

The State of the Field of Film and Media Studies

December 2015

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A Report on the SCMS Film and Media Studies Program Survey

finalized December 2015

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under the auspices of and with guidance, insight, and review provided by

SCMS' Executive Director, Jill Simpson, the Executive Board, and the Home Office

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Overview

This report constitutes a presentation and analysis of data gathered from March 31-May 31, 2014, July 1-August 1, 2014 and October 31, 2014-January 31, 2015 (the latter dates for programs who had not responded to the initial inquiry) through a survey distributed via email to the department/program heads of 539 film and media studies programs at universities and colleges across the United States. The results include responses from the program heads or other representatives from approximately 285 film and media studies programs (accounting for programs who submitted duplicate surveys and those that did not complete the entire survey) and cover questions such as types of degrees offered, number of students, and specialties of faculty. The results from those questions with quantifiable answers can be found in the Appendix.

Methodology

In order to create a list of film and media studies programs/departments that was as comprehensive as possible, a thorough internet search was conducted on a state-by-state basis, visiting the website of every four-year, nonprofit college and university in a given state, and searching its academic programs for majors, minors, and degree concentrations having to do with film and/or media. Communication/ broadcasting departments were only included in cases where there was no other film and/or media studies program at the school *and* the communication department demonstrated some evidence of a focus on film/media theory, criticism, or production over and above standard communication classes in journalism, rhetoric, public speaking, speech, etc. This is an inherently flawed approach in its reliance

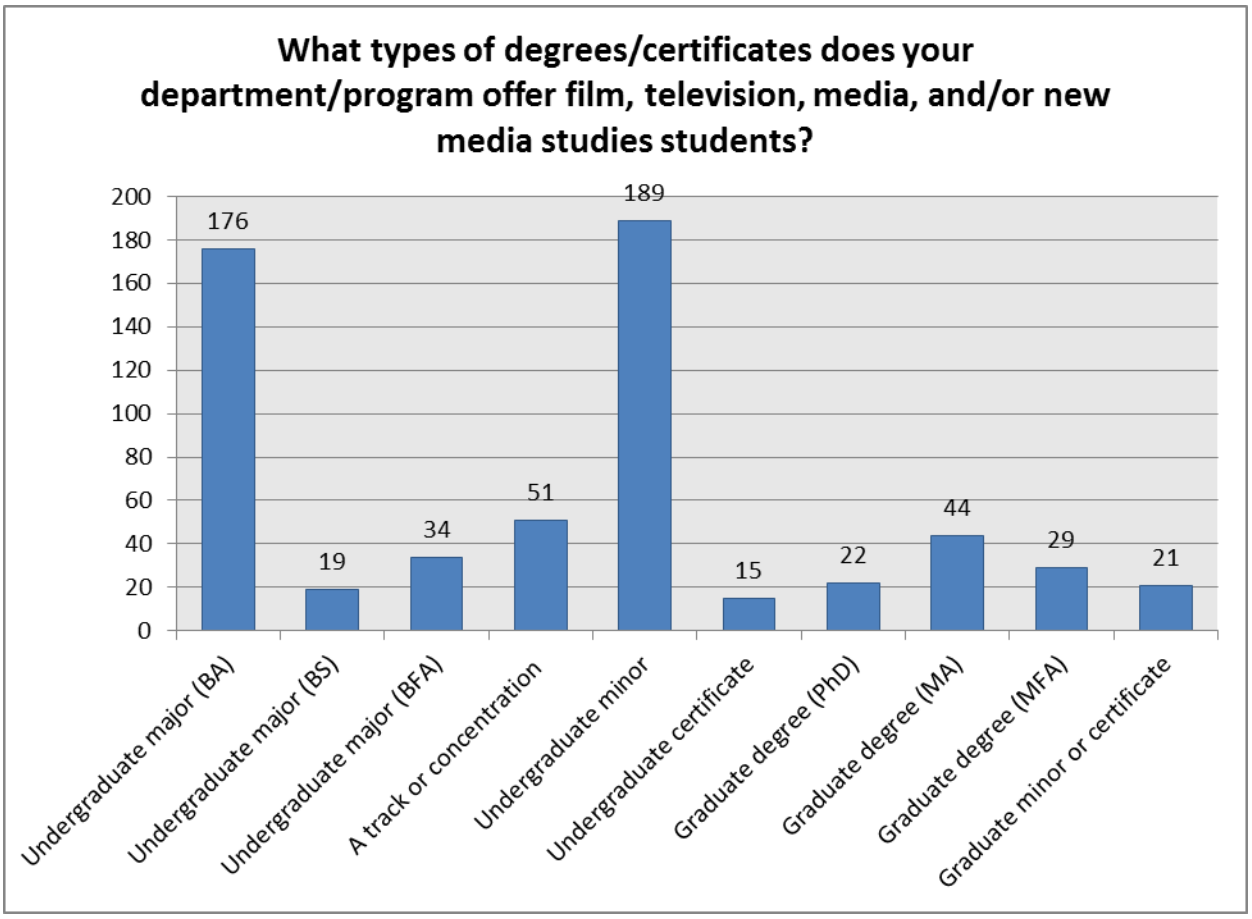


Figure 1

on internet search functions and its susceptibility to human error. While a few programs may have fallen through the cracks here and there, the lack of comprehensive data or a complete directory of these types of programs make this approach the most thorough way to gather information about as many programs as possible, especially those programs that are not represented by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies' membership, of which there were quite a few. For further study, it may be of interest to survey two-year colleges that have film studies-related offerings and, potentially, consider the overlap between film and media studies and communication studies departments/programs at schools that house two separate units in these respective fields. This survey does attempt to take into account that some schools had more than more one program that could fall under the auspices of film studies.

While just over half of the film and media studies programs contacted replied to this initial survey, close to 300 respondents is still an adequate number to glean certain trends, support overarching conclusions, and provide a basis for further study.

Results

The following figures offer a visual representation of some of the results of this survey, providing insight into aspects of programs and departments teaching film and media studies from types of degrees offered to collaboration with outside programs.

Types of Degrees Offered:

Figure 1 (above) details the types of degrees offered by participating programs/departments. Undergraduate majors and minors dominate the field, with the majority of programs with undergraduate majors having up to 300 students matriculated in the participating unit at a given time (Figure 2). An overwhelming majority of programs with minors had fewer than 50 students in that degree program.

