

Academic Program Review

Institution: Western Carolina University (WCU)
Program: Motion Picture & Television Production (MPTP)
Degree: Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)
Date: February / March 2009

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1 Introduction

The review team assembled on campus late Sunday February 22, 2009. An initial planning meeting took place that evening over dinner, with the site visit all day Monday February 23 and early Tuesday February 24.

We conducted the following meetings/events:

- Dinner meeting with Program Director Jack Sholder, full time tenure track MPTP faculty member Associate Professor Terry Curtis Fox and Brenda Lilly, part-time screenwriting faculty member.
- Breakfast meeting with MPTP Program Director Jack Sholder and full time MPTP faculty member, Associate Professor Arledge Armenaki.
- Campus Tour
- Meeting with Dean of the School of Fine & Performing Arts, Dr. Robert Kehrberg.
- Meeting with the Head of the Stage & Screen Department, Thomas Salzman.
- Meeting with English Department tenure track full time faculty member, Dr. Elizabeth Heffelfinger.
- Lunch meeting with students: 2 recent alumni and 5 current students.
- Meeting with full time and part-time faculty teaching in the Stage & Screen Department.
- Dinner meeting Thomas Salzman, Jack Sholder and Arledge Armenaki
- Breakfast meeting with WCU Provost, Dr. Kyle Carter.

We were extended full cooperation while on campus and were impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm shown by all faculty, staff and students.

2 Analysis of Program

2.1 Summary of Curriculum

The degree offered is a BFA in Motion Picture & Television Production. (Note: Television Production currently resides in the Broadcasting Area of the Department of Communications within the College of Arts and Sciences, an arrangement we believe should change. See Section 5.2.)

To complete the degree a student must be awarded 120 credit hours with the following components:

Liberal Studies	42
Motion Picture & Television Production Core	41
Concentration (Motion Picture OR Television)	21
Additional Courses	<u>16</u>
	120

Motion Picture & Television Production Core

This component includes one 100 level course, *Introduction to Communication Media*. At the 200 level students study production, storytelling and stagecrafts. The 300 level courses cover screenwriting, non-linear editing, producing and music / audio. The 400 level includes the only core directing course plus an internship and the Senior Project, which is the thesis component of the BFA.

Motion Picture Concentration

Students electing this concentration are introduced to basic acting principles, film studies and television production. They also advance knowledge already acquired in the specialized crafts of cinematography, screenwriting and directing, with the latter extended to the documentary mode.

2.2 Overall Structure & Flow of Curriculum

The curriculum follows the most common formula for start-up film programs: a freshman year entirely made up of general or liberal studies courses; incorporation in the sophomore year of introductory level production, screenwriting and storytelling; a junior year dominated by the motion picture component – some at introductory level and some at intermediate level; a final senior year focused on the thesis, supported by advanced study in directing and specialized aspects of post-production such as audio and motion graphics.

The strength of this approach is that it allows for course components to be managed (i.e. resourced and staffed) in discrete and flexible ways. The weakness is that there is a convergence point (typically in the second semester of the junior year) where the complexity of content and the level of demand on student time and performance escalate exponentially. Many students find the thesis is suddenly upon them and feel either insufficiently prepared or unreasonably constrained for time or both. Our discussions with MPTP students indicated serious concerns in this regard. Additionally, with the small number of full time MPTP faculty, many students feel there is insufficient faculty support and mentoring.

2.3 Curriculum Components

Generally the range of courses is adequate and the content is appropriate. The program would benefit from the incorporation of Producing (not just Production Coordination / Management) and Production Design, although most new programs tackle these specializations after the initial (establishment) phase. Three specific curriculum concerns arise:

- A It is wise to include a *Storytelling For The Screen* course but surprising that the suggested course plan places it in the second sophomore semester and after *Introduction to Screenwriting, Basic Production Technique, Stagecrafts* and the commencement of the *Production Practicum*. Consideration should be given to positioning *Storytelling For The Screen* as the first screen or staging course to be taken.
- B The *Production Practicum* course has two levels (I & II). The degree requires 2 credit hours of *Production Practicum I* (usually taken as a single credit hour each of the sophomore semesters) and 3 credit hours of *Production Practicum II* (usually taken as a single credit hour each of the junior year semesters and in the first senior year semester).

The syllabus for the two levels reads as a “check in” course whereby faculty monitor production students are involved in at the time. It is difficult to see how the necessary detail and individual attention can be delivered with this formulation. In fact, these courses appear to deliver no more than the monitoring provided in most film degree programs outside of (and supplementary to) the course structure. It is the nature of film and video production that 50 formal minutes one day a week is too small a time allocation to provide the continuity and multiple levels of analysis necessary for a cohort of students involved in a range of productions. Best practice for Practicum courses in film degrees is 2 to 3 hours of contact time per week.

Consideration should be given to revising this component of the degree to i) better align it with the realities of production; ii) articulate more detail and

depth in the course aims and learning outcomes and iii) increase contact time beyond a single credit hour per semester (50 minutes per week).

