



Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

---

# L.A. FILM STUDIES CENTER

---

Los Angeles, CA

## OCTOBER 2016 EVALUATION STUDENT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMISSION



*Authored by Wendy Lippert, William Hackett, and Kathy Storm  
September 26-29, 2016*

### SAPC Commission Members

**Dr. Kathleen Storm**  
Associate Provost  
Whitworth University (WA)

**Mr. Ken Gilson**  
Dean of Academic Records &  
University Registrar  
Biola University (CA)

**Dr. William Hackett**  
Provost  
Southeastern University (FL)

**Wendy Lippert**  
Assistant Director of Off-Campus  
Programs  
Messiah College (PA)

**Debra Harless**  
Executive Vice President and Provost  
Bethel University (MN)

**Dr. Laura Montgomery**  
Director of Global Education  
Wheaton College (IL)

# Student Academic Programs Commission Program Review Report: Los Angeles Film Studies Center

October 2016

Report prepared by:

William Hackett (Provost, Southeastern University)

Wendy Lippert (Director of Off-Campus Programs, Messiah College)

Kathy Storm (Associate Provost of Faculty Development, Whitworth University)

## I. Overview

The CCCU's Los Angeles Film Studies Center offers a highly professional, deeply caring environment for students seeking a program that will develop their skills to enter the entertainment industry—and to do so as thoughtful people of faith. Directed by Rebecca Ver Straten-McSparran, the program is located in the heart of L.A., immersing students in the world of Hollywood while maintaining a home base of support for their faith conviction, training and well-being.

From September 26-29, 2016, three members of the Student Academic Program Commission (Wendy Lippert, William Hackett, and Kathy Storm) visited Los Angeles Film Studies Center and conducted a program review. The purpose of the review was to evaluate major areas of LAFSC's offerings, including curriculum, assessment plan, student development program and staffing. Interviews with staff members and students, class observations, internship site visits, as well as an extensive self-study were provided. In addition, the SAPC team has had access to alumni surveys, course syllabi, policy documents and handbooks. Staff and students were generous with time and information; a spirit of warmth and welcome, but also efficiency and professionalism marked the review visit.

This report is offered to the staff of LAFSC and of the CCCU, hoping that the perspectives of campus visitors may be of assistance in future planning. In addition, this report is provided to colleges considering the value of BestSemester opportunities for their own students.

## II. Program mission and history

### **Observations:**

By virtue of mission and location, LAFSC offers an educational program that prepares students to contribute to the Hollywood entertainment industry with skill, thoughtfulness and clarity of purpose. The Christ-centered vision, which combines Christian identity with a generous and welcoming spirit, permeates coursework and community life. As impressive as educational objectives and industry accomplishments are, it's the quality of personal presence of the staff—people of faith and commitment to student development and welfare—that makes the program uniquely effective.

As articulated by LAFSC staff, major program objectives for students include:

- To become life-long learners who think more critically and creatively
- To know and practice the art of cinematic storytelling
- To know and practice the aesthetic, practical and technical aspects of the filmmaking process
- To develop a thoughtful, holistic Christian worldview and exhibit Christ-like attitudes and habits
- To develop and exhibit the professional skills necessary to work in the Hollywood entertainment industry

For 25 years, LAFSC has walked a fine line between serving students, CCCU schools and the Hollywood industry. Highly regarded by a network of friends in the professional world, LAFSC offers an ethos of professionalism that serves as a transition for students as they leave home universities and, as people of faith and conviction, enter a fast-paced world of career in the entertainment industry.

**Commendations:**

1. The staff members of LAFSC, committed to developing professional skills, are also united by Christian conviction that is winsome, inclusive and kind. Above all, we commend the program director, staff and faculty for their contributions to the lives of students.
2. This program is marked by high standards of professionalism and achievement in the entertainment industry. The remarkable network of contacts and opportunities gives students entrée into a world of career experience, realism and opportunity that builds on preparation received on home campuses.
3. Remarkable support for alumni, involvement of alumni in providing opportunities for current students, and a history of alumni success in finding employment all give evidence of LAFSC's unique and exceptional commitment to program alumni.
4. The program has been remarkably stable in a changing environment; longevity of staff employment is commendable, and no doubt contributes to alumni loyalty.

**III. Program leadership**

**Observations:**

The leadership values and vision articulated by Rebecca, the director, are evident in the passion and philosophy of all the faculty and staff. There appears to be remarkable unity of shared purpose among all those who work at the center. Further, longevity of the staff not only provides program stability but gives evidence of this commonality of value. This shared purpose, strong communication and general good will of staff permeate the program ethos.

In addition to leading the construction of shared vision, Rebecca's leadership is marked by an extensive professional sensibility and network of contacts, availability as a mentor to students (reflected in alumni feedback), and entrepreneurial spirit. She is tackling some of the unique budget challenges of the program, for example, by pursuing arrangements for graduate student opportunity on-site. In addition, program materials speak to Rebecca's strong organizational abilities. In summary, the level of industry understanding and leadership skill she brings, on top of her theological and ministry background, makes her a highly effective program advocate and leader.

