

## **Full Report**

**Academic Unit Review: Department of Film  
Faculty Of Media, Art, and Performance  
University Of Regina  
June 2022**

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## **Preamble**

As one of longest established film programmes in Canada, the Department of Film at the University of Regina occupies a key place in the country's educational and cinematic landscape. As the only film department between Ontario and British Columbia that offers degrees in both production and studies, it is important not only to the province of Saskatchewan but to the Prairies as a whole that the department continues to flourish. The Department has faced many challenges over the past decade – from cuts to the province's film production tax credit system in 2014 to the onset of a global pandemic – yet remains in rude health, ready to continue its work in the years to come.

The strength of the department resides in the expertise of its faculty and its history of student-centered learning. Its members are leaders in their respective fields, producing innovative research and ground-breaking films. But in addition to this scholarly and creative work, there is clearly a firm commitment to teaching in the department and, because of its relatively small size, an ability to mentor students in a way that would be impossible in larger programmes at other universities. This is something to be both celebrated and preserved, and our recommendations here seek not to transform the department into something else, but to build on the strengths, extant expertise and excellence, and to work with the collegial culture that has sustained the programme in recent years, while also not losing sight of the reality of rapidly transforming field of cinema and ensuring relevance of the Department of Film in the future .

## Recommendations

**1. Faculty Renewal.** With at least four faculty retirements on the horizon – all slated to happen over the next 5 to 7 years – the department faces a potential staffing crisis. This is particularly acute given that the faculty members due to retire have been key in shaping the department and its curriculum. The department bears the marks of their research expertise and creative practice, as well as its healthy culture of collegiality and student-centred learning. They are nationally and internationally recognized experts in their respective fields and their work has distinguished the University of Regina as a key site for film culture.

Central to the long-term health of the department is the assurance that these retiring faculty members will be replaced with tenure-stream faculty. With a full-time faculty complement of only nine, these retirements represent nearly half of the department and the loss of even one of these positions would necessitate not only a restructuring of the unit, but an overall reduction in what it can offer.

### *Maintenance of Existing Faculty Numbers and Plans for Future Department Expansion*

Over the course of our interviews, several faculty members noted that the Film Department in these past few years has been “stretched thin” but has nevertheless “stepped up” in terms of ensuring a continuity of offerings even as individual members received research leaves, took on administrative positions in MAP and for the university, and developed initiatives that deepened the connections between the University of Regina and the wider community, both in Regina and in Saskatchewan as a whole. If, in these difficult economic times, increasing the number of faculty members in the department appears unlikely, it is essential that the current number of tenure-stream members be maintained at 9, and replacement hires being at the Assistant Professor level rather than Lecturer. Given the success of the department, in terms of research output and enrollment numbers, as well as its commitment to the administrative operation of the university overall and its success in expanding its hybrid and online course offerings in a way that has opened up its expertise to students from across the province and beyond, the department should top the list of departments meriting expansion as soon as budgeting allows.

### *Development of a Transition Plan*

In the interim, the department needs to develop a transition plan to ensure that the administrative expertise, institutional memory, and general knowledge about departmental operations can be passed onto the incoming group of new faculty members. Though this is true of the production stream, it is particularly important with regards to the studies stream, which currently comprises three full professors and one senior associate professor. There is a need here to ensure that new faculty members are both supported and mentored by this more senior group of scholars and not forced into a position of having to take on too many administrative duties too early in their career as a result. For the department to flourish into the next decade, it needs to ensure that these new faculty members have the

opportunity to develop their research in their tenure-track and early tenured years rather than being prematurely conscripted into administrative duties. Given the small size of the department and significant number of faculty retirements in the very near future, we strongly recommend that this transition include staggered hires of tenure-stream faculty to avoid overwhelming the incoming faculty as well as present faculty and staff. In addition, staggered hires also allow for more targeted job postings and time to consider issues of EDI in the hiring process and in the recruitment of candidates from one or more of the underrepresented groups.