- C The craft syllabi (screenwriting, production, cinematography, directing and editing) are written more as backgrounds to mentorship or general summations of the craft in question than as rigorous educational documents. The format should be standardized to present clear frameworks for course aims, teaching methodologies, weekly lesson plans, assessment procedures and, most importantly, student learning outcomes. It is very important that learning outcomes be expressed in terms of actions: “Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to... identify / explain / apply / operate / analyze / investigate etc. (whatever is applicable for the course and level),” with the object of the actions clearly indicated. After confirming appropriate leveling and flow and standardizing syllabi as documents that articulate educational aims and learning process, the pre-requisite relationships may need some adjustment. It is important to align learning outcomes at one level with clear descriptions of required capacities for entry at the next connected course or level and to make sure students are performing adequately before advancing to higher-level course work.

2.4 Planning & Assessment

The professional film world construes product – the finished work – as documentation of achievement, along with success in the marketplace and/or critical and peer acclaim. This is not practical (and would not be sufficient even if it were) in the educational environment. All students are entitled to a thorough, contemporaneous and on-going documentation of their learning regardless of how much of their product gains external or professional recognition. This is the most difficult challenge for industry professionals charged with creating new film and video programs.

The WCU Motion Picture & Television Production program needs to do more to document student learning. The students we spoke with are unsure about their own progress and feel strongly that the program is inclined to “carry people who shouldn’t be there.” All students interviewed favor academic rigor and some are concerned that mid-term evaluations are erratic and not particularly helpful. The use of written mid-term evaluations of progress is essential across the whole curriculum.

Documentation of student learning is compromised by the issues covered in Section 2.3 (above). In general the course goals and outcomes are appropriate but they do need to be presented in educational rather than primarily vocational terms (which in no way devalues the vocational relevance of the learning). Syllabi that follow the standardized format suggested in Section 2.3 are the mechanism by which the institution articulates its formal teaching and learning relationship with the students.

Clarification of aims, methods and outcomes will help to identify where adjustments must be made to assessment activities.

Courses that require broad student collaboration generate individual grades from group work. Students we interviewed expressed concern that faculty do not always have an adequate basis for attributing performance in the group context to specific individuals. Many film programs derive individual grades in this way. However, it is important that the basis for this process is clear to the students from the outset and transparent as the work and the grading proceed. This requires more sophisticated management than is currently in place.

For example, the *Production Practicum I & II* syllabus (there is only a single document for these two courses) states that a list of items “will factor into the production aspect of your grade.” The first three items listed are:

- Quality and quantity of your active involvement in the production.
- Ability to help, advise and teach underclassmen in your crew.
- Ability to verbally communicate what you are trying to accomplish.

In the section How Things Work (The Rules), this statement appears: “Students will be asked to evaluate the quality of their partners’ collaboration. This will be part of your grade.” Near the end of the document there is an “Evaluation and Grading Policy” statement that informs the students they are participating in a “production learning process” and that “late work is absolutely not acceptable.” Then a grading scale is provided.

It is difficult to see how a student can actively manage her participation and success in these courses. As written the syllabus lacks specificity and sets up a *quid pro quo* relationship between students (something along the lines of “let’s give each other reasons to say nice things about our work”) that, while reflecting one key aspect of professional filmmaking, does not adequately present or manage the relationship of assessment to learning. The professional training provided is content, not pedagogy or course structure.

Students we spoke with said they did not complete all required peer evaluations and suggested this is common. We are unable to verify that claim, but if it’s the case, a central aspect of what the syllabus mandates is not taking place. Peer evaluation results are distorted unless there is full compliance. It can be helpful to use a matrix that draws on both peer evaluations and self-evaluations. When students are asked to reflect on their own performance alongside making evaluations of the performance of their peers they have mutual reference points.

The Program Director and the full-time faculty have a great deal of experience in the professional entertainment industries and the program benefits from this. However, they need to be supported to develop the pedagogical aspects of the MPTP degree.

Many conservatory oriented film programs employ similar transitional professionals. Each of these programs has had to confront the lack of pedagogical training and knowledge amongst this faculty and the need for faculty training and enrichment programs, especially related to curriculum design and assessment.

2.5 Student Body & Student Interests

The makeup of the program's student body is similar to that of most film programs: primarily male (more than three times as many male students as female) and white (there are currently no black or Native American students). Because the total student number (60 in Fall 2008) is small, comparative statistical analysis cannot provide an absolute measure of the program's sensitivity to minorities and gender. However, it is important to use such comparisons to inform future recruiting and the development of initiatives designed to support enrolled students.

At present 97% of the MPTP students are white; according to census data about 74% of the population in North Carolina is white. At present 22% of the MPTP students are female; 51% of the population of North Carolina is female. Continued work with WCU Admissions Office should target recruiting students of color and more female applicants.

