2012 EXTERNAL PROGRAM REVIEW
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS
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Barry Hewlett of Washington State University and Thomas Gregor of Vanderbilt University conducted this review over a two-day period in April 2012. We interviewed 9 tenure-track faculty in their offices, met several faculty informally over lunch or dinner; met with two small and two large groups (one seminar and one lunch) of graduate students; and met with 45 undergraduate majors during a class. We interviewed various administrators—Dean of College of Liberal Arts, Associate Dean of Graduate School, Provost, Director of Advising Center—and reviewed multiple documents—requirements for degrees, self-study, graduation rates, faculty senate review.

The report represents the consensus of the review team. We summarize our observations, identify strengths to build upon, make 7 recommendations, and describe 10 items for consideration (minor issues).

We sincerely appreciate the warm reception and the thoughtful and constructive comments of the many individuals with whom we had the opportunity to meet during our visit.

General Overview

The Department currently has 13 tenure-track faculty of which 5 are archaeologists, 5 are biological anthropologists, and 3 are cultural anthropologists. The Department lost several cultural anthropologists to retirement and the linguist position was lost during recent budget cuts. The Department has 156 undergraduate majors and 53 active graduate students. The number of majors and graduate students are reasonable for the size of the Department; the 4:1 graduate student to faculty ratio is good. The Department produced an average of 4.6 MA degrees per year for the last 21 years and about 1 PhD per year for the last 8 years. The PhD program was established in 1998 and awarded its first PhD in 2004. The MA production rate is good and the PhD production rate is reasonable given its recent start.
All faculty described last year’s crisis when positions and the department were publically threatened with being cut. It was demoralizing, several top scholars were ready to quit, it led to conflicts between faculty members, and it continues to influence the Department culture and psyche. Most faculty felt the Department was on the mend, but it will take some time and investment to calm faculty fears.

The experience was unfortunate because several administrators indicated the Department is considered one of the top three departments at UNLV and that Anthropology was really never under threat. Administrators described Anthropology as a “stellar” and a “landmark” program and the faculty were “dynamic and engaged”. It is our understanding that the idea to publically identify specific departments for elimination was a political strategy initiated by supporters of education in the state capital. Administrators placed Anthropology on the cutting block because standardized metrics ” (e.g., number of tenure-track faculty per major, faculty per students taught, cost per graduate student, etc.) utilized to compare departments indicated Anthropology was one of the most “expensive” departments at the University. The experience made the research focused faculty realize they needed to increase the number of majors and course enrollments and reduce the impression that they were expensive. Within a short time the Department increased the number of majors from 100 to 156 and were teaching more courses with over 100 students.

**Strengths**

The Department has several strengths but we identified a few exceptional characteristics that should be built upon in their strategic planning, described in Department materials, and publicized in brochures and online materials for national and international audiences.

1. Outstanding faculty. Administrators were impressed with faculty productivity, many undergraduates said they became anthropology majors because of the passionate lectures and extensive and exciting field research conducted by Anthropology faculty, and graduate students felt faculty were amazing--always available to them and generated enthusiasm about the field. Several faculty have developed innovative and exciting courses on their own—they are teaching more undergraduate preparations than required because of their high energy and enthusiasm. Faculty were also incredibly upbeat; one faculty member said last year’s crisis was good because it made the department review what it was doing. Another faculty member teaching in Prague this semester continued to have lab meetings every week with his graduate students via Skype.

One administrator pointed out that Anthropology senior faculty during the 1995-2005 UNLV expansion period (i.e., hires and PhD established) were quite bold and unlike other UNLV senior faculty, they were willing to hire people better than themselves. The Department is now reaping the benefits of their hiring decisions as UNLV now has some of the most dynamic and productive Anthropology faculty in the Western US.
The passion, energy, and enthusiasm we observed with faculty was contagious—the graduate students were impressive as well and had the same characteristics—excited about what they were doing, resilient, and incredibly upbeat.

2. Sub-discipline communication, respect, teamwork, and congeniality. Most faculty and graduate students were impressed with the level of interaction (“cross-talk”) between faculty and the overall “good chemistry” of the department. Faculty, especially new faculty, did not feel like they were in a “cultural” or “archaeology” slot; they were anthropologists first and a biological anthropologist or archaeologist second. Prominent junior faculty said the Department chemistry kept them at UNLV; they had opportunities to go elsewhere but they enjoyed the congeniality and transdisciplinary nature of the Department.

3. Excellent labs for all sub-disciplines. Archaeology, biological anthropology, and ethnographic (e.g., cognitive science, field equipment) labs were excellent and few anthropology programs anywhere in the US have labs for all sub-disciplines and for this many faculty. Faculty and graduate students were generally delighted with these resources and noted that they were key to graduate education and professional productivity.

The three items described above are particularly important strengths, but the Department is doing many things very well and they need to be continued and built upon: a) methods to attract majors—open house second week of semester (several administrators praised faculty for their efforts) and Anthropology faculty training Liberal Arts recruiters and advisors; b) distribution of the Anthropology mega-memo that promotes faculty and graduate student accomplishments; and, c) working on a NSF IGERT grant to help build the graduate program.

