

P a r t i c i p a n t s

Mary Tsiongas, University of New Mexico, NM
James Lujan, Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM
Jonathan Wacks, Brooklyn College, CUNY, New York

I n t r o d u c t i o n

The following report has been prepared after thorough review of documentation submitted by the Cinematic Arts Department in the College of Fine Arts, a two and a half day visit, including a schedule of meetings with various constituencies, tour of facilities and discussion with faculty, students and administrators.

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s:

The review team would like to thank the University of New Mexico for the invitation to be part of the academic planning for the future. We are honored to have taken part in this complex and important process.

We would particularly like to extend thanks to the Chair of Cinematic Arts, James Stone, Associate Chair, Deborah Fort, College of Fine Arts Dean Kymberly Pinder, Associate Dean Regina Carlow, Associate Provost Pamela Cheek, Acting Provost Craig White and the many faculty, staff and students who met with us during our evaluation visit.

P r o g r a m R e v i e w

The Cinematic Arts Department has a number of evident strengths: excellent leadership in the chair and associate chair, a faculty that is hugely committed to the advancement of the department and an enthusiastic student body. We were deeply impressed by the turnout at the meetings that were scheduled for us with full-time faculty, adjuncts and students; clearly indicative of the level of commitment and engagement of folks in the department. All of those that we met appeared to be very excited to be in that department and eager to share their opinions with us.

We came away from these various meetings feeling that there is a huge upside for the department going forward, and that the Cinematic Arts Department has wonderful opportunity to stake out a place in the southwest and beyond, as a thriving center of film education. With the growth of the film and television industries in New Mexico, and the demise of the College of Santa Fe's excellent Moving Image Arts Department, UNM is well positioned to be a serious player in this space. We are, though, aware of the multifarious challenges that the department faces if it is to leverage its assets and reach its evident potential. However, with the support of the UNM administration coupled with serious

efforts at fundraising in the public and private sectors, the Cinematic Arts Department has the potential to fairly quickly become a flagship department at UNM.

In reviewing the department we considered its strengths and weaknesses under this rubric:

- Departmental Structure
- Departmental Resources
- Curriculum
- Assessment and Learning Outcomes

Departmental Structure

What we observed is that following the merger of the two hitherto separate programs, Media Arts (MA) and Interdisciplinary Film & Digital Media (IFDM) the structure of the Cinematic Arts Department, can perhaps best be summed up as complicated, complex and confusing. The first alarm bell that went off for us was when we were informed that the department has two separate budgets, one for MA and another for IFDM. This underlined the fact that notwithstanding the merger between the two programs over a year ago, they continue to function largely as separate entities gummed together by not much more than a common departmental name. We saw little evidence that the two programs have merged in a meaningful and coherent fashion. The connections between the two programs appeared muddled and we were unable to discern a roadmap that a student coming into the department would be guided by as she matriculated through the various courses.

We were also troubled by the fact that there was not a clear identity and certainly no evident branding of the department. With three names being bandied about - Cinematic Arts, Media Arts and Interdisciplinary Film & Digital Media - it is little wonder that no one that we met was able to articulate a coherent story that captures what the department is all about. Or describe any of the key value propositions that define the Cinematic Arts Department.

While everyone from the Interim Provost to the Dean of the College of Fine Arts to the Cinematic Arts chair and the faculty shared their enthusiasm for the department's mission, no one was able to coherently or convincingly describe what that mission is. The Dean referred to Cinematic Arts as "such an important program" but at the same time acknowledged that there was a "legibility problem" with regard to the self-definition of the department.

While it was apparent to all involved that the inclusion of the IFDM into the Cinematic Arts Department was a good idea, what we observed were two structures at odds with one another. Whereas the Media Arts program has a very traditional "major" structure, the IFDM has a "cohort" structure, which requires students to move through the program in lockstep based more or less on when they came into the department. While the MA students

graduate with a BA, the IFDM students graduate with a BFA with a more production-oriented curriculum at a satellite campus designed (more or less) to support serious filmmaking. (See Resources below)

It seems to us that the course offerings of each of the two programs (MA and IFDM) need to be laid bare, their content examined, their sequencing articulated, the pre-requisites considered, and then integrated holistically into the department as a set of offerings available to all Cinematic Arts majors.