From our interviews with students it appears there is a reasonable alignment between the goals and objectives of the program and the interests of the students currently enrolled. The one parameter for which this may not hold is career focus. While all the students expressed interest in learning about the "Hollywood" entertainment industry, a significant number do not plan to work in that environment after graduation. More effort needs to be made to focus on professional media and entertainment opportunities in North Carolina and adjacent areas. The goals and objectives of the MPTP program should be adjusted to accommodate a wider range of professional approaches and cultures. This can be done without diluting the coverage already given to the Los Angeles-based industry.

The alumni in the student group we met agreed that the program is built around the idea that graduates will go to Hollywood after completion of the degree. However, there is no formal component whereby the program helps them to achieve that goal – students lamented the absence of a job fair, a senior trip to Los Angeles, and particularly the absence of a capstone "transition to the profession" class. Consideration should be given to creating a "Professional Practice" survey course near the exit point of the degree that summarizes prior learning about roles and responsibilities and helps individual students to identify and target what most interests them in the professional world.

The key to success for a production-oriented film program is a low faculty-to-student teaching ratio. This allows all students equal hands-on access to equipment and instruction and is critical for student learning outcomes to be achieved.

Currently, the proportion of full-time faculty to students is too low and makes achieving this goal difficult. There are three full-time MPTP faculty, one teaching only screenwriting and film studies classes and two teaching outside of their specific areas of expertise. There is also a faculty member in another department whose primary teaching responsibilities are in the Motion Picture & Television Production degree.

Given that at present there are 60 MPTP students, this 20:1 ratio (full-time MPTP faculty to MPTP students) is deleterious to the mission of the program in terms of teaching, mentoring, supervising thesis projects and revising curriculum. It is important to stress that in film programs it's the program faculty on whom the burden of mentoring, thesis advising and curriculum revision falls. Supplementary faculty can make significant contributions to the delivery of credit hours in the classroom but minimally impact these central "conservatory" aspects.

The faculty we spoke with said they were told the mandated ratio of students to faculty is 15:1, but at other UNC campuses the ratio is 7.5 students for each faculty member. (All these ratios are currently under review due to budget cuts.)

The dissatisfaction engendered by a high faculty-to-student ratio was palpable in our meeting with the students, who perceive the faculty as being under constant pressure. "This program can't grow if the faculty can't grow," one student commented. "The reality doesn't live up to the hype," said another student, who elaborated that promised mentoring was not possible because of the faculty-to-student ratio. Students also complained that equipment and instruction were inadequate to the demands of the program now that it has grown: "We're trying to work the same way with 60 students as we did when we had 12."

While these quantitative issues are significant concerns that directly affect the reputation of the program and need to be addressed, it is important to note that the same students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the quality of faculty mentoring they have received. Their concerns are with the structure, not the performance of individual faculty. (All strongly advocated greater involvement of English Department faculty member Elizabeth Heffelfinger in the production process because of her extensive knowledge of cinema history and practice. They feel she can bring a much needed critical perspective to their work and our observations support that view.)

The full range of experience required to teach the entire program effectively is not yet available. For example, students are aware of the need for a dedicated editing instructor who can teach Final Cut Pro, which is the dominant nonlinear editing

technology used in the program. Film educators acknowledge a distinction between teaching creative expression through a craft and teaching the technologies employed to execute that craft. This is especially the case for complex, rapidly advancing areas like nonlinear digital editing and the students are right to expect access to an instructor with Final Cut Pro expertise.

Last academic year (2007-2008) the Motion Picture & Television Program accepted 25 applicants in the Fall and another 3 in the Spring, a number that fell to 17 in the Fall of 2008. The goal announced to us during our visit was to admit 125 students annually to retain 75-85 Stage and Screen Majors who complete the degree from each cohort. Of those, 60 would be Motion Picture and Television Production students and 15-25 would be enrolled as theater students.

There were only eight MPTP degree graduates last year but the program is planning for the future based on an assumption of 15 graduates annually and an influx of 50 new freshmen annually. Given last Fall's actual admission totals, that may be optimistic, although 30-35 students are expected to enter the major during their sophomore year.

While the reduced admission totals for Fall 2008 may have dampened overall student numbers, it could be a blessing in disguise as there will be a consequential lessening of stress on resources in two years - unless the number of transfer students is significantly increased. The program's stated goal of raising standards and the total number of students simultaneously needs to be seriously reconsidered in the light of available resources, staffing and funding. Each goal is worthy and achievable but faculty-to-student ratio, dedicated resources and academic rigor will all have to change for that to happen.

MPTP faculty expressed to us several times the desire to improve the quality of the students but presented no schema on which this will be based. We infer the desire is to admit candidates who have attained higher standards in their prior academic work and to challenge students more while they are in the program. Many of the current students present at our meeting complained that the program "carries" students who are not performing up to par. They were openly scornful of the minimum 2.5 GPA, saying that "C" students are dragging down their productions and classes. If there is to be a requirement for attainment of a minimum GPA by entry to the third year (as has apparently been discussed), a rationale and mechanism for implementation must be articulated. It will also be necessary to make students aware of the new standard and assist their efforts to achieve it.

