

**External Review Committee Report  
Department of Cinematic Arts  
University of New Mexico**

**Introduction:**

In our review of the Cinematic Arts Department, we were asked to focus on four specific questions in addition to those listed on page eight of the university's Academic Program Review manual. These four questions centered on collaborations between Cinematic Arts and the Interdisciplinary Film and Digital Media Program, student diversity, areas that should be targeted for growth, and administrative/faculty workloads. In the process of our review, it became apparent to us that Cinematic Arts—a small undergraduate academic department with very large student enrollments—was functioning admirably under the stress of limited resources. By the time of our meeting with Provost Suzanne Trager Ortega on the second day of our visit, we had come to understand the weight of these questions as they bear on both the notable accomplishments of Cinematic Arts and the challenges facing the department. Our review therefore follows the three-part structure that emerged at the end of our meeting with the Provost: first, Appropriate Recognition of the Cinematic Arts Department; second, Cautionary Observations; and third, Practical Recommendations.

**I. Appropriate Recognition of the Cinematic Arts Department:**

**Faculty:** CA currently has four tenure-line faculty, all of whom deserve recognition for the high quality of their research and creative productions, and especially for their engagement with students. The department's several contingent faculty also deserve recognition for their teaching and their engagement in department and community activities. We were impressed throughout our visit with the faculty's commitment to the *quality* of the educational experience.

**Curriculum:** CA offers a cutting edge curriculum, featuring innovative large introductory courses combining theory and practice, varied lower and upper division courses in new and immersive technologies, and an impressive curricular foundation in Latina/o, Native American, Third World, and Diasporic cinema that distinguishes the department. Their curricular diversity, particularly Critical Studies, rivals that of any curriculum at the top ranked cinematic and media studies programs in the California system with ten times their faculty and resources.

**Diversity of Students:** Data from the UNM Office of Institutional Research shows that just over 40% of CA majors come from multi-ethnic backgrounds. The Hyperion Data Base shows that if we account for pre-majors, then just over 50% of CA students would come from multi-ethnic backgrounds. This data is confirmed by our observations in our class visits, tour of the department facilities and media labs, and conversations with

students. We surmise that the department's innovative multicultural curriculum is responsible in large part for this notably strong record of diversity, which the department is still committed to improving.

**Student Enrollments and Mentor-Mentee Relationships:** Faculty-student connections are enhanced by a close mentoring relationship that not only guides students through the program but also sustains “networks” that channel students into employment in the film industry and other related areas of work. We consider this remarkable for a department with such high student enrollments that have steadily increased over the years, and with all current courses at capacity enrollment. The department also has an impressive record and level of contact with alumni. These findings are published on pages 43-46 under Student Career Placement in the Program Review.

**Department Staff and Space:** The department has secured an excellent administrative and technical staff. Their oversight of budgets, equipment, and all administrative operations is commendable. The department is also gifted with especially good offices and teaching facilities which provide a generative work space for its faculty, staff, and students. There is a palpable spirit of the department that resides here. This spirit is supported by the close physical proximity of faculty workspace to student workspace.

**Administration:** Cinematic Arts has flourished in recent years under the direction of a generous Department Chair, Professor Susan Dever, and her ability to foster a generous work paradigm. Faculty and staff generally extend themselves well beyond the already long academic workday.

**Connections with other Academic Units:** Cinematic Arts sustains its longstanding connections with other academic units in the college and university, including American Studies, Women's Studies, Architecture, Theatre, Foreign Languages and Cultural Studies, Native American Studies, to name only a few. The department employs graduate students from other departments to serve as TA's in Cinematic Arts, and often teaches graduate students from other departments in its 400-level courses.

**Assessment:** We acknowledge and applaud the department's good assessment and its willing participation in ongoing conversations related to assessment.

**The Written Report:** Our review committee was impressed with the *written* report of the departmental self-study, which has excited students (who quoted parts to us in their positive testimonies) and which participates in the complex modes of narrative and media/mediation informing both the discipline and its interdisciplinary extensions.

