

UFVA Policy Statement  
Evaluation of Creative Activities for Tenure and/or Promotion  
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## **Opening Statement**

This document is intended to assist chairs, deans and program/division heads who oversee creative media production areas and may be unfamiliar with such work or are otherwise seeking guidance in evaluating such work as part of tenure and/or promotion packages. It attempts to provide a framework for appraising a broad range of creative activities in areas such as film/cinema, audio/sound design, digital video, screenwriting, multimedia and interactive media, as well as new and emerging technologies including (but not limited to) virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), video games, and creative coding. In this document, we will hereinafter refer to all such faculty output as creative production work.

Consideration for academic promotion and tenure traditionally involves an evaluation of a faculty member's contribution in three general areas: teaching, scholarly research and/or creative activity, and service to the institution and the profession. Since the procedures and standards for evaluation of scholarly research, teaching and service are generally well-established at most institutions, this statement focuses on the procedures and standards for evaluation of creative activity in media arts.

NOTE: While this policy statement does not address diversity, equity, and inclusion in creative fields in the academy, UFVA recognizes the vital importance of this issue. Much effort has been undertaken by the organization and its membership to support faculty members who are minorities within the academy and industry. A separate

statement has been prepared to address this issue directly. We encourage you to consult that document for more information on this crucial subject.

## Introduction

It is assumed that unit leadership (chairs, deans, etc.) will clearly communicate the workload expectations for media arts faculty, often expressed in percentages that vary based on the college or university's mission (e.g. 40% teaching, 40% scholarship and/or creative activities, 20% teaching). It is also assumed that creative and professional media arts work will be fully accepted as part of the tenure and/or promotion evaluation process when such work is appropriate to faculty specialization, expertise and teaching responsibilities. Just as the primary professional contributions of a faculty member teaching media criticism, theory, and history might be expected to be in the form of published scholarship, the primary professional contributions of a faculty member specializing in a creative area should be expected to be in one or more categories of creative production. This document outlines how creative activities can be evaluated and counted toward tenure and/or promotion for faculty.

Traditional fine arts disciplines have clearly established a precedent for the consideration of creative work as a part of the evaluation process for tenure and/or promotion. The same is true of creative production work by faculty members in media-based disciplines. A key factor in all of these fields is the importance of peer review of published and or exhibited work (through film festivals, telecasts, webcasts, screenings, competitions, distribution, galleries etc.), as well as awards and recognition and the professional stature of the production. In addition to juried venues, curated and invited exhibitions also play a role in the dissemination of creative media productions, and those should be evaluated according to the scope of distribution (e.g., international, national, regional, or local), the status of the project as a solo or group exhibition (taking into account the stature of the other artists if any), and the exhibition's impact and prestige, typically verified by outside referee letters during the review process. [See curation activities.](#)

Additionally, this document acknowledges the growth of new media as an artistic and academic endeavor. According to the December 2006 report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion:

In evaluating scholarship for tenure and promotion, committees and administrators must take responsibility for becoming fully aware both of the mechanisms of oversight and assessment that already govern the production of a great deal of digital scholarship and of the well-established role of new media in humanities research. It is of course convenient when electronic scholarly editing and writing are clearly analogous to their print counterparts. But when new media make new forms of scholarship possible, those forms can be assessed with the same rigor used to judge scholarly quality in print media. We must have the flexibility to ensure that as new sources and instruments for knowing develop, the meaning of scholarship can expand and remain relevant to our changing times."<sup>1</sup>

New media art is a rapidly developing area of creative scholarship in media design, production, exhibition and distribution whether in physical, or digital, or some newly created form. New media is now generally considered to be a digitally delivered combination of media, which might include moving images, still images, software, performance, projections, video game technology, virtual/augmented/extended reality and other interactively experienced forms. Creative productions in new media might be disseminated electronically, or as a stand-alone installation or exhibition. Due to rapid changes in this area of artistic production, this document does not purport to cover all areas defined as new media; however, the methods described herein can be used to reliably assess new media art forms as they emerge and evolve.

## **Understanding Creative Work in the Context of Traditional Scholarship**

In order for to be acceptable evidence in support of promotion and tenure, traditional scholarship is generally disseminated and evaluated by expert peers in specific subfields. The same is true of creative production work. However, traditional measures, such as peer-reviewed publications, reviews, and prizes, do not apply equally across all parts of the media-making process, and are especially difficult to gauge in emerging media forms. Such measures will also vary from more visible media creation tasks (such as directing, writing or performing) to less visible but no less crucial activities (editing, sound design, cinematography, production design, user design, etc.). Because media creation is an inherently collaborative process, it may be difficult to determine what decisions are directly attributable to the tenure and/or promotion candidate, or were made by others who were involved in the project.