### *Meeting EDI Commitments*

Guided by the admirable and ambitious EDI initiatives detailed in the University's Strategic Plan, the Department of Film has expressed its firm commitment to ensuring that its faculty complement reflects the wider Regina community and a changing Saskatchewan. The Department, and University more generally, face the challenge of teaching a student body that is changing more quickly than they are and who are, quite justifiably, demanding a seismic shift in the demographic make-up of both the university's faculty and administration. Given the centrality of the EDI initiative to the Strategic Plan, the Department will presumably have the support of MAP and the University Administration in efforts to accelerate this overdue process. Though it goes beyond the scope of what the Department can do internally or on its own, this review nevertheless strongly recommends that the Film be afforded the opportunity to realize its EDI commitments through the hiring of new faculty.

### *Accelerating Departmental Change*

Although it is common for faculty renewal to take place only on a replacement basis, with retirements themselves triggering this process, given the cluster of departures set to take place in the Department of Film in the near future, this review strongly recommends the department work with the Faculty of MAP and the University administration to develop a plan which would stagger this process and to ensure a smooth transition between the department's present and its future. The ideal scenario would for some of these replacement hires to happen early, producing an overlap between incoming and outgoing faculty members. In the absence of these ideal conditions, a plan that would reduce the burden and expectations on the future members must be developed. This is especially important given that many of these new hires will be from groups – women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ2S+ – that, as several studies have confirmed, bear a disproportionate burden of administrative labour and face increased workload as a result of the formal and informal mentoring of students from marginalized groups.

### *Recognizing the Contributions of Limited-Term, Sessional, and Contract Faculty*

The Film Department has benefited enormously from the contributions of Limited-Term, Sessional, and Contract Faculty over the years, and it is clear that they play a crucial role not only in the delivery of the curriculum but in the creation of a vibrant and collaborative learning environment for their students. Although much of what shapes the experience of

these department members is beyond the purview of department decision-making - governed by Collective Agreements and controlled by administrative decisions at higher levels - we recommend that Film strive to recognize the important contributions these department members make to the culture of the department and advocate for the recognition of these contributions at the Faculty and Administrative levels.

The recognition of their contributions should not so much be an award, although awards always help with boosting group morale, but rather take more practical forms. Job security is among the most stressful aspects of university employment for these faculty members and although some decisions are beyond the control of the department, e.g., last-minute course cancellations due to low enrollment, decisions about assignments of courses to faculty remain within the department. COVID-19 pandemic introduced virtual classrooms and online courses at an unprecedented level, while also providing opportunities to hire faculty from other parts of Canada or the world because geographical distance is no barrier in virtual classrooms. Although the prospect of hiring renowned scholars and artists presents very exciting opportunities for students and the department and ought to be explored, the department's sessional and contract faculty should not be forgotten or kept in the dark about the department's plans that will have direct effect on their employment. Given that these colleagues play a significant part in the design and delivery of the curriculum, as well as in the overall culture of the department, recognizing these contributions by including these colleagues in discussions about future plans of the department can go a long way, especially if these include courses they designed and/or have taught for a long time being assigned to new faculty. Better communication and sharing important information are key, e.g., noting earmarked courses and general orientation for new contract faculty that would include essential information about reimbursement of expenses, per/diems, location of their mailbox, among others. Transparency through inclusion in discussions about future plans of the department and sharing of information is a form of recognition of these faculty members' contributions and as valued members of the department. This recognition will go a longer way than any award and ensure healthy collegial culture in the department.

**2. Student Recruitment.** Enrollment numbers in the Department of Film are healthy, and there is justified optimism that the recently announced Creative Saskatchewan funding for film, television, and the creative industries will stimulate interest in the programme and attract new students who will see a future for themselves in the province and will want a homegrown programme to prepare them for it. In order to grow the programme and ensure healthy enrollments in the years to come, the Department of Film needs to enhance its recruitment strategies.

### *Harnessing the Power of Alumni*

The Department of Film should draw on the goodwill, enthusiasm, and expertise of its alumni. It was clear from the session with those who have graduated from the department that there is real admiration and affection for both the programme and its professors, and a willingness to participate as ambassadors for it. The Department needs to develop a scheme whereby current and prospective students can see not only the success of those

who have graduated from the programme, but to make visible the sheer range of creative and professional opportunities. The programme has produced working independent filmmakers, industry professionals working on large productions, producers running their own companies, media and communications specialists, multi-talented content creators, and their success can be harnessed – through special talks and roundtables, in-class visits and workshops, sessional teaching opportunities, website features, and so on – to inspire a new generation of students and to bolster enrollment in what is clearly a successful degree programme. The alumni we met were enthusiastic about the possibility of mentoring film students, e.g., connecting them with film industry and fine arts institutions, providing information about where to look for professional experience opportunities and sharing the ones that come available, thereby improving students' chances of employment in the field after graduation.