Recommendations

1. The Department undertake a faculty-wide, bottom-up planning session to clarify the mission statement, identify 3-4 areas of emphasis that cut across the sub-disciplines, and identify 2-3 areas of emphasis within each sub-discipline.

a) Mission statement
We received two Department mission statements. One in the self-study states “Throughout the 21st century the Anthropology Department at UNLV has been consciously transforming itself away from the traditional focus on 4-fields toward a more problem or topical approach that seeks to combine theory and methods from all sub-disciplines.” One faculty member talked about this shift as “breaking down the walls” of the 4-field approach, that the Anthropology program was the “wave of the future” and that the Department was making their graduate students the “relevant next generation” of anthropologists.
The second mission statement does not mention this break with tradition and sounds more like a conventional Anthropology department. The requirement for the BA continue to emphasize the 4-field approach with requirements for each subdiscipline, and the organization of graduate program on the Department website gives the impression of a 4-field approach (i.e., sub-disciplines are described separately). By contrast, the recent changes in graduate program requirements (i.e., dropping the two core courses that cover the sub-disciplines) reflect the Department's interest in breaking down sub-discipline walls.

Most faculty we talked with were enthusiastic about the non-traditional approach and thought this was a characteristic feature of the UNLV Anthropology program. Our observations were consistent with this, but department materials online and elsewhere do not emphasize this "wave of the future" or give a mixed message.

b) Cross-disciplinary themes
The Department website identifies three cross-disciplinary themes: biocultural evolution, arid lands, and ethnic identity. Our observations and faculty interviews indicated these were established some time ago and need to be reconsidered.

Cross-disciplinary topical areas that might be considered:
Evolutionary and biocultural approaches to human behavior—all biological faculty, several archaeology faculty, and 2 of 3 cultural faculty
Hunter-gatherers—Frink, Atici, Roth, Simmons, Gray, Crittenden
Anthropology of childhood—Crittenden, Jankowiak, Thompson, Martin, Lienard, Gray
Anthropology of gender—Roth, Martin, Jankowiak, Bao, Crittenden, Gray,
Medical anthropology (including mental health)—Benyshek, Crittenden, Martin, Thompson, Lienard, Gray, Bao

Once the Department clarifies its approach and areas of cross-disciplinary emphasis, it needs to modify the undergraduate and graduate programs to reflect the Department's academic strengths. For instance, the Department clearly has strengths in evolutionary approaches to human behavior or anthropology of childhood, but graduate courses do not exist in either area. A graduate hunter-gatherer course exists, but it is the archaeology of hunter-gatherers and does not reflect the cross-disciplinary strengths of the department in this area.

This is an exciting and productive department and it would be worthwhile to identify a few new foci in order to argue for future positions, promote collaboration, and advertise and promote the UNLV PhD program.

c) Areas of emphasis within sub-disciplines
Descriptions of the sub-disciplines on the Department website list areas of expertise and foci, but as many or more foci and research areas are listed as there are faculty in the sub-discipline. If the Department keeps the sub-field organization on the website we recommend that each sub-discipline select a 2-3 areas of emphasis.
Most MA students are archaeologists interested in using their degrees to do CRM so it was surprising to us that this was not identified as an area of Departmental or archaeological focus and expertise.

It is also worth noting that no specific core requirements exist for graduate students within a sub-discipline. Archaeology, biological, or cultural anthropology do not have required courses. Questions that arise: How do biological students obtain a background in primatology or human genetics necessary to teach undergraduate or graduate biological anthropology courses? The department does not have expertise or courses in these areas but they are core areas within biological anthropology. One assumes cultural anthropologists will take Anth 743 Seminar in Method and Theory in Cultural Anthropology, but is it possible they could graduate without taking it because it is not required? Can cultural anthropologists graduate without taking a linguistics course? Can archaeologists graduate without taking a field course?

2. More graduate assistantships and out-of-state tuition waivers are needed.

The Department has 53 active graduate students, 24 in the MA program and 29 in the PhD program. Only 17 students are supported which means the majority of graduate students (35) are unfunded. According to administrators, the Anthropology GA budget has not changed in 10 years. This explains, in part, the long period of time to degree completion in Anthropology. To maintain a viable high quality PhD program, it is essential to be able to offer support to the top students from any state in the US or country in the world; out-of-state tuition waivers are critical to attracting these students.

The demand for the UNLV Anthropology graduate program is demonstrated in this year’s acceptance rate: 10 of 13 students offered admittance to the PhD program accepted, and 2 of 3 MA students offered slots accepted them. Many of these students come without financial support. GA and out-of-state support are necessary to attract and keep the best graduate students, and help them complete their degrees within a reasonable amount of time.

3. Hire another cultural anthropologist.

The next Department hire will be a biocultural anthropologist; the position was part of a negotiated and well-deserved pre-retention package for Deb Martin. This will make the biological anthropology the largest sub-discipline in the Department.

The hire after this should be a cultural anthropologist. The cultural wing of the program was devastated by retirements; the Department lost 4 cultural anthropologists in the last 4 years. Faculty and students alike recognized the Department’s weakness in cultural anthropology. Like most faculty, the new cultural anthropologist needs to be able to articulate and compliment existing faculty. One
possibility might include be a medical anthropologist with evolutionary and international development expertise.