## **II. Cautious Observations:**

Faculty, Staff, and Equipment are spread too thin. Everyone is overworked. The department is functioning at and beyond capacity requirements. With new student

enrollment, production facilities will need expansion with more classrooms, editing rooms, and production spaces. In its brief history, the curricular program has grown from 0 to 79 majors with only minor changes in FTE to accommodate this growth. Already there is a significant impact on Cinematic Arts as a result of the IFDM start-up semester. Enrollment has increased substantially in Cinematic as IFDM students take a minimum of 18 credits and a maximum of 27 credits, plus electives, in Cinematic Arts. All film classes in fact are taken in the Cinematic Arts Department. Likewise, if a student comes to IFDM and majors in Critical Studies, they will be required to take up to 80% of their classes in Cinematic Arts. The Review Team feels that Cinematic Arts needs to be credited for the accommodation of these IFDM students. While enrollment is increasing, and resources simply maintained, Cinematic Arts' historical commitment to teaching a wide range of UNM students across the curriculum could be diminished, students shut out of classes as a result.

Ongoing administrative duties have precluded any sabbatical for the Chair ever since her hire as a beginning Assistant Professor, and continue to complicate leaves for faculty. Under such stress, how can the department sustain long-term stability? How does success not lead to burnout?

While the curriculum and student "major" population are remarkably diverse, the faculty recognizes the need for ethnic/racial diversity among its tenure-line ranks. We note the lack of such diversity here, but also note the department's strengths in gender diversity. Currently, two women teach in production (Associate Professor Nina Fonoroff and Adjunct Faculty Melissa Henry), a field that continues to be heavily dominated by white men; such gender diversity reverses the established faculty paradigm at nationally ranked programs.

Contingent faculty in Cinematic Arts significantly enhance the curriculum (often in ways comparable to tenure-line faculty), but are not part of the permanent or long-term faculty presence. Currently both Cinematic Arts and IFDM require classes that are taught by adjunct faculty.

### **Collaborations with IFDM (Interdisciplinary Film and Digital Media):**

Our review team has been asked specifically to comment on collaborations between Cinematic Arts and IFDM, and we found many of our conversations turning to this issue. Our assessment is that Cinematic Arts faculty members are open to, and indeed already significantly involved in, IFDM planning and in the early operation of this program. (See, in particular, pages 105-06 of the department's report for documentation of the *substantial* coursework that Cinematic Arts provides to IFDM majors in both production and critical studies.)

We sense understandable anxiety from administrators about IFDM as it moves from planning to execution, and we respect the expressed concerns of Cinematic Arts faculty about the terms and cost of their collaboration as it continues to press departmental resources. Administrators want to know about the contributions of Cinematic Arts to

IFDM, but Cinematic Arts rightly wants to know about the specific impact of IFDM on their department. The question posed by Cinematic Arts faculty seems to us a reasonable one: What will current and future collaborations between Cinematic Arts and IFDM *specifically* entail? In what ways will Cinematic Arts students be able to participate in this collaboration?

At the present moment, our Review Team is concerned about several aspects of this collaboration even as we recognize the potential for productive interdisciplinary connections fostered by a newly emerging program and a department that has already proved its success in sustaining interdisciplinary extensions. First, we are concerned about overtaxing an already stressed department. Second, we are concerned about the expressed cautions of Cinematic Arts students, who have told us again and again about their fears of being trained for “below-the-line” positions in New Mexico’s emerging film industry. This training is being covered by CNM. Students attend UNM to receive a different type of education. Third, we share this concern as it directly correlates to UNM’s role in supporting the film and digital media industry in the state: training students purely in technical production for “below-the-line” employment would contradict UNM’s commitment to meaningful education for its diverse students and would undercut the Governor’s mandate for the promise of the film industry. A sustainable New Mexico film industry requires “above the line training” and participation at the local level and that training resides in the programmatic and pedagogic structure of Cinematic Arts

Our review team acknowledges the potential of collaboration between Cinematic Arts and IFDM. Our sense is that the Cinematic Arts faculty members occupy a crucial position vis-à-vis the planning and operation of IFDM, and should be a key player in *shaping* a productive collaboration between its curriculum and that of IFDM. But the terms of this collaboration *need to be specifically defined, and further resources must be committed to Cinematic Arts.*