We understand that entrance requirements have been instituted in the Spring 2009 semester and that applications to the program are now assessed on the basis of prior academic record (including GPA), an essay, an interview and evaluation of a portfolio or film analysis paper. At the time of the review it was not clear as to how these

different components are weighted or the level required for acceptance to the program.

A portfolio review component has also been added in Spring 2009 for students transitioning from sophomore to junior years. We did not see the details – pedagogical analysis, specific methodologies, formative preparation (if any) or consequences. Such reviews provide an important mechanism to link performance and advancement in the program. Consideration should be given to expanding this to a full “body of work” approach whereby students are guided to build a portfolio as they progress through the degree. (As we understand it the current portfolio is more passively created: a collection of products rather than a learning process in its own right.) As with all curriculum instruments, Body of Work components require well-articulated aims, specified methodologies, linkage to learning outcomes and transparent evaluation processes that include formative and/or mid-term events.

Similar clarity needs to be brought to the formal critiques of Senior Thesis projects and the grades that process generates. At present the students are confused by how this is handled and feel the link between their efforts and the grades they are given is opaque.

Students want a relevant handbook for production and other aspects of the program. Materials of that type help production-based programs to run smoothly and make an important contribution to the growth of a local culture. The faculty acknowledges that current adaptations of Chapman University and UNCSCA’s student handbooks may not be relevant to the WCU program as it exists and are working on creating a custom MPTP handbook. This is prudent and should be treated as a priority: it’s something that is relatively easy to do but will have a major impact on efficiency and the building of a “school culture.”

3 *Analysis of Faculty*

3.1 **Faculty Qualifications**

The full-time faculty contributing to the Western Carolina University Motion Picture & Television Production BFA degree are eminently qualified to teach almost all of the classes made available for examination via their syllabi. Like the faculty in many film and TV production-oriented programs, their primary training and expertise is as professionals in the film and TV industries, and not in academia and pedagogy. The MPTP program is fortunate to have working professionals with such deep and widespread industry credits.

Arledge Armenaki has extensive teaching and filmmaking experience, and is expert in his knowledge of cinematography and documentary filmmaking. His load is particularly heavy, however, with as many as 16 credit hours in one term, an excessive load for any faculty member. Mr. Armenaki did not provide details of what school committees he serves on and what specific school service he delivers, although he seems thoroughly engaged with the students. His experience at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts is much better documented in his CV than details of his work at Western Carolina University.

While Associate Professor Armenaki is an excellent cinematography and documentary teacher, editing is not his specialty. However, he has been called on to teach this subject. The program statement we were given promised that by Fall 2008 all faculty members would be up to date on all technology they teach in the program. Mr. Armenaki should either receive the required training or another teacher with appropriate training be hired to teach editing.

A similar situation exists with Jack Sholder, who is currently also teaching non-linear digital editing without appropriate experience of the software – Final Cut Pro. His situation is further complicated by the additional responsibility of being Program Director. (This is addressed more fully in Section 3.2 below.)

Terry Curtis Fox did not supply a traditional academic curriculum vitae for the review so we are not certain of his educational qualifications, although we believe he holds a graduate degree. Mr. Fox has designed exceptionally intelligent course offerings in the MPTP program, including individual classes that analyze adaptation, study an entire season of television series THE WIRE and focus on the elegant screenplays of Billy Wilder. It is a shame that Associate Professor Fox, the one tenure-track professor within the MPTP program, is not more fully engaged with the aesthetic aspects of the degree, where a fertile collaboration between him and Dr. Heffelfinger could greatly benefit the students.

Assistant Professor Elizabeth Heffelfinger has the most traditional academic background of any faculty teaching in the Motion Picture & Television Production program, and her goal of teaching film studies to production students on their level is

both admirable and effective. However, currently only 20% of the motion picture students take her electives, which is too low a percentage to have the desired impact and undervalues the considerable benefit for students of integrating theoretical and practical aspects of filmmaking. According to Dr. Heffelfinger, to truly incorporate cinema studies into a production-oriented program like MPTP (as more and more film schools are attempting to do) will take a radical re-evaluation, a conclusion with which we agree.

The students we met singled out part-time faculty member Brenda Lilly as a valuable teaching adjunct with whom they would like to have greater contact. Some expressed what seems to us a very wise request for Ms. Lilly to stay connected to their projects in the production phase. Unfortunately, Ms. Lilly's resume failed to provide any courses she has taught or currently teaches and did not specify her formal position at WCU. This lack of professional materials was the case for several faculty members. Missing were conventional curriculum vitae, lists of courses taught with associated credit hours, and/or professional résumés. For example, it was unclear from the materials provided exactly what Mark Mattheis teaches. This is detrimental to the program and needs to be addressed.