Several faculty and graduate students said they did not know if particular biological and archaeology faculty were really cultural anthropologists because they worked with living peoples. This is a common issue for many contemporary biological anthropologists working with living peoples—traditional anthropologists are confused because their research questions are biological/evolutionary, but they conduct research with small-scale cultures. Some overlap in biological and cultural anthropology methods exist—behavioral observations, collecting reproductive histories, identifying kinship relations--but the topics and research methods are generally quite distinct. Unlike biological anthropologists working with living peoples, cultural anthropologists are more likely to study cultural models, symbolic systems, rituals, webs of meaning, self and society, and use methods such as free listing, ranking and soring techniques and extensive in-depth interviews. Conducting research with living populations does not necessarily mean that faculty have the training or background in cultural anthropology. It depends upon where they were trained, but most departments that specialize in evolution of human behavior do not require courses in cultural anthropology or ethnographic methods. It is nice that faculty and graduate students see the potential cross-over in theory and methods between the sub-disciplines, but it also implies they have a limited understanding of the methods and theory in contemporary cultural anthropology.

When asked to select their favorite Anthropology sub-discipline UNLV undergraduates, like those at most universities, select cultural anthropology. Most of the Anthropology undergraduate courses in catalogue are cultural anthropology courses.

The Department website also describes a flourishing graduate program in cultural anthropology and it is not clear how this can occur with only three cultural faculty and no linguist.

4. Increase undergraduate enrollment in general education courses.

Several faculty were not clear about the Department’s role in general education. Some did not differentiate between the University’s and the College’s general education requirements. Several faculty mentioned that all cultural anthropology courses met the International requirement, but in fact only 8 Anthropology courses meet the requirement. Most cultural courses do meet the of Liberal Art’s Foreign Culture requirement. We asked faculty why no archaeology courses fulfill the University’s International requirement or the College’s Foreign Culture requirement and faculty explained that these course had to deal with living peoples. When we reviewed the list of courses from other disciplines that meet these requirements we found that many history courses were listed (e.g., Introduction to Chinese Civilizations for International requirement, and Ancient History for the College Foreign Culture requirement). Only 4 Anthropology courses fulfill the University’s
Multicultural requirement. 15/53 undergraduate courses meet some University or College general education requirement. This is a relatively small percentage of courses, especially given the number of Anthropology majors, and several existing courses, including archaeology courses, could be submitted as University and College general education requirements. This would, in turn, increase undergraduate enrollment, especially in archaeology courses.

5. Seed money for junior faculty research projects.

Several very productive junior faculty mentioned that it is difficult if not impossible to obtain extramural funding without some preliminary results. The last few years have been difficult because of the economic crisis and faculty have tried to be patient, but it is time for the administration to do what it can to stimulate research and extramural funding.

6. Stabilize funding for archaeological field schools.

Archaeologists often receive contract or extramural funding to conduct a field school, but it does not happen every year. Several undergraduate majors complained that they were never able to take a field archaeology class, which they said would impact their abilities to obtain CRM jobs when they finished. Field schools are, of course, essential for a successful graduate program in archaeology. We recommend the archaeologists work with the administration to determine what it would take to stabilize field school funding to ensure that at least one archaeological field school is provided each year.

7. Streamline (e.g., reduce requirements) and clarify (e.g., why is Contemporary Chinese society a theory course?) the requirements for the BA degree to attract more Anthropology majors.

The Department has already started to do this. This is also linked to Recommendation #1 because as the Department identifies their approach and areas of emphasis they may modify BA requirements. Anthropology currently has 156 majors, which seems healthy to us for a campus and faculty of this size, but administrators still feel this is low by comparison to other disciplines. We pointed out to administrators that by comparison to other disciplines it is particularly difficult to attract anthropology majors because freshmen students generally have no idea what Anthropology is until they take their first college class. This is why it is important to commend and build upon what the Department has already started—open house, training advisors, going to high schools—to increase the number of majors.

**Minor issues/things to consider**

1. Offer more applied or international development courses. The University Mission Statement, Department materials and several faculty mentioned the importance of applying anthropology to contemporary local and global problems, but with the
exception of the CRM course and one undergraduate applied anthropology course it
does not look like students receive much direct training on how to conduct research
for or work with local or international NGOs, government agencies, or policy groups.
We discussed applied issues with undergraduate and graduate students and both
groups indicated an interest in obtaining more applied background.

2. Try to reward and balance graduate committee assignments. Based upon data
from the Department webpage, Martin chairs 8 graduate committees, Roth chairs 5
committees, seven faculty chair 1-2 committees and three faculty do not chair
committees. These data are probably out of date, but it appears a few faculty carry
the bulk of the graduate student committee load. The Department may want to
consider mechanisms to encourage faculty to chair committees (e.g., part of merit
consideration is based on how many committees one chairs) or place limits on how
many committees a faculty member chairs (more than 5 is often considered too
many).

3. Talk to graduate students about their views on dropping Department core
courses. Graduate students generally had a negative view of dropping the two core
courses as they felt it was important to obtain training in each sub-discipline.