Dissemination and evaluation of traditional written scholarship is usually accomplished by means of print or online publication. A fairly clear set of criteria have evolved for the evaluation of publications, which are ordinarily books or peer-reviewed articles. The prestige of the publisher and the prepublication comments of peer reviewers can signal the value and importance of a particular book.

In the case of articles, the acceptance rate and post-publication reviews in scholarly journals can be used for evaluation purposes. Journals, whether they are refereed or not, are rated on the basis of their reputations, the reputations of their editors and peer evaluators, and their acceptance rate, as well as how often their articles are cited in the literature. Invitations to a faculty member to write particular pieces for a journal can be viewed as recognition of that faculty member's status within a specialization.

Creative production artists and scholars may also choose to write for scholarly publications in the form of reviews, pedagogical and praxis articles, interviews, or filmmaker profiles, among other topical and historical research related to the field of media studies and creative production work. It is assumed that the traditional criteria as outlined above will be applied to such written work.

Creative production work, across its many forms and genres, can similarly be disseminated and evaluated, although the process may be less well understood by some within the academic unit that houses the faculty member. Sometimes this depends on the department or college within which the creative production faculty member is institutionally situated (e.g., Visual Arts, Journalism, Theatre Arts, Communication, Anthropology, or English departments may be home to creative media production faculty).

Though it may present challenges, the unit is responsible for clearly stipulating the scholarly or creative workload expectations for tenure and/or promotion. If governance documents must be altered to accommodate and recognize the output of a newly hired faculty member in a creative position, senior colleagues can review and update such guidelines and make recommendations that support the fair and appropriate review of creative projects.

As is true of any discipline, the totality and complexity of an individual's creative or scholarly output should be considered in the review process. The new faculty member should know if there is a specific number of required publications or productions. As in all academic hiring, this discussion with the department chair, director, or dean should take place during the hiring process and again in advance of the review process for tenure/promotion. There are faculty who focus on production, others who focus on research and print publishing, and still others who do both. Faculty specialty areas, scholarship activity, and required output should be clearly established early in the evaluation process.

There is no simple numerical equivalency between creative projects and traditional scholarship in regard to expected faculty output. Creative productions vary considerably in complexity, and may include a reliance on collaborators. A film or multimedia production cannot be easily equated with a journal article or a book. Pre-production and research may occur over a long span of time, just as book research is often a multi-year process, and production (shooting) and post-production can also be time-consuming and complicated.

Completed creative work consists of products whose forms have a greater variety in length, format, and dissemination than is typically found in media scholarship. For example, a faculty member might be involved in the production of a feature-length dramatic film, a half-hour documentary, a three-minute animated work, a virtual reality project, or a work of some other type and length. The length or size of a finished work are significant but not always fully indicative of the complexity or effort required to complete it. A short experimental video piece or a new media production/installation may require more time and effort to create than a relatively straightforward hour-long documentary. Additionally, some new media artworks do not have a temporal component and would not be comparable in scope and scale to a traditional film with a fixed duration. When peers evaluate creative work, it is important that they determine the difficulty and complexity of particular projects on a case-by-case basis. The task is analogous to that of judging the importance of a multi-year longitudinal study in the

social sciences; such a study might require many years of research and effort, yet result in a high-impact article of only modest length.

Instances of joint or multiple authors occur in traditional print research and scholarship. In such cases, it is necessary to establish the contribution made by each author if the work is included in a promotion or tenure dossier. Likewise, creative production works are frequently, although not always, collaborative endeavors. Thus, it is equally important to know what role a faculty member played or what contributions they made on a particular work. In many cases, the faculty member will have had total or significant responsibility for a major area of the production such as (producing, screenwriting, directing, cinematography, editing, sound design, production design, etc.) that coincides with their area of expertise. This is especially true in larger programs in which faculty specialization is desirable. The collaborative nature of film/video/new media production is complex and synergistic, and one role or area is not necessarily more important than another. Each of these categories must be considered as valuable in their artistic and/or educational contribution to the overall piece. In some cases, a single faculty member may be a contributor in more than one area, but that does not lessen the artistic contribution made by any of the other primary creators.

Another critical component of evaluation for creative production work is funding. Creative production is inherently costly either in the production process or during dissemination (e.g., festival entry fees). Thus, it is usually necessary for faculty members to seek financial support for their own creative work. This can be a labor-intensive process, as it requires clear articulation of creative goals and methods, detailed budgetary information, and extensive production plans in order to secure funding.