Students are highly desirous of continuity in part-time faculty. There has been a steady parade of individuals teaching one term and then vanishing and at times a lack of consistency in a particular subject (for example, producing) as part time instructors come and go. The availability of qualified adjuncts is beyond the control of the program leadership. Nevertheless, careful management of the contributions part time faculty make to the program is always important, particularly when there is a low proportion of full-time faculty for the student numbers. The focus has to be on stabilizing the program's curriculum and teaching approach.

Minutes of departmental faculty meetings were sometimes detailed, and sometimes brief and incomplete. Accurate and relevant minutes, disseminated and discussed, can help bring clarity and focus to the self-evaluation of the program. We suggest that for each meeting there be a clear agenda accompanied by notes on business transacted, decisions made, actions agreed and deadlines for completion and/or reporting. Action items should be agenda items in the following meeting.

While Head of the Stage & Screen Department Thomas Salzman is not a faculty member in the MPTP program and therefore not directly reviewed in this report, we want to express how impressed we are with Mr. Salzman's passion for his department and the considerable strategic and planning skills he brings to his role. In our discussions with him, Mr. Salzman showed a deep understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with the combining of stage and screen crafts. He is realistic about both aspects and deeply committed to the students and faculty in the MPTP program. Now that the establishment phase is completed, the collaboration between the Head of Stage & Screen and the MPTP Program Director is crucial and Mr. Salzman can play a major role in helping the Program Director and the

MPTP faculty (all of whom have industry backgrounds) to develop their skills as professional educators.

3.2 Resources and Support for Faculty

As noted in 3.1 (above), there are effectively 3 full-time faculty members assigned to the MPTP Program, one of whom also serves as Program Director. A fourth full-time faculty member resides in the English Department (where the Motion Picture Studies section she heads is housed) but currently teaches three quarters of her load in MPTP. The rest of the MPTP teaching is provided by part-time faculty supplemented with specialist instruction from other WCU professors in fields such as Music & Audio.

WCU follows the standard practice of only offering tenure-track positions and granting tenure to holders of a terminal degree. In the case of MPTP this means only one current full-time faculty member is in the tenure track (plus Dr. Heffelfinger in the English Department) and there are no tenured faculty dedicated entirely to the program.

From the documents provided and the discussions we had with faculty we believe the procedures for rank, tenure and promotion are appropriate and that faculty salaries fall within prevailing norms for this academic field. However, the program is under-resourced in terms of full-time faculty.

Jack Sholder has 6 credit hours of teaching time released to lead the program, although in the current semester he is teaching 9 credit hours so is only released for 3. Mr. Sholder is an experienced film director who is currently the only teacher of narrative directing. He is also teaching the *Non-Linear Editing* course even though his knowledge of editing is aesthetic and by his own admission he does not have sufficient understanding or experience of digital non-linear editing technologies. It is admirable that Mr. Sholder is willing to lead the program, teach the directors and deliver some of the editing component. However, this does not serve the best interests of the students or the program.

Half a full time teaching load is the minimum required for a Program Director to establish and run a program of this nature – many film program leaders do not teach at all or are only required to teach one course per semester (size of program is a minor factor: the demand can be greater in a small program because of minimal management support structures such as dedicated department staff). Regardless of the formulation, this program will benefit if program leadership is the primary function of one individual with teaching as their secondary role. Mr. Sholder has successfully led the establishment of the degree and with appropriate training and support could continue to serve as an insightful and energetic Program Director. It is unlikely that he can continue to perform as much of both of these roles – program leadership and teaching - in the next phase of the MPTP program's development as

he has to date and should be supported to step back a little from one or other of these responsibilities.

We recommend one new full-time faculty position in Post-Production with emphasis on non-linear digital editing. Ideally the person hired would also supply expertise in sound recording, sound mixing and post-production workflow.

Professional film production is controlled by producers. When film degree programs do not have a faculty member with that expertise the central catalyzing role is absent and the void has to be filled by the other craft specialists. Many benefits would accrue if the MPTP program had a full-time Producing faculty member: 1) Producing could be offered in the curriculum, providing an additional educational strand and strengthening the other specializations; 2) student productions, the primary practical aspect of the degree, would be better planned and executed; 3) completed student work would be of a higher standard and more likely to make the wider world aware of what is being achieved at WCU; 4) graduates would have viable producing skills regardless of their area of focus; such skills are sought after in new entrants to the film industry regardless of their long term field of interest.

We recommend one new full-time faculty position in Producing. Ideally the person hired would also supply expertise in Production Management and Assistant Directing.

Reference Resources:

The review team was not able to directly evaluate the campus Library during the site visit. We did, however, discuss the library and other reference resources with some faculty, who report that MPTP studies are well supported in that regard.

We were hoping to be provided with a list of DVDs and other video material controlled by and utilized by the program, but the only link provided was to Library databases in the film and theater area. Primarily oriented towards academic journals, these databases are rarely employed by film students, other than film studies' students doing research papers. They are most useful to faculty for the preparation of lectures.

