Concept Paper: Proposed BA in Film Studies

I. Title / Department / College

Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Film Studies offered by the School of Film and Animation (SOFA), College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

II. Abstract

The primary goal of the proposed BA in Film Studies is to provide students with an interest in film history and applied theory the opportunity to study within a thriving environment of SOFA filmmakers / artists and motion picture science students. The proposed Film Studies BA will enhance the existing BFA, BS, MFA degree offerings in SOFA positioning it uniquely among universities in the USA with comprehensive degree offerings in all aspects of film education. Students in the BA program will explore traditional and evolving cinema at the global level.

The current degree programs within SOFA are impressive in their depth and technological scope including live action fiction and documentary production, animation, cinema crafts, screenwriting, and digital engineering of motion picture imaging. The missing emphasis is the larger historical and theoretical overview of the medium and the opportunity to learn applied analytical skills leading to publication and graduate studies. Students in the BA program will explore the universal language of cinema at the global level through a wide range of coursework and written analysis leading to the publication of a senior thesis monograph including articles on student and non-professional films, national cinemas, and theoretical concerns. Select SOFA faculty as well as faculty from within other departments in CIAS and COLA already offer some coursework to support this proposed program.

SOFA is arguably one of the most popular programs at RIT. Every year approximately 75% of applicants are denied admission to the BFA program and every year only 20% of internal transfer students are admitted to the BFA program which is sized based on the limited amount of facilities and equipment necessary to support the program. The BA in Film Studies would allow for larger enrollments, especially among students who may not be creative filmmakers or interested in the science and technologies of digital filmmaking.

Graduates of the BA program would exist within the dynamic culture of active filmmakers in SOFA. This exposure will enhance their understanding of the film medium while providing them opportunities to write about current filmmaking practices.
III. Program Description

a. Overview and justification of new program

The proposed Film Studies BA in SOFA / CIAS would be offered in alignment with the foundation first semester experience of all SOFA majors. Instead of production courses, students would begin their study of history, theory, and analytical writing.

There is the possibility of on-line class offerings in later years. Proficiency in a foreign language would be required. Students would be encouraged to seek out a semester study abroad exchange.

Current enrollment levels in the BFA program turn away approximately 80% of the students who apply. Students who are denied admission to the BFA program may be interested in the Film Studies program which would allow them a place in SOFA where they could learn to review films, write and publish scholarly work, and learn the fine art of film criticism from a background situated firmly in the classic academic traditions of scholarship. The placement of the BA program within the School of Film and Animation would provide students with exposure to the realities of actually making films and the creative processes of filmmakers and screenwriters. Their study of film would not happen in an abstract vacuum, but be directly linked with a creative community of students.

b. Summary of new program curriculum

The Film Studies BA has been structured to blend with the existing SOFA undergraduate degrees curriculum in the common first semester. Students will be admitted through the standard processes with the addition of a small portfolio of written work samples related to film history / theory. The same high standards in SAT scores will apply to incoming SOFA BA students.

Proposed RIT degree requirements would equal 120 semester credits.

General education requirements would equal 60 semester credits including foreign language course work and specialized course work in writing and publishing. Several COLA courses in film history would be included. Regional students would have access to on campus general education courses, with the possibility of advanced students engaged in on-line general education classes.

Writing –
Freshmen -minimum of 8 credits of expository writing
Transfers – minimum of 4 credits of expository writing

Foreign Language –
A minimum of 8 credits or confirmed proficiency at an intermediate level
Contemporary Global Culture –  
A minimum of 12 credits in Humanities and Social Sciences

Scientific Inquiry –  
A minimum of 6 credits in natural science or quantitative reasoning

The remaining credits may be taken in any area of general education.

Major area of study equals 40 semester credits / 10 courses.

Film Studies – a minimum of 40 credits in the major to be distributed as follows.