Funding support for such work at many institutions is very limited. The acquisition of internal or external grants should be recognized as a significant indication of the value of creative work to the institution and to the field. Credit should be given in the promotion and tenure process for the seeking of grants as well as for any grants received. Most grants are highly competitive and the award of a grant for a creative production project is in and of itself a noteworthy achievement. The selectivity of the granting organization should be considered as funding agencies carefully scrutinize the quality of the creator's previous work and the proposed project before awarding a grant.

## **Dissemination of Creative Production Works**

- **Festivals:**

Certain forms of film, digital video, and new media art can be adjudicated in festival competitions and other such venues (i.e. competitions, museum exhibitions, television showings, selective Internet streaming, etc.). Many film festivals have rigorous selection procedures for inclusion of films or new media (e.g. installations using digital technology, virtual reality productions, etc.) within their programs. Like print journals, festivals have acceptance rates that are indicative of the quality of the submission. Acceptance of a faculty member's

creative work for screening by a highly selective festival or network is indicative of the quality and importance of the work.

Film festival ranking as an exhibition format is rather difficult. Like periodical rankings, festivals can be ranked by their acceptance rate. For example, in 2016, the Nashville film festival received 6,700 entries and accepted 271 films whereas the Tokyo film festival received about 1500 films. [SOURCE?] While numerical data is helpful, it is only part of the story because quantitative analysis does not address the quality of the content in the programming or the prestige of the festival.

Festivals can be of local, regional, national, or international importance, and their reputations are not static. It is important for the current reputation of a pertinent festival to be specified in any promotion and tenure dossier, as well as the number of significant venues in which work has been selected and presented. Additionally, some festivals and exhibitions may be very prestigious in some arenas and art forms, but little known in other circles. For example, an exhibition space might be considered "top tier" by a fiction filmmaker, but if that particular festival virtually never programs experimental films, it would not be reasonable to expect an experimental filmmaker to exhibit there. Similarly, a film festival might be considered legendary for avant-garde art but be virtually unknown in popular cinema. Discerning the levels of prestige in exhibitions is an important role for external reviewers of a tenure dossier. This analysis can include acceptance rates and the caliber of the jury but may also include more ephemeral qualities such as the general professional status and prominence of a particular festival, broadcast network, or website.

It is important to recognize that most film and media festivals charge entrance fees for consideration prior to the jury process, and thus submission opportunities are also a function of the funds that are available to the filmmaker. Many festivals offer awards and recognitions but these do not generally include cash components.

The quality of a creative work may be partially indicated by any festival or other awards and/or prizes that have been bestowed upon it. Festival and other creative awards and prizes are evidence of a positive competitive judgment about the quality and importance of the work. In evaluating the importance of a festival award or prize, it is important again to consider the current reputation of the festival at which the award was received. Acceptance into the final rounds of certain high-profile festivals is valuable and is often better than winning the top prize at a low-tier festival.

The principles of exhibiting creative productions in new media are fundamentally the same as traditional or "legacy" media productions. It is essential to consider peer review, prestige of venue, and scope of impact.

- **Academic exhibitions:**

Public exhibitions of a creative production work to informed audiences (such as peers, conferences, festival panels, etc.) should be considered dissemination of the work that is equivalent to scholarly publication. In many cases such dissemination may result in a written critique of the work which can be added to the faculty member's dossier prior to review. Such exhibitions are often juried, and the selectivity of the process should be a consideration in the review process. This is similar to the traditional acceptance of a performance for a knowledgeable audience or the equivalent of editorial review prior to print publication.

Some academic associations and other institutions (e.g. universities, museums, archives, etc.) schedule exhibition screenings or installations based on a preview and/or convention evaluation of submitted works. Selection for screening or exhibition can be considered an indicator of quality, provided the current reputation and procedures of the association are known. Consideration of a work's value should also be given to media projects that are purchased or licensed by universities, schools, research centers (and other organizations) or streamed via media databases such as Filmmakers Library. In this case, it is recommended that faculty list library and other holdings of their creative work.

When a faculty member's creative work is presented at a university, a festival, or an academic association conference, it is usual for the faculty member to introduce the work and to respond to any subsequent questions, comments, and criticisms. Although such a presentation is difficult to document, it should be considered the equivalent of the presentation of scholarly papers for peer critique in academic settings.

It must be noted that there are certain types of creative works for which appropriate means of dissemination and evaluation have not yet been devised. Multi-image pieces, virtual and augmented reality and some types of experimental work fall into this category. In such cases, it is necessary to rely on peer evaluations to establish the value and importance of faculty creative work.

