some other graduate programs that require graduate students to emphasize particular areas within the industry (cinematography, editing, directing, producing, writing, media law/business, etc.) This approach has both advantages and limitations -- it allows for creative freedom and individual artistic growth but at the same time restricts access to the highest-level expertise in specific areas of the field. We note that a large number of alumni are hired into faculty positions in the United States and abroad, which in most cases likely takes advantage of a more holistic, generalized film production education. There are certainly a large number of successful alumni working in the film industry at both corporations and as free-lance industry professionals in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and many other locations in the United States and abroad.

**MA.** We note that there are several MA alumni in faculty positions, and have been told that others are accepted to Ph.D. programs and work in other positions in the field (film archiving, festival administration, writing/publication).
c. Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the graduate program?

The current faculty are to be highly commended for the above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty dedication they exhibit in teaching, mentoring, service, technical support, engineering, classroom support, grant writing for required equipment, administration, etc. that keeps this program functioning well. We do not believe that there are a sufficient number of faculty (in numbers and in diversity) to support the ongoing success of this program (MFA/MA). Several lines have been lost or are in need of conversion, administrative staff lines have been lost, faculty are spending time writing grants to gain equipment funding (classroom projectors, classroom audio equipment, computers, software, etc.), and are serving as equipment engineers (computer hardware/software) and technicians, all of which keeps them from doing the most important work needed -- educating students and pursuing their own scholarly/creative activities. The classroom facilities, (even in 31 South Court Street, which is an improvement over Lindley Hall) and in the Central Classroom building are not on par with many peer and aspirational programs. Audio acoustics, eye-line to projection view, older screening projectors and speakers, older computer monitors, limited number of classrooms and working space, limited graduate student space for private advising of undergraduate students, remote equipment and props rooms and a difficult/acoustically unsound large production space do not mirror best practices at some of this division’s competing graduate programs and may hinder recruitment. Nevertheless, the faculty remain highly talented, committed and adaptable, and despite these challenges are teaching and mentoring at a very high level. The dedicated students appear to be working very collaboratively and are quite appreciative of the faculty nurturing, mentoring and leadership.

d. Does the program offer appropriate financial support to graduate students?

We recommend that in addition to tuition waivers, graduate students receive additional monthly stipends equivalent to aspirational graduate programs.

e. Is teaching adequately assessed?

While we understand that graduate teaching is observed and mentoring/guidance is given for new teachers, there did seem to be some indication of lack of clear and timely preparation for some graduate students (late receipt of syllabi, unclear expectations of their role in the classroom, etc.)

In addition to university-wide course evaluations, faculty are routinely observed in the classroom and are given constructive feedback from their peers. Junior faculty have the opportunity to participate in pedagogical discussions within the college.

From their self-study, it is clear that the Film Division is approaching students' achievement of learning outcomes methodically. It outlines the assessment process in detail and gives examples of improvements made in the programs as a result of the assessment. For instance, MA candidates now have a choice between taking comprehensive exams and writing a thesis and they discuss the best option for them with their advisor at the end of their first year. This change has resulted in more students graduating on time.

f. Are students able to move into discipline-related careers?

Yes, see answer to b. above.
4. Areas of Concern

- Division operating budget loss of 20% ($74 K in 2008-2009 vs current $59 K).
- A limited number of Group 1 (tenured/tenure-track) faculty.
- Loss of staff lines (going from 2 administrative lines to one part-time administrative line that appears to have pushed several areas of work onto the division director and faculty).
- High-end, complex and very expensive equipment needed for student creative work (high-definition cameras, audio equipment, lights, film cameras, projectors, supplemental required motion picture gear, computers, software) is necessary for success. The division should have a healthy, ongoing budgetary commitment for equipment acquisition, upkeep and replacement, so that both curricula and recruitment can be planned effectively.
- It is unusual that such equipment is not put on a formal depreciation schedule for replacement/upgrading.
- Limited faculty diversity.
- Lack of a division advisory board made up of alumni and industry leaders.
- Lack of a clear culture of industry partnership for equipment infusion.
- One dedicated technical staff and engineering staff, which is lower than other comparable programs utilizing high-level media equipment and postproduction nonlinear workflow.
- Due to geographical location, limited access to internships, industry mentoring, etc. A defined program allowing travel to internships, festivals, etc. might be designed if the summer bridge programs are reconfigured to allow for structured summer travel and opportunities.
- Limited access for graduate students to successful alumni in their field.