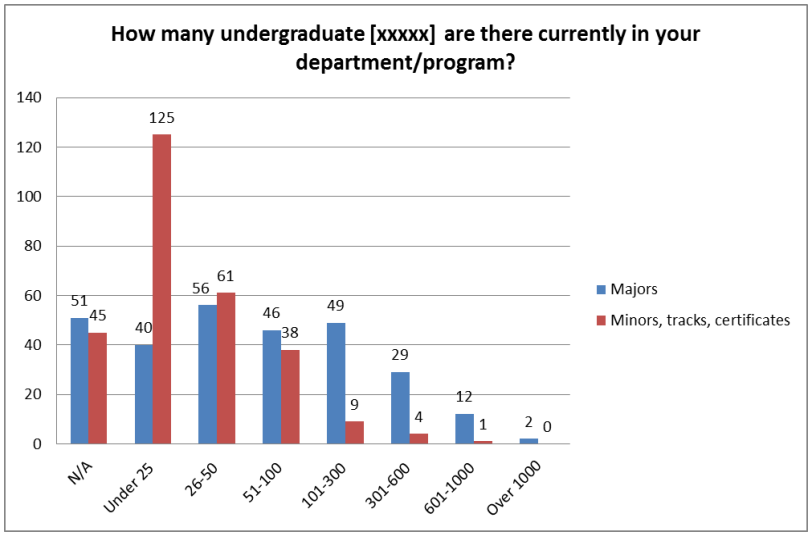


Figure 2

While most of the programs surveyed did not have graduate programs, those that did usually had fewer than 50 M.A., M.F.A and/or Ph.D students at a given time, with only a handful of programs having larger numbers (51-100 or over 100) of M.A. or M.F.A. students. Only one program surveyed had over 75 Ph.D. students.

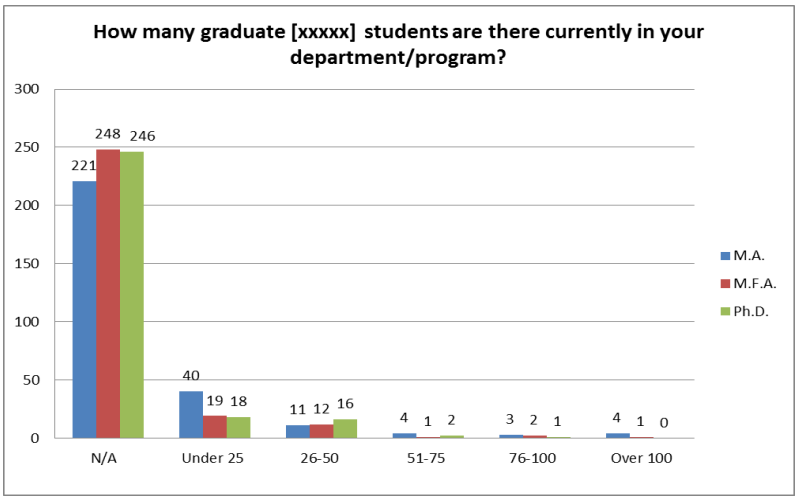


Figure 3

Faculty Specializations:

In response to the question regarding faculty specializations, program directors/chairs could add as many specializations as they chose, with film history, film and television theory and criticism, and American cinema coming out on top as the areas in which most units had at least one faculty member with expertise (Figure 4). Media studies, film production, documentary studies, global or transnational cinema/television, gender studies, and new media come in second, with at least 150 units reporting those areas of expertise. While media pedagogy, radio studies, and video game studies were the least reported areas, they were each still reported between 30 and 60 times by various units.

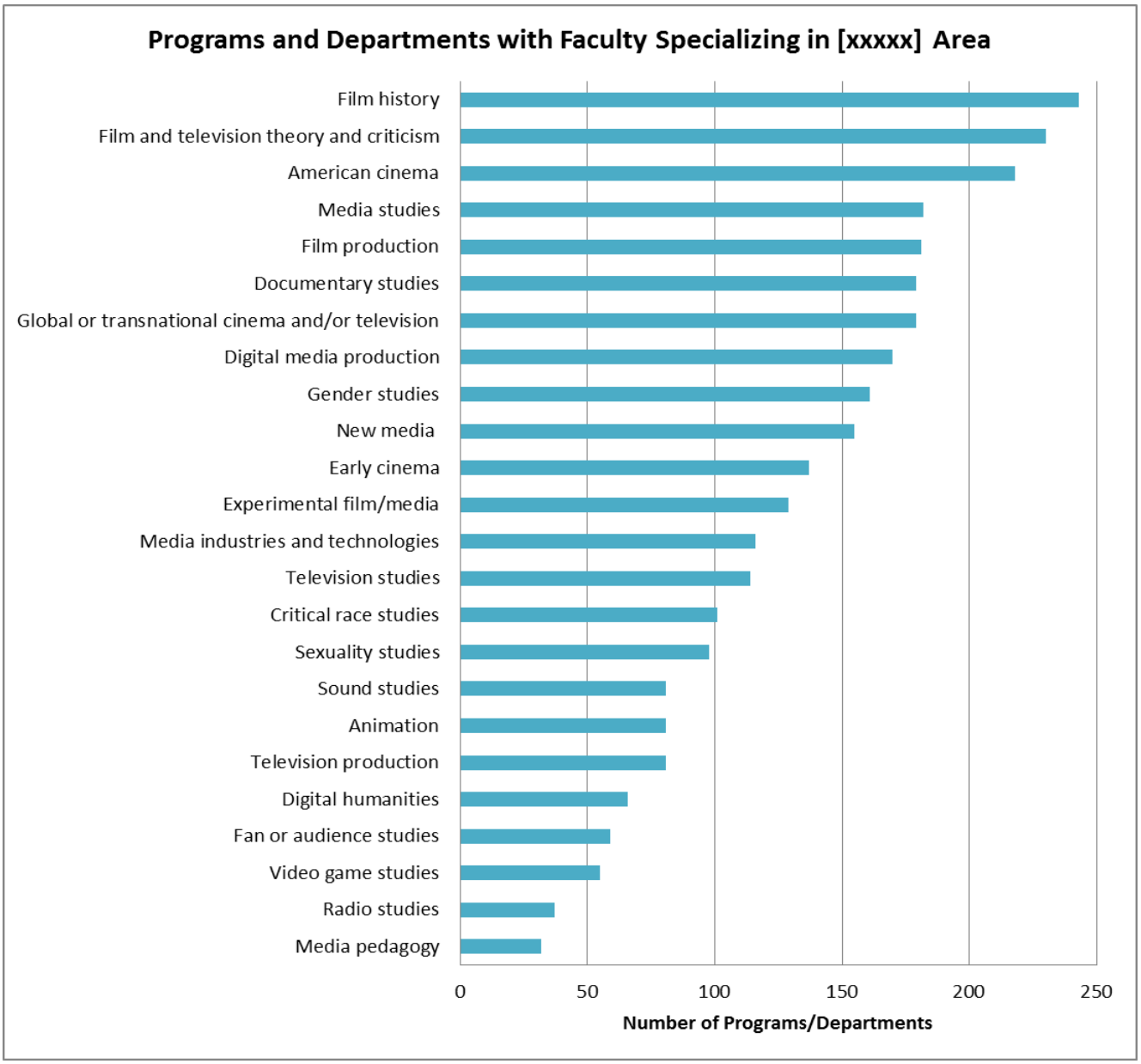


Figure 4

In Figure 5 (below), the specialization of faculty is further broken down, by filtering each area of expertise by the self-reported focus of their unit, either primarily cinema and media studies, primarily production, or a combination of the two. The chart illustrates the percentage of programs (rather than the number of programs, as in Figure 4) in a given unit with faculty in each specialization in order to account for a far smaller number of primarily production departments (29) versus departments identifying themselves as primarily cinema and media studies (101) or both (155). This chart provides a compelling glimpse into the emphasis placed on certain areas of film and media studies depending on program focus, with film history, film and television theory and criticism, and American cinema taught by over 50% of units regardless of focus and areas such as gender studies, sexuality studies, and critical race studies skewed heavily in favor of programs with a cinema and media studies emphasis.