### *Promoting the Studies Stream*

The majority of current students and alumni that we spoke to came from Film Production rather than Film Studies, and this suggests that the Department needs to develop a firmer identity for the Studies degree – with a clear sense of pathways through the programme, prospective outcomes and future careers – that can be used to attract students to it. Key to the ongoing success of the Studies stream is Film 100, and we strongly recommend that the Department take measures each year to ensure that some sections of this popular course be taught by tenure-stream faculty to bridge introductory offerings with upper-year options. It seems simple, but sometimes the best mode of recruitment is recognition: students will take further courses with professors they have taken courses from before.

### *High School Recruitment*

As a discipline that generally is not taught at the secondary school level, Film faces a challenge in attracting incoming students to their introductory level courses. It has met this challenge face on in recent years, developing, in coordination with MAP's Academic Coordinator, initiatives to introduce graduating high school students, especially those from rural areas, to the possibilities of studying film. We recommend that this initiative be continued and expanded, alongside MAP's overall recruitment strategies, to ensure that students who may not know that Film is a viable course of study, either as a major or as an elective, arrive at the University of Regina knowing the use and value of Film Studies and/or Film Production as disciplines, in particular their generalizability to other areas of creative industries when seeking employment in the future.

### *Publicity Through Public-Facing Activities*

The Department of Film has the longest running student film festival in Canada, Living Skies Film Festival, a gem it should promote more widely and deploy in recruitment of future students to Film Production and Film Studies undergraduate programs and to the MFA in Film.

**3. Integration into Riddell Centre-Based MAP Space.** The long-term home of the Department of Film should be in the Riddell Centre. The Department is already a valued contributor to the intellectual, creative, and administrative life of MAP and the integration of the Department into the space of MAP would facilitate even greater participation in the Faculty and foster productive collaborations between students and faculty in Film, Theatre, Visual Arts, Music, and Creative Technologies programs.

#### *Infrastructural Renewal*

The Department has long made do with the facilities offered by the Education Building, adapting the spaces as best it can. Infrastructural renewal is ongoing at all universities these days, especially those with a core of buildings dating to expansion years of the 1960s and '70s, in which hazards like asbestos must be monitored and contained. Given this, it is strongly recommended that the Department continue the process started in the self-study report of itemizing and detailing the spaces, equipment, and resources necessary to teach film and other audio-visual media in the twenty-first century. This should be done in coordination with other units in MAP to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts and ensure that the faculty as a whole is ready to produce the filmmakers, technicians, and content creators of the future.

#### *Implementing Green Initiatives*

Given the university's commitments in the Strategic Plan for infrastructural renewal and the adoption of green policies, now is the time to set in motion the process of relocation to the more modern building and the implementation of policies that ensure a safe workspace for both students and faculties. Given the Film Department's nationally-recognized expertise in analogue filmmaking as well as its unique minor in photography, the University of Regina has the opportunity to be world leaders in the design and maintenance of spaces where analogue practices are preserved and prosper, bringing the same attention to these lab spaces as is afforded to those in Chemistry and Biology. After all, this is the only photochemical darkroom in Saskatchewan and, as we were told by students, a major attraction for young people eager to learn about more tangible and immersive ways of image-making, as well as have access to other analogue technologies not available elsewhere in Regina and the province. The department has the opportunity to integrate green film processing and printing materials into darkroom workflows and the possible move to a more modern building would ensure that proper darkroom ventilation is not compromised by centrally controlled building fan switchoffs. Given the enthusiasm among both faculty and students for innovative and sustainable film practices that ensure the health and safety of practitioners, there is an opportunity here to be at the forefront of environmentally attentive analogue filmmaking, which is presently absent in film programs at universities in Canada and, to our knowledge, on this continent in general. In fact, in recent years, attention to environmentally safe and sustainable practices have been at the front and centre in the professional field of film and media preservation, and has been taken up by independent filmmakers in their productions

#### *Screening Facility*

Space is always at a premium at any university, but as part of infrastructural renewal, it would be an immense benefit - to the Film Department, to MAP, and to the University as a whole - to find and equip a screening space that could accommodate classes, special events,, and community screenings. Film has deep links to the wider community of both working filmmakers and enthusiastic filmgoers, and a dedicated, bookable screening space, would allow them to deepen this connection. And even though Film and MAP students and events should be given priority to such a facility, there is also the opportunity to collaborate with other academic units through the rental or lending of the space at other times.