Museums, media arts centers, universities and other community organizations schedule invited presentations of creative work, which may include an oral presentation or lecture by the creator. The prestige of such invitational showings varies depending upon the importance of the institution and the rigor of the selection process. As with juried exhibitions, the current reputation of the venue should also be considered in assessing its significance. International and national scope and reputation demonstrate the impact of creative productions; however regional, local, and specialized exhibitions may also have significant impact, particularly when the creative productions are intended to produce local changes or deal with local social issues.

Museums and galleries may also include works of new media art and media production in their collections. These instances should be evaluated in the same manner as any exhibition, with consideration given to the reputation, scope, and impact of the collecting organization.

- **Commercial distribution:**

The merit of a moving image work may also be indicated by its having been publicly released via television or Internet platforms. New media productions may see wide commercial release on video game platforms and app stores.

Regardless of genre, work might be shown on commercial and/or public television, aired on cable systems, and/or streamed via existing and emerging webcast sites and web platforms. Greater weight is often given to works selected for network (national/ international) presentation than to those carried in only local markets. In all cases, it is important to consider the level at which the work has had public exposure.

It must be acknowledged that television/cable showings are not equally accessible to all types of work because of strict requirements regarding the length of the work. It is important to note that while commercial distribution may strictly speaking be considered a form of peer review, it is different from peer juries that consider acceptances in peer reviewed exhibition formats such as film festivals. Some distributors are highly selective, and the inclusion of a faculty member's work within their inventories can be considered an indication of quality and importance. However, most film and digital video distributors are commercial, and the exclusion of a faculty member's work from such distribution is not necessarily an indication that it has little or no artistic or social value. Faculty works must compete for distribution with projects produced by individuals whose careers are exclusively dedicated to creative film and video production, and whose motives are strictly commercial in nature.

- **Community collaborations:**

Creative production work by a faculty member may be done in collaboration with community partners as part of service learning and civic engagement. This work can expand the reach of academic involvement within a community and is often essential to productive institutional/community interaction. Such work might be of little commercial value but have significant community value. As such, it might not otherwise be produced were it not created by someone from the academy. This type of collaborative work can be of great pedagogical value when it includes student crews and collaborators who are then involved in powerful engaged learning opportunities. Such opportunities also allow for student mentoring opportunities above and beyond classroom experiences and serve to prepare students for future professional work.

- **Multiple exhibitions:**

It should be noted that multiple exhibitions of the same artwork are not the equivalent of reprints of a scholarly work. In the case of reprints of books or

articles, the original printing is often still available through libraries. Reprinting of an article is primarily for the convenience of the readers of a particular periodical. In most circumstances, each showing of a media work makes the production available to a new, previously inaccessible audience, thus expanding the reach of the work. Additional showings may be labor intensive if installation of a new media project is involved, and can provide opportunities for artists to reconfigure and reinvent their projects.

- **Distribution agencies:**

Film and other forms of moving image media may be disseminated through distribution agencies and companies in traditional media formats such as optical discs (DVDs, Blu-Rays), and also through online distribution platforms, which are constantly evolving. A film/video that is distributed by distribution agencies or companies has been peer reviewed as the distributors are within the profession and are continuously adjudicating projects submitted to them based on their educated observations.

- **Digital distribution:**

Web channels and networks are important for the screening of short films, new media art, VR/AR, and video games, as well as experimental and avant-garde forms. The rapid evolution of new media is changing the concept of mass media dissemination and thus invites a networked architecture of multiple technologies of content delivery and interactivity. Vimeo, YouTube, Steam, and other sites (including independent artist websites) that can be used to disseminate creative production work are not peer reviewed and might be considered to offer a service to media artists that is similar to the self-publication of a book. However, these distribution methods may also lead to increased viewership or audience saturation (e.g. number of hits, views or shares of a creative work).

In some cases, the number of views, social media shares and downloads can indicate aspects of the impact of the creative work; however, these metrics should be considered as part of, and not the sum total of, the value of the creator's social/cultural/artistic contribution.

## **Sources of Written Evaluations of Creative Production Works**

The importance of peer review for creative production work cannot be overstated, particularly in units in which faculty are not familiar with this area. Meaningful reviews of faculty creative work can appear in scholarly and professional publications, library media publications, and in print and online newspapers and general interest magazines. Blogs/vlogs, online film/new media review sites, and other Internet venues may also review such work. The status of the reviewer and the reputation of the periodical or online venue are important in considering such reviews.