Given the shared leadership ethos of the program, it is important to note that all of the faculty and staff bring a similar combination of professional skills, commitment to education, heart for students, and deep commitment to faith. In total this is an impressive group, each contributing great strength to the program and to the quality of student experience.

One additional note that speaks to the effectiveness of leadership is that alumni of LAFSC, many of whom have remained in Los Angeles and found employment in the entertainment industry, are a particularly rich resource for the program. Alumni are involved in instruction and in opening on-site professional opportunities for current students, as well as in providing advice and feedback (as through an alumni council). Extensive alumni involvement in LAFSC helps maintain program currency as well as fortify an invaluable network of contacts and support for students.

### **Commendations:**

1. Rebecca, the director, is amazing. Bringing background both in theology and film, she articulates a message regarding the priestly role of the filmmaker that helps to frame the deep Christian, theologically-informed vision that guides the program.
2. The faculty and staff are passionate in their desire to serve students. We heard countless reports from students, even in our short time in L.A., of the approachability, helpfulness and care conveyed by staff. This investment in students is demonstrated in tangible ways—for example, in the open door policy of all personnel.
3. LAFSC staff members are highly professional and well-connected in the entertainment industry. The professionalism of the program is demonstrated in very practical ways large and small, such as teaching students to write thank you notes to those who help them accomplish projects, to show up to appointments early, to leave the set cleaner than when they came, and to meet people face to face.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The alumni advisory council is a strength of the program's structure; they are involved in approving curriculum changes and giving general program feedback. It is worth considering, over time, whether the charter or mandate for the group can be fruitfully expanded, given the invaluable resource that they provide (e.g., whether they can contribute to identification of professional development resources—and especially, given concern about remaining current in a rapidly-changing industry, whether they bring particular benefit to program strategic planning efforts).
2. We affirm the program's commitment to professional development, and want to encourage even more opportunity (while realizing that budget constraints are always a reality). Particularly given the isolation of many of the roles and the especially fast-paced change of this industry, regular professional development is as essential here as it is anywhere. Again, we recognize and support current involvement in workshops and conferences, and encourage continued and particular focus here.

## **IV. Academic and experiential learning**

### **Observations:**

The academic and internship structure of LAFSC provides students with an appropriate learning and practical hands-on experience led by qualified and gifted faculty and staff who are working in the film industry. Students are enrolled in classes that provide a valuable overview of the film industry while allowing them to wrestle with important issues within the filmmaking community and business.

The core courses provide students with comprehensive insight into the industry, especially into matters of practice. Students have extensive opportunity to receive training and to use professional equipment, including, this year, the introduction of virtual reality technology.

The ***Faith and Artistic Development*** core course allows students to wrestle with the concept of what it means to be a Christian in the film industry. Students consider ethical issues as well as foundational issues in the field. One of the course requirements is for groups to propose and participate in service projects (Culture Care) within LA and the Hollywood community. Through this course, students have, as examples, supported a struggling actor and served at a facility that helps women come out of the sex traffic industry.

In the ***Hollywood Production Workshop***, students work on script to screen projects, assuming roles as producers, directors, editors, photographers, as well as in sound and lighting. Collaboration is valued highly as a course goal; students work together as a team to develop a short film. Each week students are involved in two-

hour tutorials in production areas, led by faculty and alumni who guide students through the production process, trouble shoot issues, and talk with students about the etiquette of working in the film industry.

Internships are embedded in the ***Inside Hollywood Internship*** course. Internships take place three days a week, a schedule employers applaud. This gives students enough time to be immersed in meaningful work and be able to take on projects that benefit both the student and the employers. Internships are designed to give students a basic, practical knowledge of the film industry (or at least one aspect of the industry). Students engage in valuable networking that allows them to make connections to enter the field when they complete the semester.

Students are mentored throughout the process as they meet with the internship staff during the beginning process of applying; they take an intensive class that prepares them for the experience (including practical advising on interviewing and resume writing) where they are taught how to do script coverage, a skill most students need in their internships. Once students are hired, they set goals with their supervisor. In addition, students meet with the Internship Director periodically to discuss their goals, to review how their internship is going, to address any issues that arise, and to discuss further career plans.

Elective Courses provide students with additional opportunities to experience additional specific aspects of storytelling and film production:

***Narrative Storytelling*** emphasizes storytelling, allowing students to produce a short film, beginning with writing the script. The focus is on the story and less on technical aspects of the process.

***Professional Screenwriting*** is designed for the student who wishes to pursue a career in writing. Students write a full-length film and learn how to “pitch” a finished work to producers.

***Professional Acting for the Camera*** is taught by a professional actor. It is designed to help prepare students who wish to pursue an acting career and shepherd students through the audition process.