#### *Opportunities for MAP Students to Meet and Collaborate*

Integrating the Film Department into the MAP Building will also facilitate further collaboration between students and faculty. Such a move opens up opportunities for student filmmakers to work more closely with their peers working in theatre, design, music composition and performance, and the visual arts. Both current students and alumni voiced the desire for these kinds of collaborations, which would enrich the program experience itself and establish connections that they would be able to take into their professional careers. We were told that there are future plans to create a common space for all MAP students in the Riddell Centre. This is a wonderful idea and will help students meet students in other MAP programs. However, since only the Film Department is housed in a different building on campus it might result in awkward dynamics for these students, as they may feel more like visitors rather than as residents of that space, unlike students in other MAP programs already housed in the same building. For this and other reasons we mentioned here, we strongly recommend that the Department of Film be relocated to the Riddell Centre.

**4. Equipment Management and Resource Sharing.** The Film Department offers its students an impressive array of equipment, analogue and digital, to ensure they learn both traditional and cutting edge forms of filmmaking, and readying them for the rapidly changing technological landscape of the professional film world. The equipment is professionally catalogued and well-maintained, and it is imperative that the department be allocated the resources, and allocate its own resources, to maintain current equipment and purchase new equipment in anticipation of industry development and technological change.

Although the priority of the Film department should rightly be ensuring that the program's own students have priority access to the equipment they need, the department might also explore some level of resource sharing with other programmes in MAP, perhaps with some degree of centralization and overlap. This would also be a potential money-saving move as it would avoid duplication of equipment between several equipment centres and departments, especially since there are periods when equipment is not in use at the centres and can be used by other students. Centralization of equipment came up in our discussion with Joe, who oversees equipment in the Film Department and in Creative Technologies, therefore having to move between two buildings on campus to serve students in both

departments. Centralization of equipment also encourages students to meet other students in MAP, and perhaps pique interest in other MAP Departments as possible minors.

Although it is important for students to develop a professional sense of equipment rental, borrowing, and use, we acknowledge the comments from some students and alumni that the equipment borrowing process was somewhat intimidating, and encourage the department to continue working toward a set of protocols for equipment room culture that are open and inclusive at the same time that they instill the necessary sense of professionalism and responsibility. Moreover, students also mentioned several times that they are not aware of what equipment is available to them and would like a list to be made available to them. We would recommend using the department's public-facing website to list equipment available to students, which can be used to further promote the department to prospective undergraduate and graduate students, and using an internal site for more detailed information about availability of the equipment and booking it. Either way, a centralized online space that all students and faculty can access would be ideal to share this list and other important equipment-related information.

Finally, given the range of specialized equipment the department has, especially in terms of older video and film formats in some demand, the department should consider its equipment an asset of possible interest and use, in terms of resource sharing or even monetization, to other parts of MAP, the university, or even the wider community. In addition, this video equipment can be used to access content on analogue tapes and digitize it for future use and preservation. For example, a "home movie day" event open to the public in Regina can be organized by the Film Department jointly with the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan or University of Regina Special Collections to offer help with preservation of people's home movies and videos by digitizing them for low cost or free. This would also be a great opportunity to use as an open house for the department. A screening of old home movies could conclude the event.

**5. Developing Professionalization Opportunities.** A recurring observation in the session with alumni was that the Department of Film gave them the skills they needed to make the transition from classroom to industry, that they found their feed as working filmmakers, media specialists, and industry professionals because of the technical skills they learned, the professional contacts they made, and the practical advice they received over the course of their studies.