We repeatedly heard from students and faculty that there was a fair amount of duplication of subject matter in courses, as well as a desire for more production classes that prepare students for the film or digital media industries. The availability of the latter kind of courses seemed to us random and not properly supported. Such courses include introductory and advanced classes in screenwriting, directing, cinematography, producing and post-production for those interested in narrative filmmaking. Or alternatively, courses in documentary or experimental filmmaking for those interested in those forms. But, notwithstanding the absence of any full-time faculty in a number of these filmmaking areas or in digital media, the department seemed to us ready and able to design a curriculum that would make concentrations available in at least three areas: Critical Studies (History and Theory), Filmmaking (Fiction, Non-Fiction, Experimental), and Digital Media (Gaming, Animation, VR & AR).

This architecture would not, of course, preclude the availability of the production-intensive BFA option with a capstone project in the senior year. This option could be available to some students, while at the same time making a more general BA available to most students. There appeared to us no logical reason (apart from the legacy issues inherited by the department with regard to the IFDM) why all courses available in the two programs should not be available to all students in the department. After all, this is an undergraduate degree that should give majors a good balance between breadth and depth based on the classes and opportunities afforded by the department. Perhaps the BFA could be made available to all majors (subject to the ability of the department to support capstone projects) after a competitive admission process into the BFA that would occur during the junior year not at the point of admission as it currently is for the IFDM program.

We recognize that there is and should be a fair amount of overlap between the concentrations. It is clearly a good thing for Filmmaking students to be grounded in Critical Studies, for Critical Studies students to take a production course or two, and for Digital Media students to understand narrative structure etc. And for those in the BA there is no reason why their major should not tilt towards breadth rather than depth, whereas the BFA students would aspire to greater depth and pre-professionalism.

From a structural point of view we observed a lack of clarity and a brave but incomplete attempt to integrate IFDM into the department. We were impressed by the problems with morale voiced by a number of students. While they certainly recognized that the department is experiencing growing pains they are clearly hungry for movement towards a resolution of the complications that accompanied the merger.

On the other hand, from our many conversations with the various constituencies we came away with a sense that there is a strong desire for a greater sense of unity and coherence in the department and felt that with the available resources and appropriate levels of support by the UNM administration, these structural problems can be fairly quickly be fixed.

Departmental Resources

The department has a strong core faculty, all of whom hold terminal degrees. The faculty members we met are passionate and dedicated to their field of study and to their students. Due to the small number of full time faculty, the department relies heavily on temporary part time adjuncts (eighteen). The high turnover in temporary part time faculty, especially in IFDM has created an unstable program and as a consequence some semesters faculty are asked to take on courses they are not always qualified to teach. This creates an uneven curriculum path and jeopardizes consistency in pedagogy. The department would benefit from additional lines to alleviate the uncertainty that comes with temporary part time faculty availability.

We observed a need for a production professional in film, specifically in key areas of narrative fiction, including directing and cinematography, as a matter of urgency. There also are no permanent faculty in animation, gaming, or VR. If courses are going to be offered consistently for the IFDM and MA degree programs, permanent faculty will need to be hired to cover these areas. The department may have to create its own opportunities here by considering how it will replace retiring faculty members in the future. Along with support from UNM, this deficiency could easily be addressed in the next few years.

The merging of IFDM into Cinematic Arts added only one staff line to the area, a program director for IFDM. This added one more member to a strong and dedicated but very small group of staff in the department. What we observed is a serious lack of technical staffing support for the Mesa del Sol facility. This facility is used for a small number of classes, by students for their productions, and by the VR club. *The unsupervised facility poses huge safety issues that will need to be addressed promptly. A flexible tech support staff member who specializes in production and postproduction would greatly benefit students and faculty and tackle problematic safety issues in a facility far from campus resources and hospitals.* This staff person can train and provide safety procedures to all students. Although there is a full time Multimedia Service tech at the Ceria facility, this is not where most production and postproduction activity happens. The department may need to consider how to reallocate staffing positions to address the safety needs of Mesa del Sol while waiting for a position from the university.