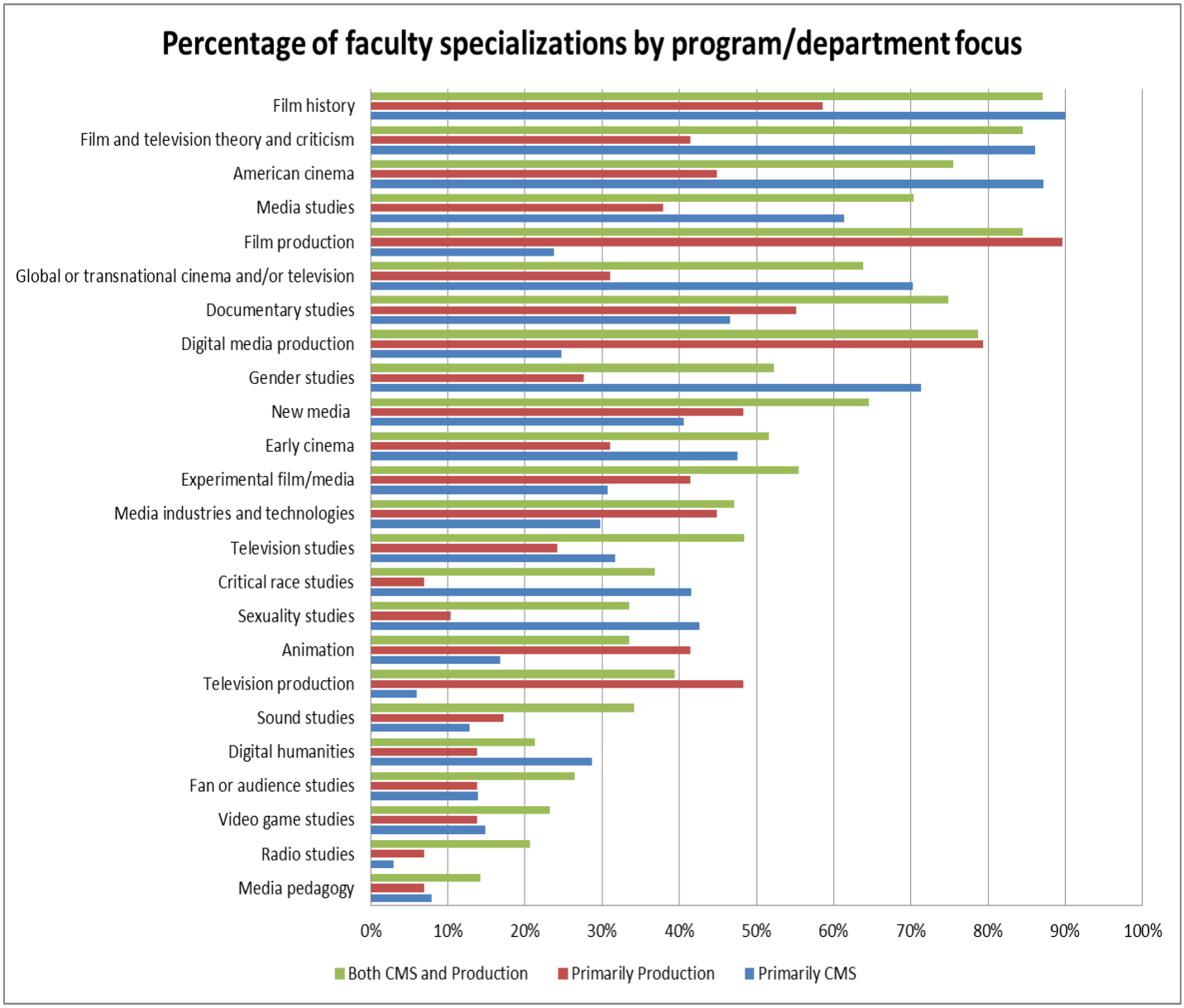


Figure 5

Program/ Department Focus:

Further information about the types of degrees offered by programs that are primarily cinema and media studies, primarily production, or both (Figure 6) indicates that primarily cinema and media studies programs are less likely to offer an undergraduate major than programs with some kind of production component, but are more likely to offer a minor than production-only programs. Primarily cinema and media studies programs are slightly more likely to offer Ph.D.s and graduate minors/certificates, whereas M.F.A. programs are marginally dominated by production-only programs.

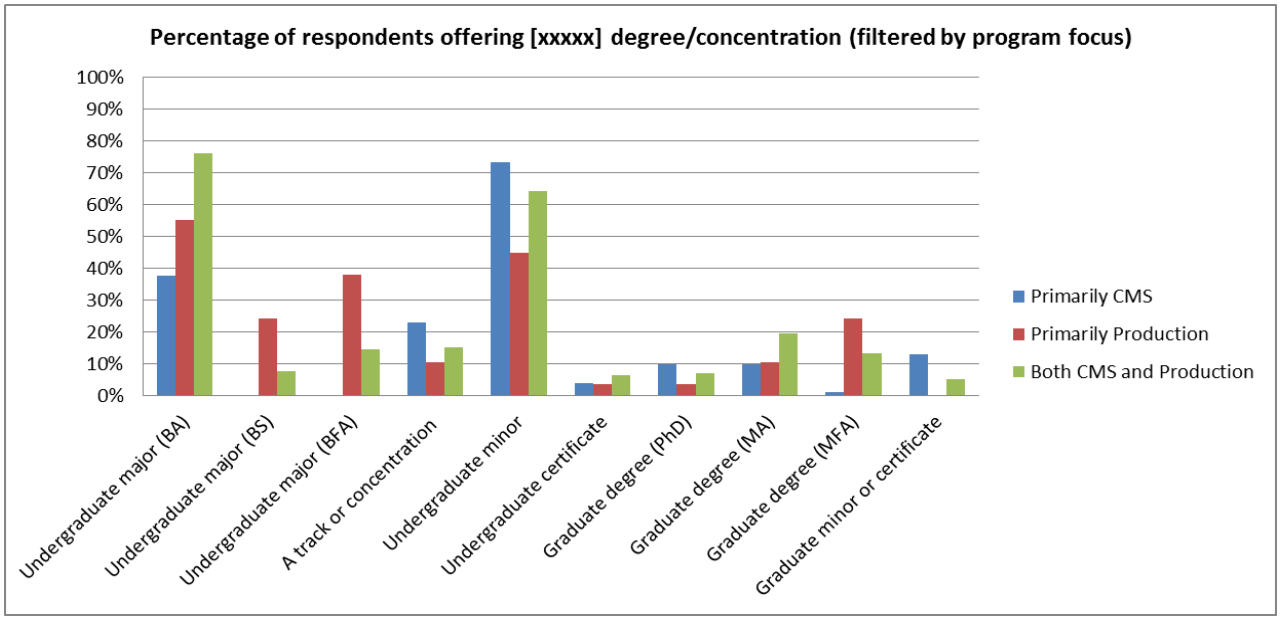
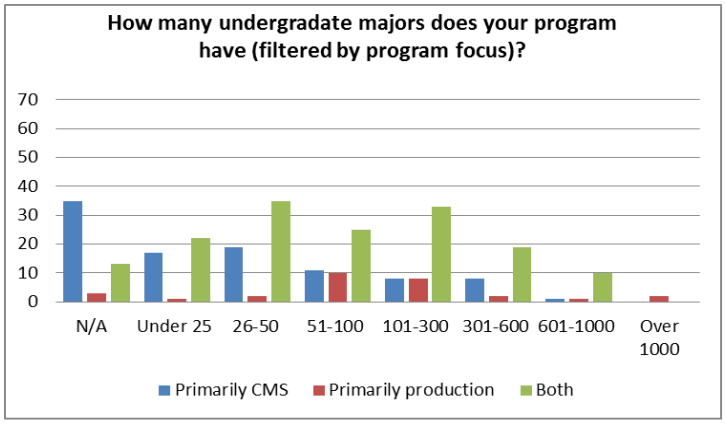