#### *Workshops and Practicums*

The strong tradition of professionalization initiatives notwithstanding, there was a general consensus that the Department could build further on this, through the coordination of workshops with invited speakers and the implementation of practicums with local organizations and business. Knowing the labour involved in the organization of such schemes and initiatives, we do not make this recommendation lightly, and it would require increased funding for honoraria for any workshop facilitators or invited speakers, yet the value of these is such that the Department should explore ways to connect its students with

working filmmakers and industry professionals. Alumni of the department might be a great way to start, especially since in our discussions with them they expressed interest and willingness to help establish these connections for students and also share their knowledge and professional experience in talks or workshops. A list of jobs that students can pursue after graduation will also be very helpful for them when planning their future during their studies. This list should focus on all three programs in the department, not only the undergraduate film production program. Plus, such a list might attract more undergraduate and graduate students, especially if the list also has examples of alumni in these positions, perhaps short interviews or soundbites to make it more relatable and concrete for students. Therefore, such a list should live permanently on your website and it can be updated on an annual basis.

### *Resources for Students Interested in Graduate Studies*

The Film Department has students interested in continuing their studies at a graduate level. The Department has its own MFA in Film, which some of their undergrads in the production stream are eager to pursue, however, others are interested in MFA, MA and PhD programs outside the province and even Canada, looking for change in scenery and new life experiences. We realize that graduate education at the University of Regina only dates back to 2007 and it takes time to build university resources, including information resources that students can access to learn about graduate education and program offerings at your university and elsewhere. This does not need to be a robust document to start with but a modest list of graduate programs across Canada placed on the MAP website and easy to find. Since SSHRC's deadlines for graduate scholarships are much earlier in the academic year than for graduate programs, information about these important scholarships should also be included either on the same list or on the same page. Lastly, don't forget about your alumni who completed their graduate degrees in the Film Department and elsewhere. Keep track of them and engage them by asking to speak with your students or providing useful tips that can be included as soundbites on your website. A simple questionnaire might be sufficient for excerpts to use on your webpage.

**6. Expanding the Living Skies Film Festival.** The Living Skies Film Festival is the longest-running student film festival in Canada – 34 years! It is an important event in the cultural life of the department and draws submissions from student filmmakers worldwide. The importance of the festival is not only that it showcases local work, but that it attracts student volunteers who gain tangible experience in arts administration by organizing a festival, securing funding for events, putting out calls for submissions, programming films, coordinating screenings, and producing promotional materials.

### *Formalizing the Living Skies Film Festival into the Curriculum*

Students can already gain some credit for their work on the festival, but there is the opportunity here to develop that into something more. This course would be of value to both Studies and Production students. Film festivals have become a key topic of interest in

Film Studies in recent years, and Studies majors could learn valuable skills in film programming and the writing of curatorial essays and grant proposals. Production students would benefit from learning the administrative operations of a film festival and learning the mechanics of programming and promotion, as well as about shipping and technology involved in film and media presentation for the public. A course structured around a Film Festival would also offer the opportunity to bring Studies and Production students together, allowing them to see how their different perspectives on film – the analytical and the practical – overlap. Moreover, given the scope and popularity of this festival, “2018 saw the festival celebrate 30 years, and receive more than 1700 submissions from over 90 countries, including an impressive array of Canadian and Saskatchewan short films” (festival website) students will obtain professional festival work experience, as the scope of this festival is that of other professional film festivals rather than what one would consider typically as a student film festival. Lastly, Mark Wihak is the faculty member overlooking the festival and he is doing this on a volunteer basis. We recommend that some form of credit or acknowledgement be given to him or any other faculty member in this position, and that the process by which students are selected or join the festival team be more transparent. For example, the faculty supervisor puts out an open call to all students in the Film Department either in the early Fall or end of the Winter term for the following school year and students submit an application. There might be students who would like to participate but might be intimidated, soft-spoken or shy to approach the professor. An application process will help these students and others to feel more comfortable in expressing their interest in organizing the film festival.