4. Consider a capstone course for majors. Several types of capstone courses exist—
the course may focus on integrating the sub-disciplines on a particular topic
selected by the instructor (a distinguishing feature of the Department), it may be a
course where students conduct research and write a thesis, or it may cover a range
of professional issues, from applying to graduate school (70% of majors said they
plan to go to grad school!), to finding a job with a BA in Anthropology. This last issue
(finding jobs) is of particular interest because the undergraduates indicated
career/job placement services were unknown and limited within the Department.

5. Consider establishing field stations for biological and cultural graduate students.
Anthropology is a field discipline and archaeologists generally take their students to
the field. Biological and cultural faculty are active in the field, but it does not appear
that they take many students to the field.

6. A systematic Department system to evaluate the quality of the BA, MA and PhD
programs does not seem to exist. No system was identified in the self-study.
Assessment questions in the self-study were responses to issues identified by
faculty senate team.

7. Consider using class size as a factor in the distribution of GAs to faculty. Currently,
all faculty receive assistance from a GA, but is appears to be based upon providing
each faculty member with some GA assistance. This may help to incentivize teaching
large classes. Large classes often need more time than smaller classes, especially if
they have writing assignments. As one faculty member stated, “I have to give up
research to teach high enrollment classes”.
8. Encourage more graduate school applicants to apply for or switch from the MA to the PhD track. This is particularly relevant for cultural and biological students because it is more difficult for them, by comparison to archaeology students, to find a position with an MA, and the administration is primarily interested in and provides more support for programs with more PhD students.

9. Provide some stable funding for laboratories, such as dedicated GAs. Junior faculty have excellent labs, but they needed assistance to maintain them, particularly when they were between grants.

10. The four Desert Research Institute associate graduate faculty are underutilized. No faculty mentioned their contribution and several faculty did not realize they were Department faculty.
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

External Reviewer’s Report

Program Reviewed: Department of Film
Degrees: B.A.
Program Chair: Professor Francisco Menendez
Dean: Dr. Jeffrey Koep

Reviewer’s Names and Institutions:
Professor Norman Hollyn, University of Southern California
Professor Michael Kowalski, Chapman University

Date of Report: July 3, 2012
I. MISSION AND GOALS
The Bachelor of Arts in Film program has a clear mission statement that proposes a course of study in film that is a combination of film studies and production with a core focus on cinematic storytelling. As one faculty member stated “What distinguishes us from other programs is our combination of film studies and production.” This pedagogical vision informs the design of the program’s curriculum and its overall culture and is a strength of the program.

The curriculum is designed in such a way that nine of the eleven required classes for the degree are film study classes, with one of the remaining two classes being a screenwriting class and the other one being a production class. For their remaining seven classes, all electives, the students are expected to select courses in consultation with an advisor (based on their interests) from among the additional classes offered by the program. Most of the students’ production related classes are selected from the electives.

This curriculum provides the students with a broad based and very flexible course of study in film that, as their mission statement affirms, “is designed to give the students a strong basis in one of two paths best fitting their professional goals: placement in a graduate program or in a professional position in the entertainment industry.”

A. Does the mission statement of the program/department seem appropriate for:

1. Student outcomes
The Bachelor of Arts in Film degree program has outlined eight learning outcomes that we feel only partly support the mission of the program. The issue is that six of the eight learning outcomes only address the film studies and criticism dimensions of the program. These outcomes deal with the students’ ability to research and/or analyze films in terms of historical context, film language, narrative and visual storytelling. And while the two remaining outcomes, “Comprehend Film Language” and “Synthesize Filmmaking Fundamentals”, deal in part with the students’ ability to produce a movie, there are no outcomes that deal with the students’ practical/technical ability to make a film or, more importantly, with the students’ capacity to creatively and effectively tell a story in cinematic form. The lack of an outcome addressing cinematic storytelling is especially problematic given that the program’s mission statement explicitly states that: “Cinematic storytelling is the core of the program’s focus”.

This problem with the outcomes seems, in fact, indicative of a more fundamental issue that affects the film program and pertains to the imbalance between the role of film studies and the role of film production within the program’s curriculum. The program’s outcomes suggest that it
is predominantly a film studies program with a smaller production component attached to it. This format is reflected in the structure of the program’s curriculum, as detailed above.

While we appreciate the fact that this is a film studies based curriculum that was designed to emphasize storytelling and the quality of thought that goes into a film production, we do need to note that this program nevertheless has a large and important film production component to it. This is a reality that is reflected in the constitution of the faculty. Five of the six full-time faculty members teach production related courses including one who teaches screenwriting. In addition to which, all the students who we interviewed described the program as being primarily production oriented, and every one praised its culture that encourages production inside and outside of class.

We therefore recommend that the Department of Film revise its learning outcomes to better reflect the significant role film production plays within its program. It should then use its new outcomes as a basis to redesign its curriculum in a way that more effectively integrates film production into its course of study. The production courses should be organized in sequences that makes pedagogical sense. The department should also explore the possibility of creating specialization tracks and instituting a capstone project.

We are not advocating that the program do away with its focus on film studies and visual storytelling. We strongly believe that it is very valuable for film students, especially at the undergraduate level, to understand the art of filmmaking from a broad artistic and historical perspective. But the program should be structured in a way that articulates a better balance between its production and non-production components.