Figure 6



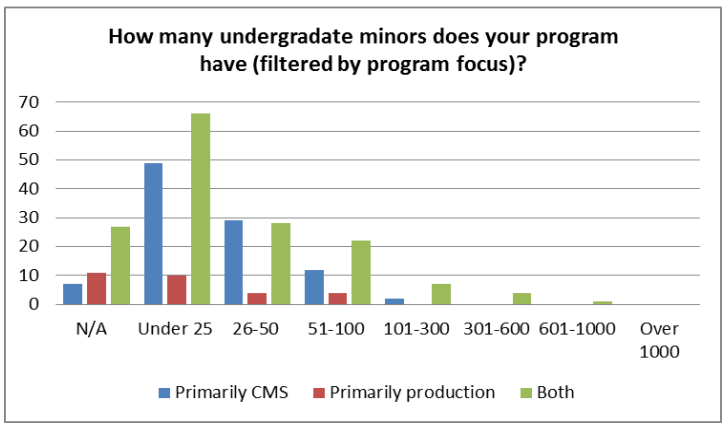


Figure 7

In terms of the size of the unit (Figure 7), those focusing on production, or with some production component, tend to have larger numbers of undergraduate majors, with most of the units identified as primarily production having 50 to 300 majors; in two cases, such programs reported over 1000 majors. Programs with undergraduate minors tend to have smaller numbers regardless of focus; most programs with a cinema and media studies component reported less than 50 minors, with up to 600 in only a few case and only one unit reporting 600-1000 minors.

Programs with graduate degrees (Figure 8, below) tend to have fewer than 50 students in a given degree program regardless of focus; however, the only units that identified

over 100 M.F.A. students were those with a joint-focus, while Ph.D. programs are dominated by primarily cinema and media studies and joint units, with only one primarily production unit reporting Ph.D. students (at the under 25 level).

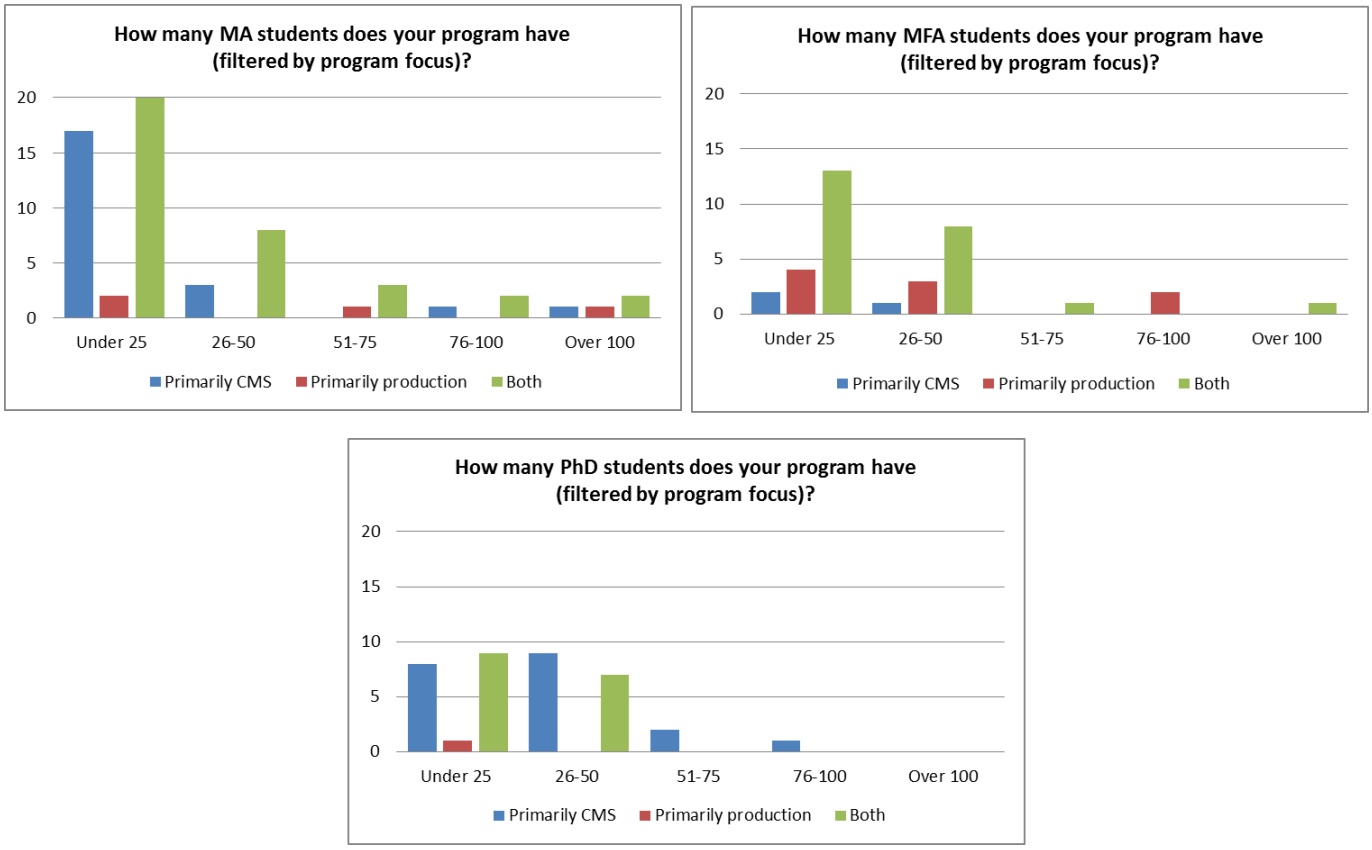


Figure 8

Program/Department Naming

Units surveyed had the option of including information about the name of their department or program. While no particular questions addressed the reasons behind a given unit's chosen name or assessed how that name reflected institutional requirements and/or the specific area foci of the unit, a brief look at the common markers of those unit names provides an instructive snapshot of the field of film and media studies. It's important to note that not all units were film/media-only as many of the respondents were directors of film minors or certificates within larger English, theatre, or communications departments. The following data does not take those differences into account, but rather provides a glimpse of what terms most frequently appear in these names and, as such, how the discipline, broadly configured, is represented. The keywords used were also not exclusionary; in other words, a unit may be counted twice, once under "film" and once under "studies," if they used both the terms in their name.