It is common for faculty members within an academic unit to evaluate the published work and creative output of their colleagues as part of the promotion and tenure

process. It is essential that creative production work be examined by knowledgeable outside evaluators who are well versed in the type of work completed by the faculty member who is being considered for promotion and tenure. For instance, an evaluator whose sole interest is narrative film should not be asked to evaluate an experimental video work. In some cases, an institution might wish to include professionals from the media industry on an outside evaluation panel. Media professionals may not be attuned to the requirements of the academic tenure and promotion process, however, and must be given appropriate direction and context for their evaluation(s).

Some professional associations, including the University Film and Video Association, regularly provide written peer evaluations of screenwriting, moving image, and new media works selected for exhibitions at their annual conventions. The judges of some festivals will provide written critiques, if requested. Many members of UFVA are also willing to serve as reviewers for tenure and promotion cases.

Letters evaluating a faculty member's work can be requested from responsible individuals at museums, media centers, art galleries, colleges and universities, and other institutions at which the work has been shown/exhibited. As in the case of scholarly or trade press reviews, it is important to consider the reputation of the individual or institution contributing the evaluation.

### **Criteria for Evaluating Industry/Professional Activity**

Evaluation of paid work for commercial purposes, whether for hire assignments or self-initiated projects ("professional work"), presents additional challenges beyond those already addressed regarding creative activity versus traditional scholarship. Individual institutions may or may not have contract language about engaging in compensated professional work outside of one's academic institution. This may impact the ability of a faculty member to undertake such paid work.

All paid creative productions, including experimental shorts, corporate videos, video games, independent software releases, or television commercials, have elements that express the talents, artistry and skills of their collaborative creators, and may have the potential to reach large audiences. For example, commercials that are broadcast on TV or online can be seen by millions of people each time they are aired. This is similar to creative scholarship that is published in a highly regarded popular magazine.

- **Applicability to Tenure and Promotion:**

Despite the commercial aspects of professional creative work, it is important to recognize its experiential value to the faculty member. Faculty can benefit from additional opportunities to participate in commercial productions. Such experiences can enhance a faculty member's skills by exposing them to new equipment and cutting-edge production practices that may not be readily available in an academic setting, and can offer critical opportunities for the faculty member to make creative contributions.

As is the case in other notable fields in the academy (such as computer science), some of the strongest faculty in media arts continue to work in the professional, commercial arena, where greater funding is available. In such areas as film and video, gaming, and new media, there is not a strong tradition of substantial grant money available at the state or federal level. Staying current in the media arts field requires the creation of works that are normally funded only by commercial entities external to universities and the government.

### **Benefits to students:**

Many students are interested in combining the value of their education with professionally relevant knowledge. As in other professions, there is no better way for students to learn the art of filmmaking than by actually doing it. There is a great advantage for a professor to work on any projects in which students can observe or participate. Exposure to professional settings is invaluable to students.

Our changing student body includes many more first-generation college students, who tend to be very practical about acquiring skills and preparing for employment. Most media arts students are professionally oriented and will move into jobs outside of academia upon graduation. Most of our alumni will put their artistry and craft to use for commercial purposes. This requires well-supported faculty who have skill sets far in excess of traditional academic expertise. Recognizing professional work activity as creative activity is necessary to ensure that the academy has a place for the full range of knowledge and experience that can help prepare students for their chosen careers.

Professionals are hired competitively exactly because each individual will contribute to a unique creative outcome. University and college programs that emphasize creative storytelling in our changing media landscape can provide better and deeper learning opportunities for our students as they adjust to tumultuous changes in the employment world. This learning can be enhanced by the professional efforts of faculty members.

- **Benefits to Faculty:**

There is no doubt that the professional digital production landscape is rapidly changing. New and more complex forms of storytelling are emerging every year. There is very little opportunity for faculty to be trained in the new worlds of digital cinema, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, virtual camera and production techniques, and a host of other technologies that will require familiarity with new storytelling paradigms.

At the leading colleges and universities, this gap in faculty learning is often taken up through the hiring of adjunct faculty who are working professionals in these newer fields. Yet, this over-reliance on part-time teachers makes the creation of a

full and consistent curriculum more difficult and creates staffing issues, as part-time faculty members often take time off to work on professional projects.

Incorporating full-time faculty into these new situations requires course release time or active encouragement from management to support faculty development. Rewarding faculty who utilize emerging media in their own work through hiring, tenure, and promotion is perhaps the best method to demonstrate institutional support. This will generally require that media arts faculty members work on projects that utilize emerging media, as there are few programs (even at top, well-funded institutions) that have the resources and ability to provide course release time or funding for faculty to purchase, study, and master rapidly evolving and/or capital-intensive technologies.