The facilities in the department include three buildings, each of which pose distinct challenges to the programmatic operations. The Ceria building (third floor) is the base for the Cinematic Art department and includes the administrative and faculty offices, two classrooms and a variety of resources for students. It now houses all the equipment in the checkout cage for students to use. This centralized equipment cage makes it difficult for students to check out equipment that need to be transported to Mesa del Sol or any on or off campus locations due to the difficulty in driving a vehicle close enough to the building for large equipment pick up. We heard from students and observed that it was not easy to schedule pick-ups due to the limited availability of the person who has the key to the gate

system near the building. We also heard from the students that there are not enough cameras, no clear inventory or prioritized procedures for reserving equipment for student projects. For example we observed 85 students in an Intro to Directing class, if these students continue in the program the department will need to make sure there are enough cameras, lighting and grip equipment and clear access to this gear. The department is strongly urged to address and reassess the equipment inventory and check out procedures. The Ceria building also has no sound stage, studio space or theater. It is too small and only has limited post-production facilities. The Robert Hartung building provides two computer lab classrooms, and a classroom with projection capabilities. This building is nearby and only a relatively short walk from the Ceria building. Equipment had been previously stored here in the basement when IFDM had a staff person for check out, and it may be a location to consider for future check out systems. This building certainly has easier access for pick up of equipment and storage space.

The most problematic and complex facility that the department oversees is the Mesa del Sol building. We observed a lack of clarity in terms of the future use of Mesa del Sol. Besides the aforementioned safety and staffing concerns, the other most pressing issue with this building is transportation. The building is a twenty-minute drive from campus, making it difficult for students to access without individual or campus transportation. Currently the UNM shuttle system is very limited only servicing specific class schedules; even with this limited shuttle system students complained that if they missed the main shuttle, they would miss the class entirely. The Mesa del Sol building and facilities appear impressive and state-of-the-art at first glance. What we heard from faculty and students and we observed is that there are serious issues with some of the spaces. For example the sound stage area has safety problems due to insufficient power and the HVAC system interferes with good recording possibilities. It was unclear if the theater had a 4K-projection system. Much of the space seemed underutilized and evident that this was mainly due to the difficulty in accessing the building from the main campus. The department will need to address this issue with the support of the university and with their own resources to make this more accessible if they plan on continuing to use this facility.

C u r r i c u l u m

Chair James Stone and Associate chair Deborah Fort are aware of curricular inconsistencies and are working on addressing these by forming a curriculum committee in the department. We agree this is a necessary step to addressing many irregularities and problems in the current curricular structure. We would also advise that students and adjunct faculty be included in the preliminary meetings or retreat events to offer multiple voices in tackling the problems, as both groups expressed an interest in being involved.

A common theme we observed was redundancy within classes offered in both the MA and IFDM degree programs. From talking with students and faculty, we gathered that the problems might arise from lack of effective prerequisites and a clear path through the degrees, particularly in regard to core classes and a defined progression from introductory to intermediate to advanced levels of learning. For example, if freshmen are taking 400 level courses, the instructor in upper division courses has to continually review materials for the students not familiar with fundamental skills/practices, which, in turn, becomes tiresome for

more advanced students who have to sit through repeated instances of basic concepts being covered. We heard from several students in IFDM who expressed frustration about having to hear over and over through multiple classes about what an aperture is. What cases like this bring into question is both the scheduling of classes and whether or not academic advisors and students are adhering to a block schedule.

We also noted that many courses had vague names and course descriptions, which caused confusion. The Intro to Directing course we observed had 85 students and was taught as a lecture style general Intro to Filmmaking course; even with break out sections the class was too large to be taught as a serious directing course. In many film programs, “Directing” is an advanced level class taught as a hands-on studio course.

The pathways for the BA and BFA degrees will need to be extensively reviewed, strengthened and clarified, preferably with a strong core of required classes that demonstrates and provides a foundation for a progression, such as, for example, Film Production I, II and III. Furthermore, the rigor for both degrees will need to be increased. Some students in the MA program felt they didn’t have to put in a lot of effort to receive an A. We also observed that the Capstone requirements for the IFDM BFA degree were not as rigorous as they could be. The students expressed frustration with the uneven skillset of their fellow cohorts; some students noted that others in their cohort did not have the basic skills needed to assist in the final stages of the capstone projects. While it’s not uncommon for film students to turn to resources like YouTube or Lynda.com to supplement their learning, we heard from some 300 level students who admitted they relied exclusively on YouTube to learn basic technical and producing skills.