Of the units surveyed, all but two included their unit name. Of those, half used the words "film" (170, 55%) and/or "studies" (146, 47%) in their unit name, with "media" coming in a close third (102, 33%). Other relatively common terms included "communication," "arts/art" "English," and "cinema" (between 11% and 16% of the time), with more specific terms like "radio," "television," "video," and "screen" used least frequently (with 3%-7% of units). See Figure 9, below.

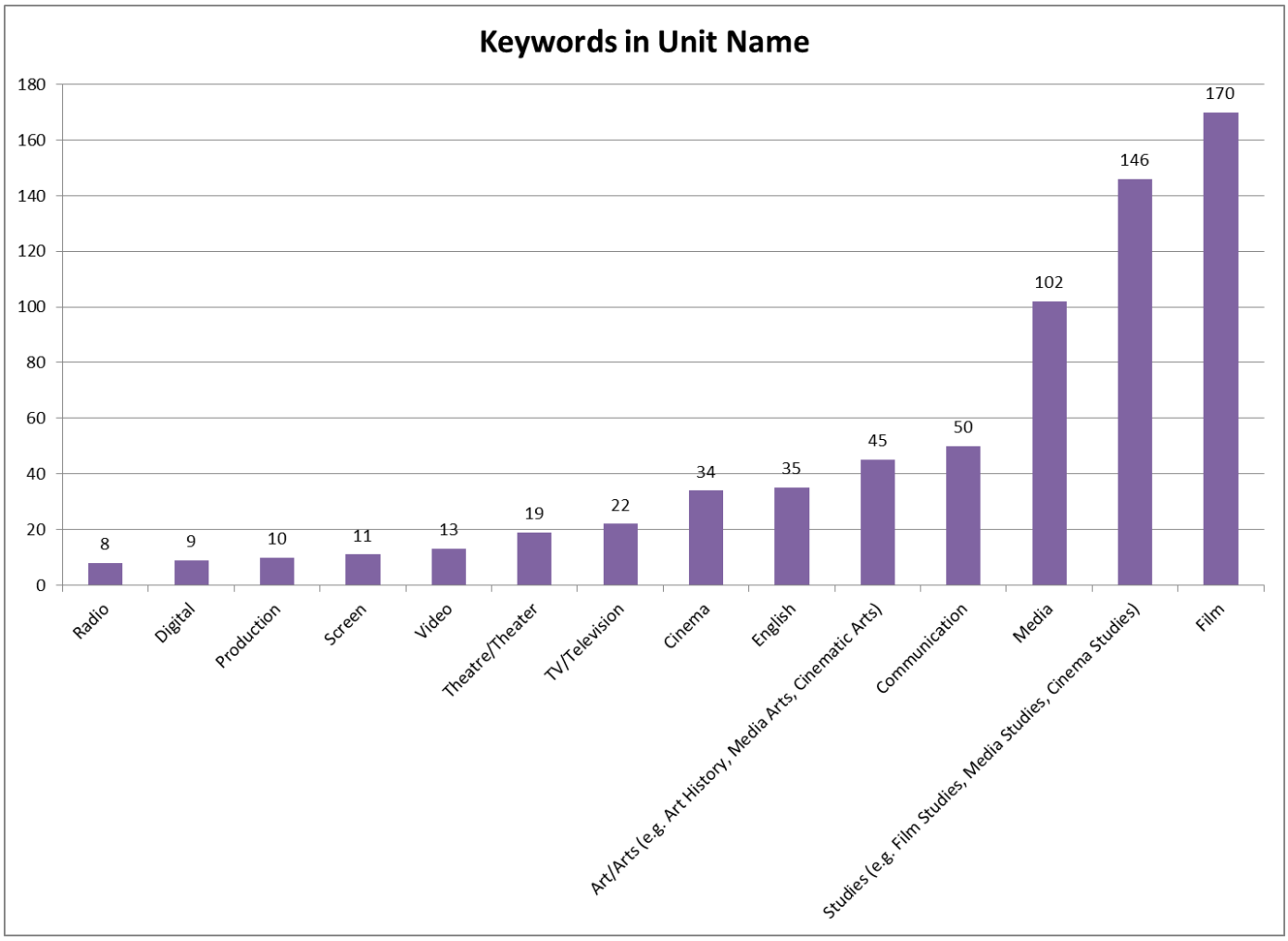
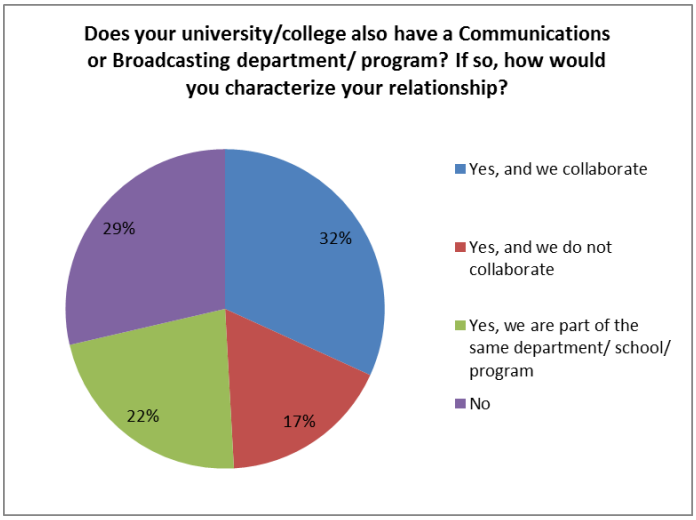


Figure 9

Collaboration with other units:

Of the units surveyed, the majority do have a communication/broadcasting department at their institutions (Figure 10, below); of those who are not part of the same unit as the communications department, 32% collaborate with that department, while 17% do not. On the other hand, the majority of units did not identify a film school or media production program at their institutions. Of those that did, the majority were either part of the same unit as the production department or collaborate in some way with that unit.

Primarily cinema and media focused units are more likely to collaborate with either communications or production units within their institutions than production-focused or joint units, which tend to be part of these other departments (Figure 11, below).