Another solution might be to create a B.F.A. in film in addition to the already existing B.A. in Film. This would allow a core group of students to focus on film production, while allowing the rest of the students to pursue a more general film degree like the one that is currently in place.

2. Relationship to the college
The mission of the Bachelor of Arts in Film program aligns itself well with the mission of the College of Fine Arts. They both advocate a course of study that balances a classroom-based scholarly approach with a practical and experiential approach to the creation of art. The film program achieves this balance by providing a curriculum in which, as one professor describes it, “film production is rooted in film studies”. This gives the students a broad based and critical approach to the study of film that is very much in accordance with the Dean’s, Dr. Jeff Koep’s, desire to provide the students in the College of Art with a well-rounded liberal arts education.

3. Relationship to the university (See Appendix 1 for UNLV Mission Statement)
The mission of the Bachelor of Arts in Film program is consistent with the mission of the university. Both share a commitment to academic excellence and to producing accomplished graduates who are well prepared to either directly enter the work force or to pursue their education at the graduate level. The film program accomplishes this by providing its students with a broad based film education that combines a historical and critical approach to the study of
film, with a practical approach to the art and craft of filmmaking through the production of short narrative films.

The program’s curriculum is flexible and open ended with a number of electives that allow the students to explore and discover their own special area of interest within the wider field of filmmaking. It is an approach that contributes to a liberal arts educational tradition that concerns itself with producing well rounded critically minded students. This is in contrast to a program like the one at Chapman, with its high percentage of required classes, and is more similar to that of U.S.C.’s.

**II. DO THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM SEEM LINKED APPROPRIATELY TO:**

**A. Student outcomes**
The two main goals of the Bachelors of Arts in Film are “placement in a graduate program or in a professional position in the entertainment industry”. The program’s learning outcomes seem to be appropriately designed to achieve the first goal. In this case, these outcomes articulate a broad-based and scholarly approach to the study of film with a focus on storytelling that should provide a solid educational foundation for any students interested in pursuing a graduate degree in film.

The success rate of the program’s graduates in getting into graduate programs clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. The Self Study points out that every year about ten percent of the graduating students have been accepted to branded graduate film schools such as The American Film Institute, U.S.C, U.C.L.A. and N.Y.U. Given the competitiveness of these programs, these are very good results.

Having had at least five of their graduates in the past four years as students in our graduate film program at Chapman University, I can personally attest to the fact that they were well prepared to pursue a graduate degree in film production.

On the other hand, we feel that the outcomes fall short of realizing the program’s second goal, placement of students in a professional position in the entertainment industry. As we have already discussed above, the program’s eight learning outcomes are overly focused on the film studies component of the program. Only two of the outcomes are related to film production, despite the fact that the program has a large production component to it. In fact, most of the students in our focus group described the program as “production oriented” and were surprised to find out that one of the goals of the program was to prepare them for graduate school. The issue therefore is not the lack of production courses, but rather the need to coherently integrate these courses into the curriculum. This integration into the curriculum must be done based on clearly formulated learning outcomes.

**B. The department/college**
The film program’s dual goals of preparing their students for graduate school or for a professional position in the film industry are consistent with the College of Fine Arts mission of providing its students with a well rounded liberal arts education that combines a conceptual/scholarly approach with a practical approach to the study of art.
C. The university (See Appendix 2 for UNLV Goals)

In most respects the film program furthers the same goals and values as those advanced and promoted by the university. By developing a curriculum that grounds film production in film studies, and by focusing on visual storytelling, the film program has developed a rigorous course of study that combines scholarly, artistic, and practical activities.

Filmmaking is an inherently entrepreneurial creative pursuit. By promoting a culture that encourages the production of films inside and outside of the classroom, with such events as Spring Flicks and the 48 Hour Film contest, the program offers its students many opportunities to practice their skills as filmmakers and visual storyteller. In the process, they also develop their capacities to collaborate, experiment and problem solve.

The program’s Co-Curricular Project that has been in place for a decade is a unique and highly innovative interdisciplinary approach to teaching film that allows the students to learn from experience in a professional environment while being supervised and mentored by their film instructors.

III. NEED/Demand FOR Program

A. Is the need/demand for the program in line with what you know of similar programs?

There is definitely a need/demand for this film program, especially given that it is the only program that offers an undergraduate film degree in the State of Nevada. The need/demand for this program is consistent with a trend that has affected film programs across the country.

In the Program Review Self-Study, Loyola’s Marymount’s dean Stephen Ujkali is cited as saying that “the majority of students majoring in film and television will not be having careers in those professions.” We disagree strongly with this statement. We feel that the very definition of the “industry” that we need to prepare our students to move into has evolved far past Ujkali’s definition. In the past twenty years, moving images/film production have come to permeate the sciences, engineering, medicine, law and just about every field of human endeavor; in fact, one can argue that the language of visual media has become the dominant mode of communication in our emerging digital world.

As a result, we feel that today one has to look at a film education from a much broader perspective then we would have twenty years ago when a film degree was still mostly regarded as preparation for a career in the much more proscribed film and television industry.