It was encouraging to see the Library does have a subscription to the *Hollywood Reporter*, but oddly, not to *Variety* or *Daily Variety*. All these publications are valuable resources for student internships and employment opportunities and we recommend subscription to them.

We would suggest the school keep a current list of all available DVD titles to be used in the classroom and for optional screenings, so that faculty are up to date in their knowledge of what material they can use.

3.3 Staff

At least as important as the faculty positions we are recommending is the creation of a full-time staff position dedicated to managing equipment checkout, safety procedures, staging and production workflow. We know of no comparable program that does not have at least one dedicated full-time staff position to cover these responsibilities. We strongly urge WCU to find a way to fund this position: educational delivery will be greatly enhanced and student frustrations with equipment and scheduling limitations significantly ameliorated.

In our meeting with students, all expressed the view that equipment for the MPTP program had not increased in proportion to enrollment growth and production complexity. While there is some basis for these complaints (see Section 4.2 below), we feel the more important issue is organizational infrastructure. The Program Director and one or two key faculty are trying to cover all bases and when students are frustrated with a specific aspect such as scheduling or equipment resources that manifests as negativity about the program and/or the Director and faculty. Distinct program leadership, specialized teaching and day-to-day oversight of operational systems are required to maximize current resources and make future growth possible. The first two are in place but without a dedicated full-time staff member the third cannot be achieved.

3.4 Teaching, Research / Creative Activity and Service

From the evidence presented we believe the full-time MPTP faculty members are staying current in their individual professional disciplines of directing (Sholder), screenwriting (Fox) and cinematography (Armenaki). This also appears to be true for adjunct or part-time faculty. Traditional research papers and conference presentations do not usually predominate among faculty whose origins are in the profession, however, most film programs do find ways to support their faculty with industry backgrounds in the development of that aspect of being a professional educator.

The University Film & Video Association (UFVA) is the most important national organization in that regard. Professor Sholder has made a particular effort to stay current in film teaching pedagogy by actively involving himself in the UFVA's annual conference, and by seeking out feedback and practical advice from other film school program heads.

Associate Professor Armenaki has stayed very active professionally, shooting several music and informational videos, and engaging in an admirable collaboration with the Stage component of the department on the Young Cherokee Theater project.

Professor Armenaki provided several examples of Engaged Learning activities in which he participates with students. This kind of documentation should serve as a model for all faculty in the program to support their teaching activities.

Continuing work by other faculty was not specifically documented. The same is true for overall service to the university and the department. It should be acknowledged that many un-credited hours are spent planning curriculum revisions, dealing with the realities of independent student filmmaking, and mentoring, which often involves coming to the rescue of students adrift in the choppy seas of film school production. This can leave little time for formal service to the greater institution and typically requires active management by the Program Director and senior administrators.

4 Analysis of Operational Facilities & Budget

4.1 Adequacy of Facilities for Educational Mission

The current Motion Picture & Television Production facilities are no longer adequate as a result of the success and growth of the program. WCU is supporting changes that will improve this situation, especially with respect to stage and lecture space.

MPTP is using one small performance space (Killian 132) for basic production, intermediate and advanced cinematography and intermediate and advanced directing. While this has been adequate for establishment of the program, the space is too small for future needs. The proportions (a close to square footprint) suit live multiple camera television coverage but not cinematic approaches. Until an adequate space is available the teaching will continue to be based on “proscenium arch with a camera” – that is, theatrical staging captured from an objective viewpoint. Film education requires a deeper, more organic approach whereby the performers and the camera can achieve a dynamic (albeit manipulated) interplay that makes it possible to utilize the screen as a dramatic conduit rather than a mere presentation surface.

The university plans to refurbish an unused television studio in the Ramsey Activity Center for the MPTP program, which is larger than Killian 132. It still has some of the limitations inherent in being designed for television presentation but is more conducive to the layout required for cinematic production than the current stage. We did not see physical plans or budget details for the Ramsey project. Access to an appropriate production teaching space is a priority for the MPTP program and the plan to commission the Ramsey studio for that purpose is a prudent medium term solution. Eventually the MPTP program will need a space designed for motion picture production in order to serve its stated goals and to be competitive in the film education market.

MPTP has one dedicated Media Laboratory equipped with 18 iMac computer workstations running Apple’s Final Cut Studio 2 digital non-linear editing software and Screenwriter scriptwriting software (version 6). Six of these iMacs also run Entertainment Partners Budgeting and Scheduling software. The Hunter Library houses an additional 24 iMacs running Final Cut Studio and Adobe’s Creative Suite. There are also 16 PCs in the Hunter Library on which students can access AVID Media Composer digital non-linear editing software. Some other hardware and software used by MPTP is housed in the CAT Sound Studio.