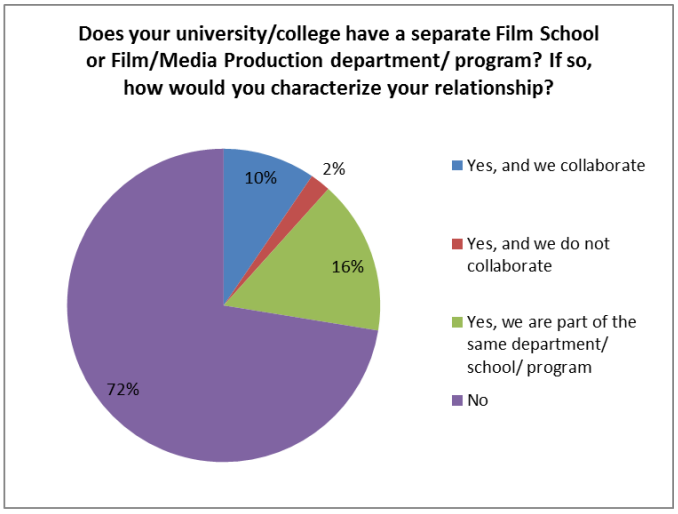
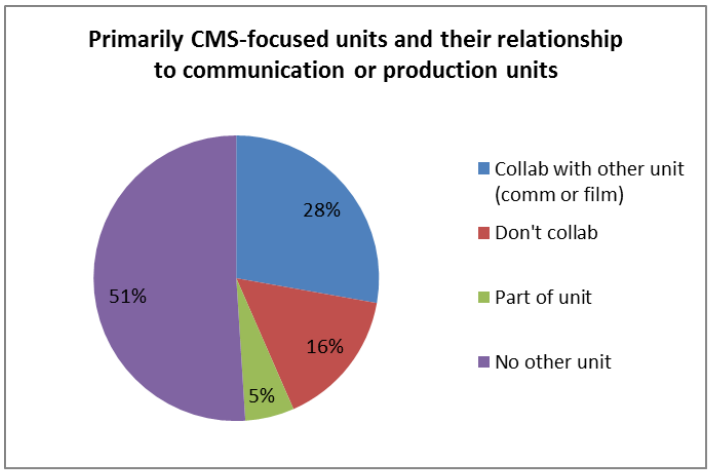
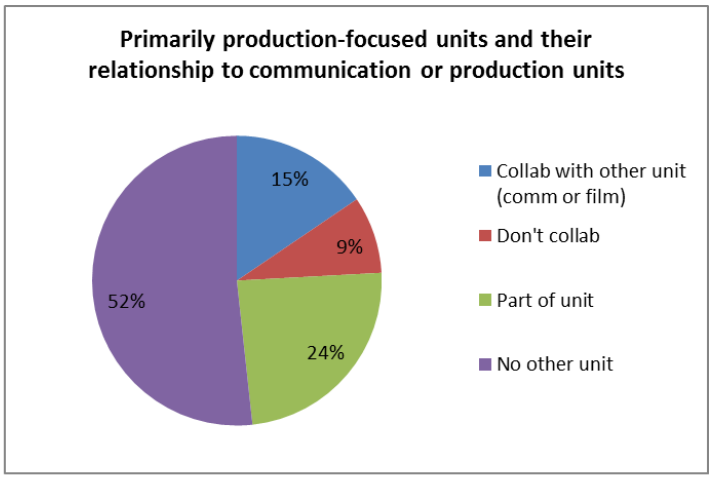


Figure 10





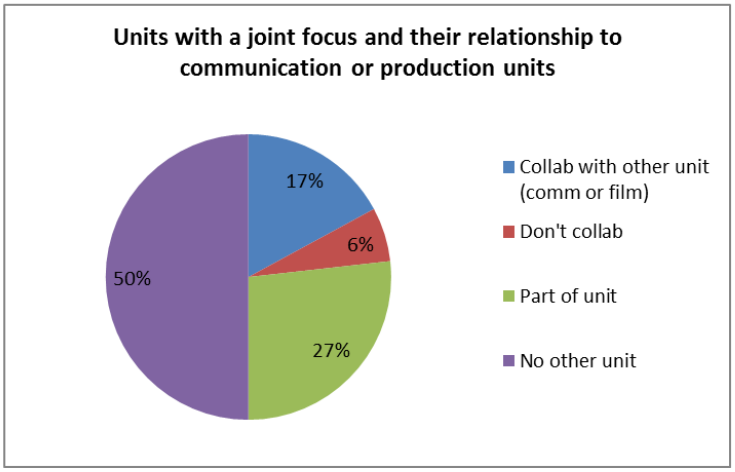


Figure 11

Discussion and Write-in Responses

Other Degree Programs

Respondents were given the option to write-in degree and certificate types that were not explicitly included in the survey. Some of these responses indicate that film-related degrees are embedded in other department and program majors and minors, such as art history, English, and/or theatre degrees with concentrations in film and/or media. Some of the other notable degree programs include interdisciplinary undergraduate degrees with concentrations in cinema or media studies, certificates in screenwriting or media and culture, a graduate certificate in social media, a degree in digital filmmaking, and a degree in moving picture archiving and preserving.

A few of the respondents indicated that their programs are housed in experimental, interdisciplinary, and/or liberal arts colleges either without majors or without formal departments where students can create their own degree programs with film or media concentrations. Several others mentioned that their film or media studies degrees are obtainable through consortiums or agreements between campuses or different institutions located in close proximity or within the same university system.

In addition to those departments/programs that were already part of interdisciplinary initiatives, a number of the respondents noted recent moves by institutions to create multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary departments, involving film studies to varying degrees—from fully integrated to tangentially related. For a more detailed look at one of these initiatives, consider one respondent's description of their institution's plans for an integrated communication, media studies, and technology curriculum:

> There is currently a proposal in the works for a new Department of Communication, Technology, and Culture (or something like that) which would be a cooperative/ interdisciplinary/inter-school initiative bridging Humanities, Social Sciences, and Computer Sciences. We would provide the core courses in history/visual analysis, as well as upper-division electives in, particularly, television and new media studies. […] We are also partnered with the Information/Computer Science school here on campus, providing the theory/history/critical analysis core and a roster of electives for the major in Computer Gaming. ICS provides instruction in code-writing and much professional outreach/career placement, while we provide the "liberal arts" element of that major.

Integrated programs like the one described above may indicate one of the ways colleges and universities are condensing departments and combining units in an effort to "professionalize" certain humanities disciplines; however, it can also be seen as a sign of innovative collaboration between programs in order to offer students several inroads into the study of film, television, and media. This and other forms of collaboration between units, particularly related units such as communication, film production, and cinema and media studies, was a significant point of discussion later in the survey.

Collaboration and Relationships

After answering questions about their degree of involvement with other programs at their institutions, respondents were asked if there was anything they would like to add about either of these relationships: between the participant department/program and any separate film/production school or separate communications/broadcasting department/program.