Today, the purpose of the film school has expanded considerably to become one of the main educational venues in which students can study and practice the language of visual media. This has led in the past fifteen years to a dramatic increase in both the demand for a film education and in the number and size of undergraduate film/media programs in the United States. Film schools are no longer solely preparing students for the film and television industry; they are also, and perhaps more importantly, preparing students for a career in the much larger and burgeoning media industry.
UNLV’s Department of Film, with its focus on visual storytelling, is therefore especially appealing to students interested in a broad film/media education. This is clearly evidenced by the large number of students that are enrolled in the program.

**IV. Quality of Program**

A. *What is the quality of the program compared with what you know of similar programs?*

The quality of the education that the students receive in the Bachelor of Arts in Film program is very comparable to similar programs at both public and private institutions. Its curriculum is both flexible and rigorous. The students in our focus group appreciated the fact that the large number of electives led them on a path of self-discovery that allowed them to explore and pursue their own particular interests within the broader field of filmmaking, though they did point out deficiencies in both pre-production and post-production areas.

The Co-Curricular Project is a highly innovative project that provides the students with a unique experience that bridges the educational and professional worlds. The students are highly appreciative of the educational value of this project, though they feel that it could better integrated into the curriculum especially during post-production.

The program has a highly professional and dedicated faculty that is well versed in both the aesthetic and practical dimensions of the filmmaking process. They are current with the latest aesthetic and technical developments taking place within the film industry. The students we interviewed praised their professors for both the quality of their classroom instruction and for their dedication to the students.

The student films that were submitted for review were well-crafted and original in their content. They were consistent in their overall quality with films produced in similar programs.

**V. Student Outcomes**

A. *Has there been improvement in the student outcomes in recent years?*

The alumnae of the program have continued to enter flagship MFA programs. Through the constant efforts of the Head of the Program, as well as other instructors, the depth of the program and its students are becoming better known in post-graduate programs.

It is unclear to us whether the program has been able to create more job placements, as there is no tracking data available. This is a complicated issue because of the rapid expansion of the definition of what we mean when we use the word “industry,” as well as the contraction of job possibilities in traditional feature film and television creation. As a result, this lack of post-graduation data is a problem that is common to nearly all film programs, including the largest.

The lack of a strong feature film industry in the Las Vegas area certainly puts the alumnae of the program at a disadvantage compared to alumnae from programs in the major media centers of Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Washington D.C. However, the ballooning of opportunities in other areas of the industry – corporate videos, wedding and event videography, web-based projects including web series and commercials, as well as crowd sourced projects,
off-network episodic, among others – has created opportunities that a story-based program such as UNLV’s is well positioned to take advantage of.

Though the students feel that they are getting enough production experience, they do not feel that they are being adequately prepared for employment in the industry. This is the main issue that was raised by the group of students in our focus group. They suggested that the establishment of both a formal internship program and an exit/transition course that focuses on the film industry would better prepare them for their transition into the industry.

We agree that the establishment of a formal internship program and a film industry focused transition course would greatly benefit the students in preparing them for their transition to the film industry. We also recommend that the program develop a system that tracks and assesses their graduates’ employment in the entertainment industry.

**B. Are the trends comparable to what other programs are experiencing?**

Once again, this is a complex question. The trends in the development of media education exactly mirror the trends in the industry and, as a result, impact every single program – from the large to the small. Perversely, even as the cost of equipment is coming down, the cost of providing quality media education is going up. It is now very easy for students to learn how to operate the latest cameras and editing software thanks to the ubiquity of online tutorials – both free and at low cost, as well as to the exploding number of classes which teach the technology. The barrier to entry is increasingly being lowered. This increases the number of people entering at the lower end of the job market, which is a factor at all university level programs.

If technical proficiency is no longer a differentiating factor in job placement, then the skills that can separate students of technical classes from those with a college degree, fall more to the ability of those students to be able to work collaboratively to fashion a better version of the director or producer’s story. In other words, a true media program needs to focus on the intricacies of the art of storytelling, in all of the ways that each individual craft can add to it. This implies a strong faculty, all grounded in modern technology, but even more importantly, grounded in the best ways of using each craft to shape stories. This also implies integrating the concepts of collaboration into our curricula.

All of this drives the cost of effective teaching up, as the hiring of good faculty becomes more complex – effective storytellers with a good grasp of modern technology is essential. This is a factor at all good film programs but is especially difficult for schools outside of the major film markets.

**C. What suggestions do you have to improve the outcomes?**

A clearer mission statement would be helpful. While it is important for the program’s mission to keep the students trained in cinema studies, a stronger binding of the cinema studies mission with the practical mission (“preparing students for a professional position in the entertainment industry”) will help the program define new outcomes that better prepare their students to enter and succeed in the media industry. It will also help the program to focus more on attracting
teachers with the proper combination of storytelling and practical experience. It will also, inevitably, evolve the curriculum in a way that can serve both prongs of the mission statement.

A commitment to a larger budget for more faculty and staff hiring would strongly improve outcomes. Recent faculty additions – in both the production and studies sides – are quite strong and will hopefully attract faculty with more experience in a variety of production capacities.