5. Recommendations

- Additional Group 1 faculty hires, and conversion of Group 4 faculty to Group 1 status.
- Dedicated funding for graduate student recruitment should be increased.
- Conversion of current administrative staff to a full-time position, addition of one technical staff member to oversee engineering, equipment room, classroom support, etc.
- Upgraded space for equipment room and large production classrooms.
- Formal, ongoing and focused discussions with the College of Media Arts and Studies within the Scripps College of Communication about more formal collaboration, possible merging as appropriate to support student and faculty needs.
- Better ongoing connection with alumni for student mentoring, career placement, etc. This would reduce the professional isolation caused by studying film in a remote, rural location.
- Formation of an Advisory Board to help connect students with alumni and others in industry.
- Establishment of partnerships with industry for equipment infusion.
- Additional coursework specifically emphasizing the rapidly changing landscape in cinema production, consumption, distribution and trends. We appreciate the emphasis on film production and studies, but recognize that nationwide and internationally, the field is morphing into a multi-platformed art form that is impacted by diverse fields such as gaming, virtual reality, augmented reality, “second screens”, mobile devices, etc.
- The Division should install and incorporate into its curricular structure postproduction editing software beyond the Avid platform. Avid is internationally recognized as a leading program in the film industry, and yet many independent producers utilize the Adobe Creative Suite (including Adobe Premiere editing software), and we believe that the ongoing requirement of
Avid proficiency, complimented by proficiency in other postproduction workflows, will make for better-prepared students.

- Ongoing collaborations (curricular, research/creative activities, etc.) are encouraged between the Film Division and Scripps.

6. Commendations

- Extraordinarily dedicated, happy faculty and staff
- Clearly respected, admired and appreciated leadership from Steven Ross, division director.
- Talented, dedicated and excited student body.
- Individualized, personalized scholarly education and creative training.
- Clear indication of collegiality and collaboration across all levels of the division
- Collaboration with the Athens International Film and Video Festival, which allows for education on festival management, curating, budgeting, PR, and other areas related to media distribution. The Festival also strengthens ties with the division and the community at large.

7. Overall Judgment

**VIABLE.**
July 1, 2017

Dear Dr. Ingram,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the program review report for the Division of Film. I appreciate the careful attention provided by the reviewers in their visit with the unit. I strongly concur with their assessment that the Division of Film is viable, reflecting its “dedicated faculty” and “a clearly collaborative and collegial environment.” The report also notes that the Division of Film prepares its “engaged and strongly motivated students” for life after graduation, writing that students “are well prepared for jobs in both the film industry and academia, and further graduate study.” Below is some additional context to recommendations that were included in the report.

The reviewers recommend increasing administrative support staff, Group I faculty, and technical staff. A workload of .5 FTE for the administrative support position the Film Division is similar to other units of the same size within the College of Fine Arts (COFA). While other units may have higher total FTE administrative support (2 FTE in general), it is important to note that student numbers are much greater in those units as well (e.g., Music has 274 students, and Art has 395, while IARTS + Film has only 89 students).

While the report states that “several lines have been lost,” the Film Division currently has six Group I faculty (one shared with Scripps), two Group IV faculty (one shared with Interdisciplinary Arts), and two Group II faculty (one shared with the Athens Film Festival). The Ohio University compendium shows six Group I faculty, one Group IV, and one Group II for AY 2009 through AY 2011, and five Group I faculty for AY 2012 through AY 2013, before returning to the current six Group I. The number and type of faculty has remained steady, parallel to student enrollment. The same is true of technical staff. We agree that there are significant concerns about faculty diversity; while we have some international faculty, there are no Group I female faculty or faculty from underrepresented groups, which can significantly affect the ability of a program to recruit effectively. This is difficult to address directly without new hires, so we will encourage the Film Division to carefully consider its approach toward visiting artists and scholars in the shorter term until faculty turnover presents more opportunities to address this issue in the long term.

The report recommends upgraded space and equipment. As noted in the self-study, the Film Division is satisfied with its space, and has not yet requested any space modifications. Any requests would have to be considered in the context of other College of Fine Arts space needs, many of which are urgent. The Film Division
recently received significant 1804 grant funds to upgrade the projection and associated equipment in their main teaching spaces.

The report recommends that funding for graduate student recruitment be increased. This spring, COFA requested a marketing proposal for the Film Division from an outside firm that that was recently selected to work with Ohio University (Carnegie); the proposal was recently received and will be evaluated. Additional one-time money was provided to film from COFA this year to help them redistribute their current graduate stipends to be used more effectively for recruiting.

The report makes several curricular as well as student, alumni, and industry engagement recommendations. The College strongly supports these thoughtful and timely suggestions to update the curriculum, engage industry partners, establish an advisory board, and build stronger connections between alumni and students. We expect the Film Division to meet regularly to address these issues, and to work with the Director of the School of Dance, Film, and Theater and appropriate COFA staff to move forward on these important suggestions as quickly as possible.

Finally, the report recommends continued discussion with the School of Media Arts and Studies (Scripps College of Communication) to explore increased collaboration. As noted in the report, this process has already begun. In addition to the current collaborations (such as some shared faculty teaching, and graduate students from Film teaching in Media Arts and Studies) a small faculty working group was charged with starting a very preliminary discussion this spring to explore a variety of options for further collaboration, including the possibility of an interdisciplinary center where courses and degrees in various time-based disciplines from COFA and Scripps (and from all over campus) could be shared, as well as some more traditional possibilities. While still in the early stages, exploring the possibility of future innovative collaboration is strongly supported by the College.

Thank you for the constructive feedback, and I thank you, your committee, and the reviewers for the time and expertise that you all have brought to the review process.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Sayrs
Interim Dean, College of Fine Arts