When faculty work on outside professional projects that are rewarded in their academic environment, it encourages their movement into the future – the future where students are headed. Thus, we encourage full support of faculty participation in professional work whenever possible.

- **Benefits to Institutions:**

An institution's reputation relies on a number of factors, but all institutions rely on the success of their alumni. In the area of media arts, hiring and supporting faculty who are experienced in the industry will benefit the institution's reputation, as such faculty will be better equipped to assist their students with entry into the job market.

It is also true that, when faculty are working professionally in their fields, they establish relationships with a wide variety of other professionals in ways that redound positively to the university. Student internships, guest speakers, potential job possibilities, and access to a larger network of working professionals strengthen the ability of our students to learn and succeed. This also reflects positively on the institution.

More traditional academic research projects can also result when faculty have relationships with working professionals – relationships that develop through both academic and professional channels. This often brings in substantial research and development money to the institution. For institutions that rely on research grants for portions of their operating budget, this is a strong positive outcome of encouraging full-time faculty to engage in outside professional projects.

## [Evaluating Industry Activity](#)

Once the appropriateness of professional work is understood, criteria for evaluation must be considered. While there are metrics for some types of professional work after it has been completed, the equivalent of peer review in the professional world generally happens prior to production. Because the selection of each principal individual will result

in a different creative outcome (and the creative outcome affects commercial effectiveness), professionals are arguably reviewed at the time of hire/funding based on past performance and their proposal(s) for rigorous and effective execution of the professional work.

- **Hiring as peer review:**

It should be recognized that hiring decisions on professional productions are a matter of hard skills (technical and storytelling abilities) and soft skills (ability to collaborate well and to present their artistry convincingly). These evaluations are usually made by directors and producers at the appropriate level for the project. The competition for each job is normally very strong. Individuals hired for their production skills are evaluated by producers and/or production managers, who have a wide field of people from whom to choose. Thus, being contracted or employed on a crew, or hired to produce, shoot, light, edit, etc. a commercial or a corporate video, involves a high level of peer review. When faculty are paid for their skill and artistic contributions, it is a sign of professional quality that is recognized by experienced experts in the field. Thus, paid work should be considered extremely valuable to the tenure and promotion process.

We must also acknowledge that the demands of the professional world are often in conflict with those of the academic world, especially in terms of time. Many outside projects cannot fit easily into an academic schedule, such as inside a summer break, or take time that is in conflict with a teacher's class demands. This makes it difficult for full-time faculty to compete against full-time professionals, who have greater availability. As a result, faculty professional work is more likely to involve shorter, smaller projects at the local or regional level.

Tenure and Promotion Committees should also take into account that project outcomes and distribution may be beyond the control of participating faculty. For example, a screenwriter may sell a script through a highly competitive optioning process, and that script may never be produced for a myriad of reasons, none of which are the fault of the writer. In the professional world, having a script commissioned is considered a significant achievement, even if it is not produced. Even for easily defined professional outcomes, a discussion of the characteristics of the works supplied in the dossier would be helpful. Feature films for direct-to-video have different budgets, requirements, and goals than feature films designed for a festival, or a film designed for theatrical release.

Professional contribution to a crew indicates that the contributor is not a sole author nor are they typically in control of the completed work. Frequently the individual who is part of a creative crew does not have control over the timetable of release of the final product nor are they allowed to release the work publicly on their own. Submission for peer review is most likely outside of the control of the contributing individual.

- **Critical and audience review:**

While the act of hiring or funding in the professional world can be seen as a form of peer review, certain types of professional work are subject to critical review and/or what might be called “audience review” after completion. Audience review refers to the engagement of the public and is expressed by such things as box office, ratings, and web views—with success judged relative to the medium. When critical review is available, assessment of that review should be based on the status of the reviewer and publication. Tenure and Promotion Committee members should be cautioned not to use anecdotal or idiosyncratic methods (such as reviews or user ratings) as evidence of success or failure of the work. It is best not to utilize them in dossiers except in extenuating circumstances.

For older projects, citations of the candidate’s work in professional journals are useful for consideration. However, such citations often are not made for positions beyond the categories of director and writer, so the absence of such citations cannot be taken as an invalidation of the work. It should also be pointed out that for some of the key ideation categories – writing, director and producer – the number of works that end up being created and released publicly is dwarfed by the number that are never made.

Non-peer reviewed critiques and published reviews are often unreliable indicators of strong academic qualities and should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the reputation of the reviewer and source.