VI. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROGRAMS IN SYSTEM

A. Does there seem to be any barriers to students completing their degree in a timely manner?

None at all.

VII. COST

A. Is the cost of the program high or low compared with what you know of similar programs?

The cost of both the graduate and undergraduate curriculum programs are below that in the top state college film programs, but comparable to other schools. Undergraduate costs at UNLV are approximately $196 per credit. Graduate level classes are approximately $269 per credit. At 30 undergraduate credits per year, this is approximately $5,100 per year. UCLA, with a strong film program, charges over $12,000 per year. Florida State University, which is designing a well-known film program, has an approximate tuition fee of $6,500 per year (with a differential). Lab fees are, of course, variable. The popular film program at the North Carolina School of the Arts has tuition fees of $7,558 for in-state students (almost $21,000 for out of state).

It should be noted that at top research schools like USC, students are doing double majors and major/minors. This pushes their course load to 18 credits a semester, which would push the yearly tuition fees at UNLV to nearly $6,000. While this is still a bargain compared to private schools and other state schools, it narrows the gap. One further note is that with out of state tuition fees, UNLV’s cost rises to over $11,000, which is the equivalent of schools like UCLA in-state tuition.

VIII. QUALITY AND ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES

A. Is the quality of the program sufficient to obtain the desired outcomes?

At present, we feel that the quality of the program, while high, cannot possibly provide both of the solid outcomes as outlined in the mission statement. Because of the limited availability of resources, it is hard to give the students adequate mentoring — essential for graduate school admission — as well as for individual feedback on production projects, a fact mentioned by several students.

The students seem to have no issue with the quality of most of the teaching, except in terms of mentoring and the amount and types of feedback given to their production work.

B. Are the adequacy of the resources of the program sufficient to obtain the desired outcomes?
Resources – including equipment and equipment maintenance, modern stage space, as well as a faculty with depth and experience and the time for individual mentoring – seem to be stretched way too thin, making the desired outcomes difficult to attain.

In general, we find that most students who lean towards media creation are (for want of a better phrase) right-brained and project oriented. This puts pressure on resources to make sure that nearly every class in a film program utilizes media projects – not simply written work – as assignments, with all of the class-based and out-of-class feedback. This concentration on media creation puts strong pressures on equipment, in terms of quantity and maintenance.

In addition, because each new incoming class is composed of inexperienced users who need to learn the equipment and the processes involved in both film production and post-production, it is our experience that damage and loss is greater in film and media programs than in comparable arts based curricula. This means that replacement costs are higher, maintenance costs are large, and faculty and staff support must be greater. It is rare that faculty are able to give adequate technical support in these areas, as the skill sets involved are divergent, and the time and work flow needs too disparate. As a result, dedicated staff must be provided for the processes of equipment check-out and check-in, as well as upkeep and maintenance.

With the rapid evolution in technology, and the growing media awareness among incoming students, both faculty and filmmaking resources are under increasing pressure to change. Purchase of new equipment, and continuing professional development for staff and faculty, is a time-consuming and expensive proposition.

Additionally, the students in our focus group noted that there was a lack of avenues and classes for learning new media. At U.S.C. and Chapman, we find that many existing teachers are not comfortable with the concepts of new media and transmedia, necessitating the hiring of adjunct faculty to teach components of classes that involve these concepts. Our locations in and near Los Angeles make this easier than for schools outside of this major market.

Finally, inadequate mentoring and internship possibilities were mentioned as problems by the students. Both of these issues will require closer relationships with industry or educational partners, as well as more time for teachers to perform good educational mentoring. Once again, this is a difficult task in a market that is not a major film or television center. Yet, there are commercial production houses, new media and web houses, as well as alumnae with companies of their own. We note with enthusiasm Brett Levner’s initiatives towards deeper advising, as well as Professor Menendez’s Co-Curricular Project. These are positive moves in the direction toward providing strong possibilities for students to interact with professionals in a way that is difficult in an academic institution.

We encourage the program to develop closer ties with professional entities. It would help establish opportunities for internships and job placement for the program’s students and graduates. Establishing a strong industry advisory board would help the program identify trends in the local industry. This could also aid in creating opportunities for mentoring.
While we understand the great financial pressure at universities across the country, in general, and the particular pressures at UNLV, these expenses are the reality of maintaining a top film program in today’s climate. So long as the budget crunch at UNLV is so severe, it will be difficult to maintain the high outcomes that your faculty and students demand of the program.

IX. Commendations

We note at the outset that the review team was impressed with the Department and commends its members and the University administration for the many remarkable accomplishments that are identified in the self-study and in this external review.

- It offers a well-developed and flexible curriculum that, generally, supports the degree’s learning outcomes while also allowing the students to explore different areas within their field of study.

- The program is successful despite its limited resources. This is in great part due to its faculty members who are very passionate in their work and highly committed to their students and the program.

- The program is well integrated in a Liberal Arts environment. As one of the faculty members noted, “What distinguishes us from other programs is our combination of film studies and production.”

- The program fosters a culture among students that encourages teamwork and collaboration.