Ultimately, we felt that the capstone requirements did not seem equitable and had no clear criteria. Key creative roles were not identified as the requirement for successfully completing the capstone course. For instance, as the capstone is currently set up, some students can get by with fulfilling relatively minor roles such as grip and lighting, while other students do the “heavy lifting” in producing, directing, editing. Overall, the curriculum offered does not feel like a complete meal insofar as what a program focused on production should offer. There are no required core classes in the key areas of Directing, Production Management or Post-Production and only one core class in Cinematography.

We also found a need to create standardized syllabi for the core classes. Since temporary part-time faculty teach many of these courses, it is crucial that there is consistency in methodology and content, so that students have the same experience in class regardless of the instructor. Standardizing the syllabi can also help reduce the redundancies and address one complaint a MA student voiced about having to see “Citizen Kane” over and over.

One piece of information that was missed in the program review materials was a departmental curriculum map that ties the courses within the degrees into the student learning outcomes and how they fit into the progression of knowledge, application and synthesis. A curriculum map can be a useful tool in getting an overall picture of the vision and mission of any academic program.

A lot of the issues with curriculum in both the BFA and BA can and will be resolved once the Cinematic Arts department defines its identity and decides what kind of film program that it wants to be.

Assessment and Learning Outcomes

Based on our discussions with 300 and 400 level students, we had questions of how basic foundational skills are assessed. One student mentioned that one of his cohorts had volunteered to do the editing on his capstone project, but when the time came around for post-production, it turned out that the would-be editor had no skills in the area. How did this student progress to the capstone level without that foundational skill? While we observed that individual classes have rubrics to assess student learning, it is not clear how student learning is assessed as they progress through the program as a whole. In other words, what are the expectations of the skills a student will possess who graduates from the program with either a BFA or BA?

It was not clear if the department has implemented any assessment projects to ascertain if the program is delivering on their learning outcomes. If so, a record of such projects should be kept for future program review. If not, then it would be useful for self-study purposes to focus on, say, one learning outcome per semester to provide measurable evidence, either way, of whether or not the results of student work is reflecting the learning outcomes.

Before that, however, we would recommend that the BA and BFA revisit and review its learning outcomes to evaluate their measurability and applicability to the degree and the Cinematic Arts program. We observed that some of the learning outcomes are rather generic, like “knowledge,” which can apply to almost every class. For a learning outcome to be measurable, there needs to be a bit more specificity about the type of knowledge that is being measured. The description of the learning outcome provides a little more explanation, but the stated learning outcome itself should be able to stand on its own. To that end, it is recommended that Bloom’s Taxonomy verbs be used to more effectively define the outcomes. Bloom’s Taxonomy has proven to be a useful framework for academics in analyzing student learning. Usage of such verbs as “apply,” “demonstrate,” or “create” will also provide more clarity for whatever assessment methods are utilized.

After reviewing some of the syllabi, we noticed that some of the class learning outcomes weren’t always consistent with the departmental learning outcomes. Courses should always include at least one of the overall departmental learning outcomes, such as “express knowledge,” for example, and then break it down with what sort of knowledge is required of the course and how it relates to assignments and rubrics that will support the learning outcome.

As mentioned earlier, the expectations of the qualifications of a student graduating with a degree in the Cinematic Arts, whether MA and IFDM merge or remain separate, will dictate the learning outcomes, and those will only become clarified once the Cinematic Arts department decides what kind of film program it wants to be.

Conclusion

While the Cinematic Arts Department faces notable challenges with regard to its current structure, the articulation of the curriculum and the consistency of learning outcomes, to move to the next level there are also significant challenges regarding available resources that are badly needed to support a program that aspires to be a player in the “film school” space. The much-needed resources are not only human – faculty and staff – but also equipment, technology and upgraded, safe facilities. We are confident that, under the present leadership of the Dean, Chair and Associate Chair, and with the active engagement of the faculty in a process of reimagining what the department might become, the Cinematic Arts Department has an exciting opportunity to build on its various and impressive assets to become a flagship department at UNM and a leading film school in the Southwest and beyond.

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