- **Client Stature:**

Professional work that cannot be classified by the standard distribution and exhibition categories (such as corporate videos or social media) can be classified by the stature of the client. Client stature can be judged by such things as footprint (worldwide, national, regional, or local) or the number of employees. Unlike art for art’s sake, which may only involve the artist, professional work can be the product of hundreds of people. These individuals work in a hierarchy that should be referenced to determine their relative contribution.

- **Awards:**

Awards comprise the closest method to traditional peer review in the professional world. There are, however, comparatively few awards relative to the outlets available for scholarly work. Hence, the lack of a nomination or award should not discount achievement.

In assessing the prestige of an award, its source must be considered. Using high profile awards as examples, Oscars (AMPAS) and Emmys (ATAS) represent true peer review, whereas critics group awards such as The National Film Critics Award, and People’s Choice Awards represent self-selected audience review.

As mentioned earlier, the geographical scope of awards should also be considered. Is the awarding body national, international, regional, or local? What is its reputation? How well respected is it in the professional world? What are its entrance criteria? (It should be noted that the criteria for works in the national Emmys are far different than for local Emmys.) There are also a number of highly regarded and well-established awards in the areas of projects for non-public or non-theatrical production, including the International Telly Awards and the CINDY Awards, where industry professionals review and judge submitted materials. Placing these awards in context for the Tenure and Promotion Committee is recommended, as these are all significant peer-reviewed awards and can be used to contextualize the entire dossier.

### **Sources of Written Evaluations for Industry/Professional Activity**

Academic conferences such as UFVA (the University Film and Video Association) and SCMS (the Society for Cinema and Media Studies) may accept professional work for screening and written peer review. But, beyond the challenges noted above, it should be pointed out that professionals normally do not own the commercial work that they are involved in creating, so they may have no control over if or when it is entered for awards or festivals, or if it may be submitted to a conference at all. As such, written evaluations should also be accepted from established professionals (whether inside or outside of the academy) with expertise in both the type of production (narrative, documentary, commercial, corporate, etc.) and function (director, director of photography, editor, etc.) that needs review. UFVA can serve as a source for finding such individuals within the academy.

Letters of review written by fellow professionals are very attractive in a dossier, especially if they are written by an industry leader or well-known person. Indeed, if written correctly, they can be valuable. However, in practice, they rarely address the same key points at the same level of depth that academic outside review letters do. Despite detailed instructions in the review inquiry letter, non-academic review letters may look more like professional letters of recommendation than outside reviews.

Professionals should be thoroughly informed, within the limitations allowed by the institution, as to the commitment and detail that these letters will involve before they accept. If the candidate's committee decides that having professional letters will help the dossier, then the committee letter should help to provide the Promotion and Tenure Committee with enough context to frame the comments that the professional letter supplies. Aspects such as collaborative ability, creative ideation and overcoming challenges (especially as it might relate to new media forms) should be specifically highlighted, within the boundaries as to what is allowed in the committee letter.

### **Criteria for Evaluating Screenwriting**

It must be recognized that screenwriting is a worthy artistic and academic endeavor and that scripts have intrinsic value whether or not they have been produced.

As scripts can be produced ten, fifteen, and even twenty years after they were written, this is in excess of the time screenwriting professors have available to prove the value of their work during the tenure and/or promotion process.

Even if produced, a script might be re-written by another writer and an optioned script may not ever be produced. Thus, a screenplay's fate is not necessarily a reflection of the skill with which it was written.

Similarly, the number of scripts a professor writes are not indicative of the effort, care, and talent needed to produce them. Of far greater importance is the challenge posed to the writer by the project, the degree of originality demonstrated, and the skill with which it is executed.

As with all creative projects, screenplays must be disseminated and evaluated as part of the promotion and tenure process. Short film scripts merit inclusion, provided they are disseminated and evaluated as described below.

### **Dissemination of Screenwriting**

Possibilities for the dissemination of faculty screenwriting projects include:

- Peer evaluations by screenwriting professors at other universities.
- Professional organizations that include script evaluation sessions and/or script readings among their activities.
- Organizations for possible production.
- Juried readings by local and regional groups.

Scripts may be published in whole or in part. Publication possibilities might include:

- Print publications of the University Film and Video Association.
- Other academic print publications.
- Inclusion in The Black List ([blcklst.com](http://blcklst.com))
- Media publications of professional organizations.
- Internet publication where allowed by institutional regulations.

Relative to the number of scripts completed each year, the possibilities for publication of scripts are extremely limited. In no case should a college or university require a script be published to validate its use as an accomplishment in the promotion and tenure process.