Many respondents reported cordial, ongoing, and even innovative collaborations between film studies and English, communications and film studies, and journalism ethics and documentary studies, to name a few such intersections, with specific examples showing the multifaceted and compelling ways units can work together to offer students several interrelated and diverse curriculums with varying foci. For example, one respondent reported that while film production was part of the theatre and film department, two other departments offered related courses with film history and film studies serving as part of the curriculum for other programs, such as popular culture and foreign languages, as well. They concluded,

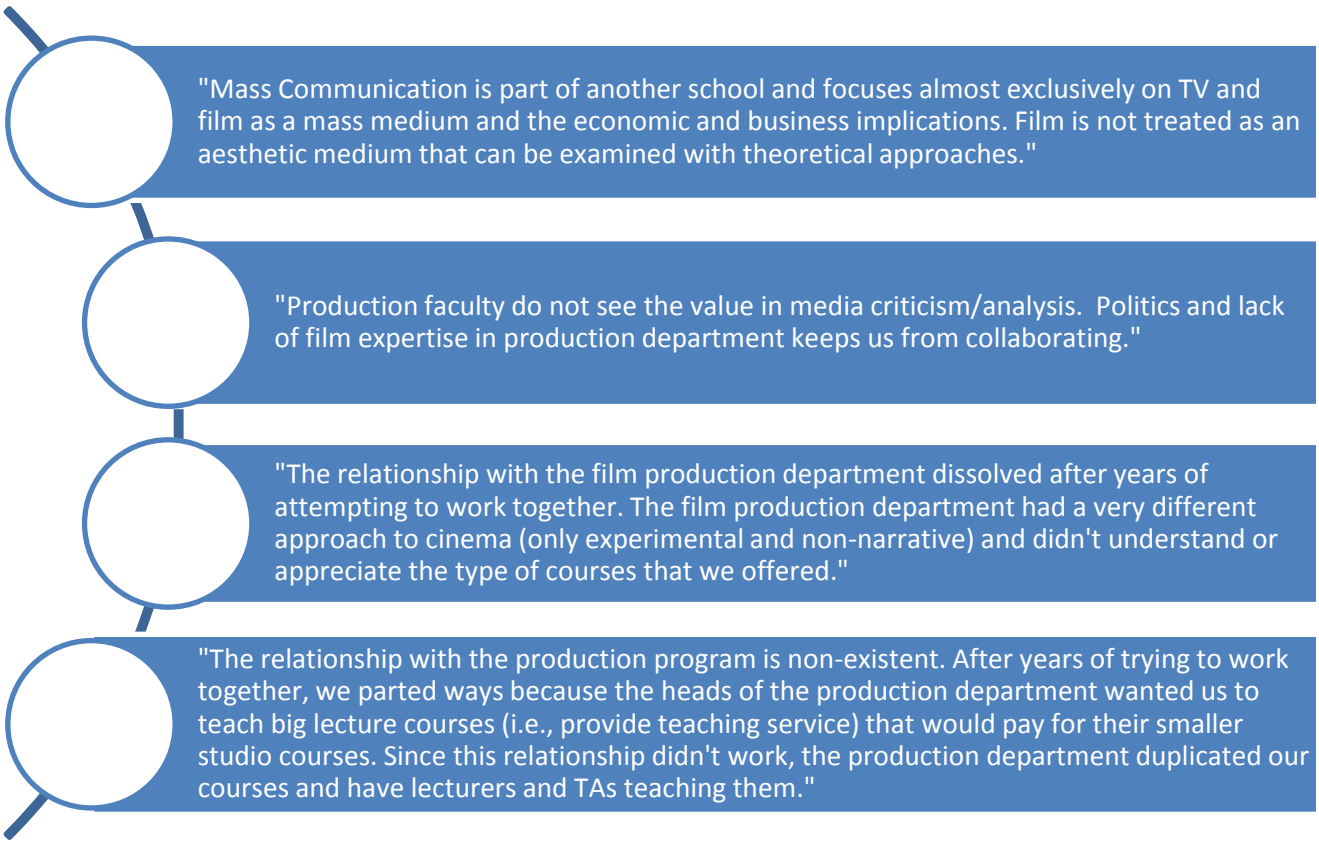
> Our students benefit in many ways because of the congenial liberal arts learning environment here, and also because of the different production technology and equipment found in each department.

For those that were struggling with collaboration, some respondents indicated that it was desired but not currently attainable for financial reasons or due to lack significant overlap:

> I would like to see more collaboration across departments, but we don't have the faculty resources or administrative support to make this happen.

> [Our relationship with] the Communications Department faculty is supportive and cordial, and we share many of the same students, but our classes are too distinct to warrant any direct collaboration.

On the other hand, many respondents who chose to write responses about their collaboration, or lack thereof, with related units reported tensions around ideological differences, a perceived disinterest or disregard for one unit's approach to film and media as compared with the other's, divergent aesthetic and critical concerns, and/or competition over resources and staff:



The difficulties with collaboration and, in some cases, hostility between some related units illustrates one of the major areas of concern for those invested in growing film and media studies as a discipline that integrates academic and industry concerns. One respondent succinctly summarized the ongoing complexity of the relationship between communications and production programs and film studies:

> There is a difficult tension between the traditions (especially between humanities vs. social sciences) though there is some warm collaboration as well. What is most striking is the huge lack of understanding of (and care for) the intellectual interests of either side for the other.

Another respondent aptly captured both a cause to hope that these relationships can improve and a sense of the tenuous nature of these collaborations:

> The English Department, where I reside, and the Communication Department are trying to work together and we have learned how to do so, after several rough years--more than a decade or so. But there is always the sense that, depending on how the program develops or, if it develops into a major as we're hoping for, that these turf wars could reignite.

Challenges and Further Exploration

While this survey provides an overview of the some of the major issues, concerns, and innovations in film and media studies programs and departments in the United States, conducting the survey also brought to light a number of challenges that seem both endemic to and illustrative of the complexity of the field of film and media studies:

What counts as "film and media studies"?

- Lack of consistency in how units operate, what kinds of courses they offer, and how they define themselves
- Units vary widely: some are standalone film/cinema units, but many are part of art history, English, communications, and theatre programs or interdisciplinary humanities programs
- According to one respondent trying to explain the various ways film is taught on their campus, "some of this is a bit messy."

Ideological variance

- Ideological differences between production and film and media studies programs, plus a variety of majors and concentrations complicate collaborations
- Laudable diversity in the field also creates competition and is a challenge for data gathering: "Given the rise of cinema and television as complex and compelling cultural artifacts, many other departments [...] now include the study of film/media in their courses. This creates constant competition for students."

Where to draw the line between programs?

- Difficulty in ascertaining division between communications and film and media studies units in some cases, which suggests a need for greater collaboration and/or building bridges between constituent organizations like the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) and the National Communication Association (NCA)
- In some ways, these blurry boundaries mirror the complex relationship between the social sciences and the humanities—divergent despite many similar interests, but with differing methodologies

Resources and faculty

- Shared or competing finances between related units and/or lack of finances and resources can make the contours of film and media studies programs difficult to ascertain
- Faculty who are also working in the private or public sector (i.e. screenwriters, directors, film critics) may not fit into traditional academic departments in the same way: "As we are located very close to the film & TV industries, our film instructors are largely working professionals who teach part time."
- Reliance on contingent faculty and graduate student labor complicates considerations of course offerings and faculty specializations

Institutional variety

- Liberal arts colleges and research universities--and the many types of institutions in between--have differing access to resources, ability to hire faculty, types of students, curricular structures, and institutional requirements
- Not all institutions have majors and minors and some units offer only certificates or other types of degrees that are not as easily assessed
- Some institutions do not fit "traditional" models: "As a school without majors many of the questions did not apply to us [...] I would say probably half of the students in our interdisciplinary / experimental art school use moving images in their work. They are informed by Cinema Studies and the History of Video Art."