The Media Lab will soon be moved to a room in the Belk Building located close to the offices the Program Director and full-time MPTP faculty will occupy at the same time. When we visited campus it was unclear as to the funds allocated to affect this move and we did not see any plans for physical layout, cabling, projection etc. Media labs are specialized facilities and very difficult to reconfigure once they are operating. This

is especially problematic for small programs with only one main lab. We strongly encourage the preparation of a complete logistics and operations plan before the move is completed. Most film schools do that planning in a Spring semester then make the move and test the new facility during the Summer period.

We are concerned that to the uninitiated – such as a freshman student or prospective students and their parents – the physical layout of the Motion Picture & Television Production program is confusing and akin to being in a maze. This is always a possibility when a new program has to be dispersed according to where space accommodations can be made. Nevertheless, it did not appear that this negative aspect has been fully considered in decisions such as the relocation of faculty offices and the Media Lab to the Belk Building. We are not suggesting that the Belk move or renovation of the Ramsey Studio are bad decisions but rather drawing attention to the need for complete cost / benefit analyses to be completed and shared with the constituency. Having centralized classrooms, stages (and/or “black boxes”) and a dedicated space out of which to base student production is essential for the curricular coherence of a film program.

We strongly advocate the generation of a space analysis that includes modeling of use patterns and student production workflow plus projections for future needs if the planned growth happens. Careful consideration has to be given to the spatial and organizational coherence of the program. Facilities should be designed and configured for optimal student convenience, operational efficiency and resource accessibility, a situation that does not exist in the current physical layout.

The Niggli Theater is being refitted to serve as the principal screening facility for the MPTP program. This is in the Stillwell Building, which houses the overall Department of Stage & Screen but no film faculty offices. It would be wise to consider inclusion of an office for faculty presenting screening based lectures in the Niggli Theater to share.

We understand that the refit of the Niggli Theater is based on using a medium quality digital projector set up so that the projector and associated DVD player have to be operated from the projection booth. This should be re-examined and serious consideration given to i) purchasing the highest quality projector possible and ii) facilitating DVD player and projector control from a remote instructor station. Contemporary students will only respond to classic films when they are screened in the manner most closely approximating 35 mm film presentation; otherwise they prefer to watch movies on their computers. This compromises the teaching and learning, as does the inability of instructors to directly control when and how the projected material is incorporated into their classroom presentations.

Finally, we note that the Fine & Performing Arts Center has wonderful teaching spaces that are well suited to film instruction but are currently not available to MPTP faculty or students.

4.2 Production Equipment

Students we spoke with expressed concern at the quantity and type of production equipment available to them. They feel this aspect of the program has not been supported in direct proportion to the growth in student numbers and the consequent increase in production.

It is difficult to teach cinematographers (and, by extension, directors and other heads of department) with only tungsten color temperature lights, but all the MPTP program lighting is that type: no daylight lamps are available. This could be resolved incrementally over the next two to four budget cycles. However it is achieved, the acquisition of basic daylight lamps along with ancillary grip equipment is important.

While the program has access to an F900 HD movie camera we understand that the peripheral equipment necessary to make it a viable production unit is not available.

We suggest it is time to complete an “Equipment Needs” audit based on requirements to meet what the curriculum mandates in the classroom and in student productions, which are a central component of course work.

4.3 Adequacy of Budget for Educational Mission

We were provided with Excel Budget documents for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. The MPTP tab on these worksheets shows the general expenses met for the MPTP program; that is, a record by date of purchase orders, check requisitions and payroll payments allocated to expense categories alongside a running “expended” total and a running “remainder to spend” total. There are separate tabs that do the same thing for specific funds, several wage categories, visiting artists and special events.

We were not able to compare the predictive budgeting process with the actual expenditures for any of these tabs other than to see a total amount allocated. For example, in 2007-2008 there was \$10,000 for Visiting Artists and \$14,250 for General MPTP Expenses. The amount allocated for Visiting Artists appears appropriate but the amount allocated for general funds (the MPTP tab - \$14,250 in 2007-2008) seems low in comparison for the scale of the program. Wages are within current parameters in the field, although, as articulated in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 (above) we believe the MPTP program needs to immediately budget for a dedicated full-time staff member and up to two new full-time faculty positions.

5 *Program Strengths and Areas for Improvement*

5.1 **Current Strengths**

The Western Carolina University Motion Picture & Television Production BFA degree serves an important need for its state constituency and makes a valid contribution to film and video education at the national level. Professional filmmakers and educators have collaborated to establish a strong platform for growth both in terms of student numbers and the quality of the work students and alumni produce. The program has the support of the WCU Senior Administration and the leaders of its major academic units, who understand what will be required to extend the program in the future.

The pairing of Stage & Screen in a single department is an exciting and interesting approach that contributes some strengths and some challenges. Many film students don't get to learn their craft with actors who are learning themselves. MPTP students have the opportunity to discover in subtle ways how performance works for the screen and will be less likely to see actors merely as living props to be manipulated in front of the camera. (The challenges are noted in 5.2 below.)