### **Evaluation of Screenwriting**

Ways to evaluate screenwriting as academic creative scholarship could include but are not be limited to:

- Production.

- Paid option by established production company.
- Free option by established production company.
- Chosen for representation by established literary agent or manager.
- Competitive industry workshops such as NBC's Writers on the Verge, Academy Nicholl Fellowships, The Sundance Screenwriter's Lab, etc.
- Screenwriting contests such as BlueCat Screenplay Competition, American Zoetrope Screenplay Contest, Script Pipeline Writing Competition, Slamdance, etc.
- Outside peer reviews by screenwriting professors & industry professionals based on one script or a body of work.
- Peer review at the University Film and Video Association annual conference. Public discussion can be recorded and/or transcribed.
- Selection of a faculty member's screenplay for inclusion at a festival such as Austin Film Festival Screenplay & Teleplay Competition, Nashville Film Festival Screenwriting Competition, etc.
- Published reviews in print or media format. These might include but not be limited to reviews that appear in the print and online issues of the *Journal of Film and Video*.

## Screenwriting Conclusions

Because of the complexities of the process of dissemination and evaluation of screenwriting, the University Film and Video Association recommends that a panel of three to five faculty experts be used in all cases involving the promotion or tenure of screenwriting professors. When possible, an industry professional should be included on such a panel.<sup>2</sup>

## Film and New Media Curation and Programming

While the area of arts curation is often considered primarily in terms of contributions to the maintenance of historical works of art, film and new media festivals are important emerging fields in curation that frequently necessitate creative production faculty involvement. Curation is especially important in new media because of the spatial and temporal demands of exhibitions for digital works or physical installations. Many cinema and digital media faculty become involved in the practice of curation in festivals, theatres or galleries. This area has become increasingly important for the exhibition and distribution for contemporary independently produced media.

There is little research in the area of new media curation and exhibition, though there is some scholarship on film curation. Due to the overlaps and similarities, this discussion borrows from the work of Peter Bosma on film programming and has been extended to include the work of curation and exhibition (gallery or festival) for new media.<sup>3</sup>

The subject of media curation lacks rigid institutionalized standards and yet is a vitally important contribution to maintaining and promoting cinematic and new media art. According to Bosma, film programmers serve as "custodians of cinema culture." The

same can be said for the curation and exhibition of new media. Bosma refers to film curation as a creative act that expresses artistic identity. It is also a management challenge as well as an expression of the social value of art. Thus, in terms of film distribution and film marketing (a common component of film festivals), festival curation/programming is both practice and theory encompassing business and art. Like an art curator, a festival programmer serves as a gatekeeper for film display and possible distribution deals.

Festivals are intense experiences in which film buffs, visitors, and industry professionals come together. Many university-sponsored film festivals secure niche films that emerge from independent artists. These films represent a valuable addition to the culture of new media and cinema and might not otherwise secure exhibition or dissemination. For example, narrative or documentary shorts or niche genre films are rarely (if ever) distributed commercially, despite Oscar recognition. University-sponsored festivals for films or new media also serve to create an institutional identity that can attract media attention, alumni support, and/or highlight important cultural contributions.

A festival is itself a gathering of individuals with expertise pertaining to international trends in creative production. Without the initial curatorial phase, audiences would need to sift through a plentitude of films for themselves. Programmers, curators and scouts search for films or new media works that represent artistic and creative value. As such, there is a need for initial judgment in selection and programming. Film scholars and historians recognize that viewing experiences are colored by the order and context within which films are screened. Similarly, new media showcases are enhanced by the surrounding works that complement each individual contribution.

Because of the constant need for sources of new media and films, festival programming is demanding both in preparation for and during the event. Many volunteers are needed for the execution of a successful, richly layered, and valuable event. New media or film programmers must research trends and creators/filmmakers in order to make appropriate selections for the context of their festival. This talent requires extensive contemporary as well as significant historical knowledge of ever-changing fields.

Research into the value of film festivals as a hybrids of film art and trade fairs for the industry and as international exhibition networks has begun, though there is a lack of scholarly work on the full impact of this very important form of curation and circulation. It is important for institutions to recognize film/video/new media curation and programming as creative production work that counts toward tenure and/or promotion.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> The material on screenwriting was added to the original UFVA TP statement in 2008 and was compiled from discussions of the Script Caucus of the University Film and Video Association and approved by the Officers and Board of Directors 3/26/08. This section was updated in 2018 by Will Akers.

<sup>3</sup> This section was taken largely from Peter Bosma's *Film Programming: Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives*, Columbia University Press, 2015

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