### **III. Practical Recommendations:**

Given high enrollments in Cinematic Arts courses, increasing majors, and full participation in the Evening and Weekend Program, the department needs additional resources to sustain its own operations. Specifically, it needs more lines across the faculty ranks. Our recommendations are based on this persistent need, but also on the impending collaborations between Cinematic Arts and IFDM. Because it is clear that Cinematic Arts plays a pivotal role in IFDM, **we urge that the university administration pay attention to these crucial questions of resources as increasing numbers of students enter into this collaborative project.**

Now that a Director of the IFDM Program has been secured, **we recommend a series of official meetings between the Cinematic Arts tenure-line faculty and the Director of IFDM during the spring 2009 semester.**

Based on these meetings, **we recommend that the Cinematic Arts faculty deliberate to determine if and to what extent their collaboration with IFDM can proceed given appropriate resources for such collaboration.**

Cinematic Arts should not be expected to serve a major interdisciplinary program with its already stretched resources. Therefore, should such collaboration proceed, **we recommend additional FTE and Tenure-line positions appropriate to sustain the work of productive academic collaboration and shared student enrollments, including appropriate investments in staff support and equipment.**

In technical areas such as digital media, it is necessary to replace hardware every two to three years and upgrade and/or purchase software every year. In order to meet the increased demands on equipment posed by the IFDM/Cinematic Arts collaboration as currently projected, Cinematic Arts will need to create at least two new editing suites, replace the hardware in three existing suites, upgrade all software, upgrade the audio production suite, and purchase at least five new camera packages (camera, extra batteries, tripod, microphone, boom, headphones, cases). As part of their initial discussions, Cinematic Arts and IFDM should develop a plan for meeting the immediate production demands, as well as a plan for ongoing maintenance, purchasing and upgrading. The current IFDM curriculum relies heavily on the Cinematic Arts Department to deliver a number of production classes. **In order for those classes to be delivered effectively we recommend that the administration agree to funding necessary increases in equipment as well as supporting a plan for on going purchasing and replacement.**

Teaching computer-based technologies works best in a group lab where students in a class can work with faculty support and supervision. Cinematic Arts currently does not have such a facility. We recommend that creating such a lab be explored as an interdisciplinary venture where several departments and programs, including Cinematic Arts and IFDM could benefit from a shared teaching lab.

We have been urged to make specific recommendations about potential hires. The question was typically posed to us: “If Cinematic Arts were to be awarded one tenure-line position, what would it be?” After discussing this matter even following the presentation of our preliminary report during the final day of our visit, and recognizing the expertise of Cinematic Arts faculty to make decisions about hiring, **we recommend at least one tenure-line position at the Assistant or Associate level, with expertise in production and in critical studies. It makes sense that the precise nature of this position should be defined by department tenure-line faculty as they continue to understand their own strengths and needs, and their specific relation to IFDM.**

Beyond our recommendation about this focused question of hiring, we note that Cinematic Arts now has an impressive cadre of contingent faculty whose positions can be advanced. Therefore, **we recommend additional FTE for Cinematic Arts that would, at the least, move two of its contingent faculty to full-time Lecturer positions.**

Given the heavy administrative duties that have consumed particularly the Department

Chair, **we recommend that Professor Susan Dever be granted a two-semester sabbatical as soon as feasible.** There are several ways in which an interim replacement can be secured to chair the department in her absence—including partial release time for a current tenure-line faculty member to chair the department, or the development of an interim Co-Chair position, also supported with appropriate release from teaching, in which the administrative duties of each Co-Chair are specifically delineated and divided.

Finally, our review team wants to emphasize that **we find the Cinematic Arts Department to be academically sound and flourishing in its major program, its successful commitment to diversity, and in its commitment to the large number of students who enroll in its classes. Cinematic Arts at UNM is a small gem of a department in an exciting and expanding academic field; it is deeply and demonstrably committed to the quality of education at UNM.**

Submitted by Members of the External Review Team:

Professor Ruth Salvaggio, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill  
Associate Professor Caroline Hinkley, Naropa University  
Professor Deborah Fort, College of Santa Fe  
Professor Gabriel Melendez, University of New Mexico