- The majority of the students are satisfied with the quality of their learning experience. According to the student survey done in the spring of 2012 close to half of the students (48.5 %) are very satisfied with the quality of their learning experience. While another third (36.4 %) are satisfied with the program.

- The program provides the students with the opportunity to do film productions, both inside and outside of class. We particularly would like to commend the Co-Curriculum Project for creating professional opportunities in an academic setting, in ways that many other schools have been unable to achieve.

X. Recommendations

Overall the program has grown beyond its original vision as a primarily film studies based degree that focuses mostly on the study of the language of visual storytelling. Now, in addition to its original mission, it also offers its students the possibility of following a traditional film production course of study. This shift is clearly reflected in the constitution of the faculty that has only one full-time faculty member with a film studies background, while the rest of the faculty have production backgrounds. It is time for the program to reassess itself.

1) There is some disconnect between the Department’s mission and the expectations of the
students. The students we interviewed were surprised to find out that one of the main missions of the Department of Film was to prepare them “for placement in a graduate program.” It was their understanding that the degree should prepare them for a successful career in the film industry. In our opinion, there needs to be a readjustment of the present balance between cinema studies and production to more accurately reflect the newer production-based goals.

2) Explore the possibility of setting up a two-tiered system, with both a BFA and BA (as at Cal State Long Beach, and in the new, upcoming undergraduate curriculum at U.S.C.). This would allow the program to focus its resources more effectively and allow its students to make a choice reflecting their interests in either cinema studies or film production.

3) One of the problems that we identified from both student and faculty interviews was the issue of a wide difference in the students’ dedication and work ethic towards production, with one interviewee saying that only 50% percent of the students were truly dedicated, with the others just “floating through.” We believe that this arises, in large part, because of the program’s split missions. A split BA/BFA program would help with this. In our experience, these issues also come from admissions and “pass-through” policies. Either a more rigorous selection process into the film program, or a practice of requiring higher GPAs to pass through to the upper class production classes (or BFA program) would address that issue.

4) There should be a clearer required exit class, which would help the students transition to the industry. There is currently a class in which they are taught how to do presentations, web sites, resumes, network and one that focuses on the different media industries. But, as the students perceive this class, it is too general and primarily addresses those who want to move into higher education, and does not provide adequate knowledge about moving into the professional media world.

5) Institutionalize a formal internship program. This is one of the areas that the students felt was particularly weak. They identified a strong lack of clinical and internship opportunities. While we realize that Las Vegas does not provide the amount of film video work done in major media markets one option would be to create a summer internship program in Los Angeles, as well as creating partnerships with local production and post-production house.

6) Post production seems to be inadequately covered, though we note the recent hiring of an editing faculty member. However, the class structure and curricula path has not seemed to change, to take advantage of the skills that she can bring. Post production and production sound also needs to be reinforced.

7) For a program that emphasizes storytelling, we note that many students stop taking screenwriting after the introductory course. This deficiency is further complicated by the fact that additional screenwriting classes are electives and can be taken in random order, rather than being fully integrated into the overall curriculum. Further writing classes or
writing/production classes should be required and structured in the curriculum for maximum effect.

8) There is a clear need for additional faculty, especially in sound recording/mixing, producing, and production design, as well in areas of emerging technologies such as (but not limited to) 3D/stereoscopic filmmaking, visual effects, interactive gaming, and animation. We note that, despite the curriculum’s emphasis on cinema studies, there is only one full-time film studies professor. Most of these classes are taught with adjuncts.

9) Because the purview of film schools has expanded to include the media arts in general, we would encourage this program to broaden its offering of classes beyond traditional filmmaking to include other forms of visual storytelling such as music videos, commercials, non-linear storytelling (such as gaming), and webisodes.

10) Integrate the Co-Curricular Project more into the overall curriculum of the program.

11) Create systems for program improvement based on assessment measures and outcomes. While the Department effectively measures student learning in several of its classes, the review team saw no evidence of the faculty taking specific actions to improve a program based on the evidence gathered from program assessment.

It would also be helpful, to survey how alumnae are doing in getting positions in the industry, as well as the types and quality of their projects.

12) As noted above, the facilities and equipment are inadequate for the type of program that the faculty and administration is creating.

13) Some faculty raised the issue of creating an MFA in Film Production. In our opinion, this is premature. The program needs to sort out its undergraduate program before creating an MFA.

14) Collaboration between the screenwriting program and the production program is limited. This is partially because there is a director-centric emphasis to the entire program, in which production students tend to create their own material. In our opinion, student work improves when they create projects which are not written by them. The program’s “auteur-centered” approach also does not mirror much of the work that they will be doing when they leave the program. We would recommend that some part of the students’ production work be required to be from material that they did not generate.

15) Explore the possibilities of integrating distance education in the curriculum. This would familiarize the students with rapidly developing technologies, as well as open up possibilities for interaction with faculty or speakers from out of the Las Vegas area.

NEXT STEPS
Please send this report to the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Dr. Michael Bowers at michael.bowers@unlv.edu. Expect your check to be mailed within 3 days of Dr. Bowers receiving the report. If you have not received your check within 2 weeks of submitting your report, contact Kristene Fisher at kristene.fisher@unlv.edu, 702-895-5182. Thank you for your assistance with this program review!