At present the faculty are the program's greatest strength. The full-time and part-time faculty members currently contributing to the MPTP program are well qualified and show exceptional commitment; this includes faculty members from other departments such as Dr. Elizabeth Heffelfinger (English) and Dr. Bruce Frazier (Music & Audio). All are passionate about their work and share a sense that they are doing something important for the region and the field.

The MPTP curriculum provides a broad foundation for undergraduate study and includes some important specialized aspects, particularly in the areas of screenwriting, cinematography, directing and editing. A genuine effort has been made to inculcate professionalism in the program. Where possible, professional attitudes are modeled and the students' learning is directly linked to their performance as creative collaborators within highly specialized craft areas. The Program Director and faculty are doing an excellent job of exposing their students to professional filmmakers, finding internship opportunities and helping alumni to make connections after graduation, albeit primarily with an emphasis on the mainstream or "Hollywood" film industry.

5.2 **Possible Improvements**

The curriculum needs to be audited on several levels. Individual courses are generally strong (notwithstanding mechanical issues with syllabi) but leveling, flow (sequencing, course exit/course entry relationships), learning outcomes and assessment procedures all require work. This is academic management and distinct from expertise in the fields being taught. The Program Director is an industry

professional so if it falls to him he will need additional training and/or support. (We are confident he can complete this task successfully with the appropriate support.)

While the combination of Stage & Screen is a definite strength, it is important to acknowledge the associated challenge: a tendency to use the camera to objectify theatrical performance. This makes it even more important to have staging facilities that allow for cinematic performance and filming. Television studios are designed for multiple camera cover with live switching, which is more akin to objective capture of a theatrical performance than cinematic single camera filming predicated on feeding raw footage to ellipsis-based editing.

Television Production is housed in the Broadcasting Program, part of the Department of Communication within the College of Arts & Sciences. The MPTP program will be improved greatly if Television is brought into MPTP and this should be considered an urgent priority. Cinema and Television share many of their key components (with variations) and are linked in the majority of schools. To give one example, even though there are differences between writing for cinema and writing for television, the two disciplines share much more than television does with any other broadcast mode because they both depend on dramatic visualization. Most importantly, professionals move back and forth between cinema and television much more than they do between television and the other broadcast modes and the industry looks for new entrants with experience of that interplay. The program under review is called “Motion Picture & Television Production” and both components should be within the one unit.

The stage facilities available to MPTP need to be upgraded and this appears to be underway with the intended move to the Ramsey Studio although, as we noted earlier (Section 4.1) this is only a short to medium term solution.

The MPTP production equipment is no longer adequate for the program. There is an urgent need to acquire at least some daylight lamps and related grip equipment.

6 Summary of Recommendations

The result of our review of the Western Carolina University Motion Picture & Television Production Program is to make the following recommendations:

- Create a new full time faculty position in Post-Production.
- Create a new full time faculty position in Producing.
- Create a full time *Manager of Operations* staff position.
- Clarify the faculty-to-student ratio, taking into account the mentoring needs of conservatory style film education.
- Move Television Production from Broadcast into MPTP.
- Clarify the role of Program Leader and distinguish the associated responsibilities from teaching.
- Establish a mechanism for faculty development, especially in the area of pedagogical analysis, curriculum creation, course planning and assessment.
- Audit and standardize all MPTP syllabi using a formulation based on Course Aims, Teaching Methodologies (Lesson Plans), Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Procedures derived from the Learning Outcomes.
- Develop mid-term events for all courses that include written reports to students.
- Write a formal strategic plan that includes growth and retention projections plus mechanisms for on-going evaluation and adjustment.
- Continue to develop entrance requirements and mechanisms for performance-based advancement in the program.
- Complete an “Equipment Needs” audit that generates budget planning for incremental purchase of essential production resources, including camera packages, lighting (especially daylight balanced) and grip equipment.
- Consider making *Storytelling For The Screen* the first MPTP course students take and establishing it as a true introduction to screen culture and screen language that integrates theory and practice to prepare all students regardless of specific area of interest.
- Reformulate the *Production Practicum* courses to achieve at least 2 hours of continuous class time per week.

- Move to predictive program budgeting and dynamic fiscal management based on “actuals” reporting.
- Continue to work on ways to draw minority students in numbers that more directly reflect North Carolina demographics.
- Broaden connections to media and entertainment professions beyond the current Hollywood emphasis.
- Explore options for direct integration of theoretical and practical components of the program, possibly through Dr. Heffelfinger becoming involved in “work-in-progress” critiques.
- Produce a Program Handbook designed specifically for the WCU Motion Picture & Television Production degree.
- Broaden subscriptions to film industry publications such as *Variety* and establish a complete database of DVD and other materials relevant to film studies and production.
- Standardize and regularly update faculty curriculum vitae, including résumés of professional work, academic achievements and college and community service.
- Provide an MPTP faculty office near the Niggli Theater.
- Equip the Niggli Theater with a high-end digital projector and provide instructors with remote control of the projector and DVD player from a teaching rostrum.
- Complete a space and utilization analysis with the aim of maximizing the organizational coherence of the program.