The data gathered in this survey suggest the need for further exploration in a number of areas, including, but not limited to, the role of contingent faculty, the funding of graduate students, resources for undergraduate students, the relationship between undergraduate and graduate departments/programs in terms of faculty specializations and course offerings, the balance between pedagogy/teaching and research/scholarship, and the ever-present concern of ideological differences between diverging branches of film and media studies, broadly-defined. The inherent interdisciplinarity of the field of film and media studies poses potent challenges, but also offers unique opportunities for cooperation and amity between units:

> We are fairly young (7 years now) and receive $0 official funding because of our status as an "interdisciplinary program" BUT have been supported by our colleagues in the English and Creative Writing programs to the point where they have given up faculty lines for us as our program grew. We align ourselves more with the humanities than [communication] studies but also have great relationships with professors from that department as well.

Conclusions

Film and media studies is a vibrant, growing, and constantly shifting field, essential to and embedded in our daily lives both inside and outside the academy. This, as a number of respondents noted, presents vital opportunities for the continued expansion and extension of the field and its reach:

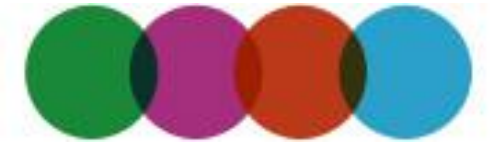
> Cinema is at the heart of a growing international, interdisciplinary interest in media studies. A minor in Cinema will give students the critical vocabulary and perspective with which to analyze motion pictures within larger artistic, cultural, historical, political, linguistic, and global contexts, as well as provide a greater understanding of and hands-on experience with cinema production, including screenwriting, acting, directing, producing, cinematography, and editing.

> Our students develop an understanding of individual films as important and highly influential works of art, as complex and contested cultural artifacts, and as products of an ever-changing technology circulating within an increasingly globalized marketplace.

However, the development and growth of the field also requires an expansion of resources, which, for some units, are quite scarce. Some respondents to the survey noted "remarkable growth" and increases in course offerings, students, and faculty, while others lamented the "cannibalizing of students, courses, and resources" from other departments in their institutions. "Visual literacy should be a part of a liberal arts education. Students are clamoring for classes," one respondent asserted, before elaborating on the

complicated path their one film studies faculty member has to navigate in order to teach primarily film, rather than English, as they are housed in that department and the institution has specific disciplinary curricular requirements for its faculty.

The wide variety in types of department/programs, faculty specializations, number of students and faculty, course offerings, curricular development, and institutional privileges and restrictions reveals the complexity, range, and necessity of the field, as well as the need for continued institutional resources to support the growth and preservation of film and media studies in higher education. Ultimately, film and media studies, and its related disciplines, is a dynamic, diverse, and rich field of study that deserves further consideration as a vital area of both academic and industry development.



NOTE: *For further information, specific questions about methodology, or to request access to the raw data from this survey, please contact Dr. Aviva Dove-Viebahn (actdv@yahoo.com) and CC office@cmstudies.org in your correspondence.*

Film and Media Studies Program Survey
Appendix

Updated January 31, 2015

Society for Cinema and Media Studies – State of the Field Survey
Quantifiable Results

What types of degrees/certificates does your department/program offer for film, television, media, and/or new media studies students? [please select all that apply] (Total respondents to this question: 291)	
A. Undergraduate major (BA)	176
B. Undergraduate major (BS)	19
C. Undergraduate major (BFA)	34
D. A track or concentration within your undergraduate major (select this option if your department only offers film/media classes but no particular certificate/degree and then please explain in the next question).	51
E. Undergraduate minor	189
F. Undergraduate certificate	15
G. Graduate degree (PhD)	22
H. Graduate degree (MA)	44
I. Graduate degree (MFA)	29
J. Graduate minor or certificate	21

Does your department/program focus on cinema/media studies (i.e. critical theory, film history, etc.) or cinema/media production (film production, broadcasting, etc.)? (Total respondents to this question: 289)	
A. Primarily Cinema and Media studies	101
B. Primarily Production	29
C. Both	159

Is your department/program a stand-alone unit or is it part of a larger department (such as English or Communications)? (Total respondents to this question: 287)	
A. Stand alone	132
B. Part of another unit	155

Please select the categories that represent the specialties of film, television, and media/new media faculty in your department/program [please select all that apply]. (Total respondents to this question: 286)	
A. Film history	243
B. Early cinema	137
C. Television studies	114
D. Radio studies	37
E. Sound studies	71
F. Gender studies	161
G. Sexuality studies	98
H. Critical race studies	101
I. Media studies	182
J. New media	155
K. Media industries and technologies	116
L. Digital humanities	66
M. Media pedagogy	32
N. American cinema	218
O. Global or transnational cinema and/or television	179
P. Documentary studies	179
Q. Film production	181
R. Television production	81
S. Digital media production	170
T. Experimental film/media	129
U. Video game studies	55
V. Fan or audience studies	59
W. Animation	81
X. Film and television theory and criticism	230

How many undergraduate majors (BA, BS, BFA) are there currently in your department/program? (Total respondents to this question: 285)	
A. N/A	51
B. Under 25	40
C. 26-50	56
D. 51-100	46
E. 101-300	49
F. 301-600	29
G. 601-1000	12
H. Over 1000	2

How many undergraduate minors or certificate students are there currently in your department/program? (Total respondents to this question: 283)	
A. N/A	45
B. Under 25	125
C. 26-50	61
D. 51-100	38
E. 101-300	9
F. 301-600	4
G. 601-1000	1
H. Over 1000	0

How many MA students are there currently in your department/program? (Total respondents to this question: 283)	
A. N/A	221
B. Under 25	40
C. 26-50	11
D. 51-75	4
E. 76-100	3
F. Over 100	4

How many MFA students are there currently in your department/program?	
(Total respondents to this question: 283)	
A. N/A	248
B. Under 25	19
C. 26-50	12
D. 51-75	1
E. 76-100	2
F. Over 100	1

How many PhD students are there currently in your department/program?	
(Total respondents to this question: 283)	
A. N/A	246
B. Under 25	18
C. 26-50	16
D. 51-75	2
E. 76-100	1
F. Over 100	0

Does your university/college also have a Communications or Broadcasting department/program? If so, how would you characterize your relationship?	
(Total respondents to this question: 283)	
A. Yes, and we collaborate	90
B. Yes, and we do not collaborate	49
C. Yes, we are part of the same department/school/program	63
D. No	81

Does your university/college have a separate Film School or Film/Media Production department/program? If so, how would you characterize your relationship?	
(Total respondents to this question: 283)	
A. Yes, and we collaborate	27
B. Yes, and we do not collaborate	6
C. Yes, we are part of the same department/school/program	45
D. No	205

Would you like key information about your department/program (types of degrees and specialties of faculty) to be included in a public listing on the SCMS website? While other information (i.e. number of majors, collaboration with other departments, etc.) will be included in our film and media studies program report, it will be used for statistical purposes and remain anonymous.	
(Total respondents to this question: 276)	
A. Yes	234
B. No	42