#### *The Development of an Arts Administration Stream or Minor*

Given departmental expertise in arts administration, ranging from the navigation of the world of film as an independent filmmakers to participation on boards of directors at co-ops and galleries, to the organization of festivals, showcases, and seasons, the department could foreground more, in its promotional materials and its courses, the programme offers a pathway to a career in arts administration and organization. This kind of learning is organic to many of the courses currently offered, provides experiential learning and is essential to the graduates whatever way their career leads them post-graduation, so there is the chance both to trumpet the ways in which Film already prepares students for these professional opportunities. In fact, such as stream or minor can be offered across MAP and potentially also with History and Anthropology programs, which in recent years developed more interest in this area through affordances of digital humanities and its technologies used in curation and exhibition of assets. These appear as natural synergies between fine arts and arts disciplines, which such a stream or minor could harness in development of an innovative interdisciplinary curriculum and future research collaborations among faculty.

#### *Using the Film Festival as a Promotional Platform for the Film Department and University*

This festival provides a perfect opportunity to promote both the Film Department and University of Regina on the festival website and during the festival in person/remotely. Holding an open house during the festival would provide a perfect opportunity for

prospective candidates (festival participants and others) to visit the facilities, meet with professors and students, and ask questions. Presently, the festival website does not include any information or mentions of the Film Department and university but on one page, “About – A Brief History” <http://www.livingskiesstudentfilmfest.com/about-us> and without actual link to the program website. This is a missed opportunity. Given that next year this festival will celebrate its 35th year anniversary, we strongly encourage that the Film Department and University of Saskatchewan be more visible on the website, perhaps included with the rest of the sponsors, and a link be provided to the program on the “About - A Brief History” page. After all, this festival relies on university facilities, resources, faculty (supervisory faculty member) and students get a credit equivalent for it.

**7. Minor Changes to Programme Offerings.** In our discussions with students and alumni, there was a general consensus that the Department of Film delivers a varied and extensive curriculum, teaching both the basics of film production and study as well as offering more specialized courses that prepare them for the rigours of doctoral study or as a professional in the film industry. As such, there does not seem to be the need for dramatic curricular revision, yet there are a number of ways in which the department’s course offerings could be modified and expanded.

- As suggested above, there is an opportunity to draw on already existing expertise in developing courses around arts administration, festival programming and presentation, management, artists’ film curation and curatorial writing. Alumni also noted that a course on navigating the world of filmmaking - or the integration of such material into established course - would be very welcome.
- The Film courses are among the most popular offered via the Centre for Continuing Education, and the department should build upon this success, bringing a wider range of courses to this group of students. Continuing Education is a valuable revenue stream for the department, and it is clear that Film and the Centre have developed a good, and mutually beneficial, collaborative relationship.
- The department’s nationally and internationally recognized strengths in experimental and independent film somewhat overshadow the existing (and hopefully, with new faculty arrivals on the horizon, future) expertise in popular and genre cinema. Discussions with current students showed both an appreciation for the current slate of courses and a desire for more that engaged with commercial and cult cinema. For example, a course on producing (perhaps offered a bit earlier, before the 4th year), “advanced producing” that would focus on the financial part of filmmaking: financing, budgeting, administration, grant writing, tax exemptions.
- There is also the appetite among the current students for courses that would bridge academic film study and popular online forms of film and cultural analysis, ranging from podcasting to video essays. Both of these forms, whether integrated into

current courses or being the focus of newly-developed courses, would help bridge film studies and film production, combining the technical and the topical.

### **Concluding Observations.**

The Department of Film at the University of Regina is an important part of the fabric of Canada's cinematic culture and the scholarly study of film in this country. It plays an important role in the academic life of the University of Regina and the cultural life of the province of Saskatchewan. It has fostered and sustained a collegial and collaborative culture, with students, both current and former, emphasizing the expertise and enthusiasm of faculty members and the support the department offered them as they developed their expertise and craft over the course of their degrees. Faculty members, whether tenured, tenure-track, or contract, have made significant critical and creative contributions over the years and, even as a small department, Film is distinguished by its national and international reputation.

All this excellence acknowledged, the Department of Film faces significant challenges in the years ahead and will need the required support of the Faculty of Media, Art, and Performance and the University as a whole to carry this excellence over into the future. First and foremost, the department needs to plan for change and manage transition. There is an incredible opportunity for the department to build on existing strengths and to continue to be at the forefront of experimental filmmaking and innovative scholarship, but it must also be open to new avenues, whether in terms of deepening its connection to a commercial film industry or developing courses that speak to the students of today and tomorrow.

We hope to have offered here a series of observations and recommendations that recognize the strengths of the department and identify opportunities for change and growth.