Core requirements –  
Film Syntax  
Film Screenings  
Story and Structure  
Intro to Film Studies  
Film Research, Scholarship, Publishing

History Requirements –  
US Film History  
Film Theory  
International Film History  
Film Director / Genre History  
Evolving Technology: Global Film Practice

The remaining credits may be taken in any SOFA or COLA Film Studies courses.

IV. Fit with RIT Mission and Strategy

The proposed BA in Film Studies supports RIT’s mission of enhanced interdisciplinary education and builds on the strengths of existing programs. The addition of this degree to those already offered by the School of Film and Animation would create a comprehensive menu of degrees at the undergraduate level. Once the BA has established itself as a viable program, the plan is to investigate a MA in Film Studies.

The proposed program offers a multidisciplinary approach to prepare students in the global society. With its emphasis on scholarship in the study of the universal medium of film, our graduates will gain a broad cultural base from which to address the large, philosophical issues of a rapidly changing culture driven more and more by media and film. Whether our graduates seek
advanced degrees or write, they will take with them a solid understanding of the discipline as it relates to the human condition.

The emphasis on writing as an educational goal is showcased and would be accomplished through collaborations with the School of Media Sciences and COLA as students write and publish their senior thesis monograph. Ultimately students with such a degree seek graduate studies and careers in education, writing and publication, film archival work, curating and programming film screenings for museums and film festivals, and online film related opportunities.

V. Synergy with Other Programs

The proposed BA in Film Studies offers an interdisciplinary approach to prepare students for graduate studies and for careers in film journalism and scholarship.

Several examples of collaborative learning include:
Existing courses in CIAS in art history, art theory, publishing.
Existing courses in COLA in various specialized film topics including narrative, global film history, USA film history and business. Many general education courses are based in COLA.

The possibility of on-line learning in the advanced years would take advantage of new courses and those already being offered.

International study opportunities within RIT through study abroad programs and in collaboration with other universities.

Once the undergraduate BA degree is established, a dual BA / MA five year degree in Film Studies would be pursued.

VI. Administrative Structure for the New Program

The BA in Film Studies fits within the existing structure of the School of Film and Animation / CIAS. Administrative and advising resources are already assigned to SOFA. A program chair position would administer the new BA program working with the Administrative Chair of SOFA.

VII. Enrollment Management Expectations and Sustainment

This program would expand the possible degree paths for students entering RIT’s School of Film and Animation which is currently among the most desirable for incoming students. Although admission standards would remain high, students would have an option of studying film instead of making films
or learning the engineering behind motion pictures. It is anticipated that students would stay in SOFA with this new degree choice of film studies.

With enrollment levels starting at 10 students in the first year and building steadily after that, the program would comfortably accommodate 50 – 60 majors in the first four years.

VIII. Impact on Resources

Resources for the BA Film Studies in SOFA already exist within the current program and would support initial start up of the new program.

The first year courses and general education requirements are already in place. BA students would meet similar requirements for all undergraduate programs within SOFA.

For the first two years, one new faculty is required assuming current levels of H&A courses are offered. A second new faculty position would be necessary in the third year. No new facilities are necessary other than office and screening space.

If online coursework is created, additional classroom space is not necessary although additional faculty might be needed.

IX. Conclusion

The creation of a BA degree within the School of Film and Animation would be unique among university level programs by offering a complete array of degree choices. Once the BA is established, a MA degree and then a dual BA/MA five year degree could be added to the scope of degrees offered by the school.

Residency in the first three years plus the creation of online courses to support the major would attract students whose interest in the medium of film is focused on history and theory with an emphasis in scholarly writing for all applications. After the BA degree is established, distance learning would provide another option for study.

The placement of the BA degree within the exciting environment that is SOFA will expose students to the dynamics of filmmaking and provide a realistic overview to the work directors, writers, and technical craftsmen bring to making films. The work of the BA students would be assessing the work of these new filmmakers as well as the global world of cinema through analysis and scholarship of films.