#### **Commendations:**

1. Strong commitment to faith integration throughout the curriculum was evident in our classroom visit, when talking to faculty and in our interactions with students.
2. There is a strong student mentoring mentality among the staff and faculty. Students know it, appreciate it, and utilize it.
3. Program objectives are lived out in courses, guided by curriculum matrices that identify which aspects of the course work will address objectives directly; this bridging of curriculum and program goals reflects careful planning and seriousness about objectives.
4. Faculty and staff members create a safe, accepting space to encourage students to be vulnerable and allow for openness to discuss hard topics. This provides for active and interactive classroom discussions.
5. Meaningful internships are situated in both long-time and newly-established companies that serve as a conduit to future employment in the film industry.
  - Options with new companies, especially those with limited staff give students opportunities to see and participate in all aspects of the film production process.
  - Students are well prepared by LAFSC to enter the workplace with pre-internship classes
  - The internship staff members are respected; employers spoke about their strong relationship with the internship director and valued their connection with the program.
  - Successfully utilizing sites with LAFSC alumni encourages a mentoring atmosphere in the workplace.

6. Faculty and staff are staying current in the field by pursuing their own projects (filmmaking, writing, involvement in the film community) in addition to their work at LAFSC. They bring these experiences back to the classroom, which directly benefits students.
7. Tutorials provide mentoring that specifically addresses practical aspects of the production process, including helping students understand etiquette.
8. The focus on training in storytelling is a strength of the programs (and offering two separate tracks in this area addresses needs of students with differing levels of experience). One employer interviewed during the review visit spoke to the high value that employers place on background and competency in storytelling.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Continue to look for ways to address the broad variety of backgrounds and experiences students bring to LAFSC. The program has already explored creative ways to do this (technology labs, two storytelling classes, tutoring, one-on one mentoring, internship placement), but may also want to consider:
  - Additional approaches to meeting needs of students with advanced technical skills. An honors or other type of advance class or additional independent study option may be particularly helpful here.
  - At the same time, we recognize that the program sometimes enrolls beginners without film background; efforts are being made to ensure these students are not left behind, and we applaud these. It may be that there are additional strategies (e.g., peer mentoring, success coaching) that would help to equalize abilities.
2. LAFSC competes with other film programs that have resources to purchase more expensive equipment, requiring delicate balance between the benefits of new equipment needed for the program with the limitations of operating budget. We applaud, first, entrepreneurial efforts to enhance revenue (e.g., equipment rental, graduate-level training, conferences). In addition, we support all efforts to highlight LAFSC strengths where the program can successfully compete, in particular:
  - Faith integration: LAFSC helps students wrestle with and understand what it means to be a Christian in the highly-challenging world of the film industry.
  - Community: Students' relationships with faculty mentors and both peer and alumni networking communities are particularly strong and valuable; this network includes ongoing professional discussion and opportunity as well as a network of friends.
  - Storytelling: Given that employers value background in storytelling and that students typically bring minimal background in this area, the program's strength in storytelling is worth highlighting in marketing.

#### **V. Student development**

##### **Observations:**

The Director of Student Life is on call 24/7 and handles all things related to living in Los Angeles and student life. She places students in housing (and lives in the same housing development), leads orientation, and cares (along with the program director) for students in crisis or when facing disciplinary issues. According to the resident director, the heart of her job is student interaction. She holds office hours and is readily available to students.

Living in a large city presents safety challenges, especially for students coming from rural homes and campuses. The program provides orientation when students arrive in the city, As the director related, "We do orientation, then we do it again." A telling example of LAFSC's comment to safety is demonstrated by the LAFSC director,

who lives near the LAFSC campus and tells students to call her for a ride back to their apartment if they are working late on a project at LAFSC so they do not walk home at night alone.

Student crisis situations are handled primarily by the Director of Student Life, and in some cases, the LAFSC Director. This would include any disciplinary or mental and physical health issues. LAFSC does not have staff with counseling backgrounds; however, they have local contacts within the city and many available resources for students who need assistance.

LAFSC provides students with a variety of activities to build community and provide students with opportunities to process their experiences. On Thursday evening, the Director of Student Life hosts a well-received evening event for students to discuss emerging issues. Notably, while the focus of the gathering is faith-oriented, students with a wide variety of views seem to feel warmly included and fully at home there. Additionally, the program hosts other fun community building activities, such as an Oscar party the night the awards are presented.

The Student Handbook is detailed and clear, covering major policies, resources and areas of helpful preparation (e.g., earthquake safety) that are specific to the Los Angeles context. There is also information that helps prepare students from a variety of religious and cultural contexts for the unique challenges of the entertainment world. For instance, students are asked to sign a statement acknowledging that they will be exposed to a range of content in films, the purpose of that, and that alternate assignments are possible. A high level of maturity is nurtured and sought in the way that responsibility is placed on students for awareness and decision-making.

Student development is encouraged through curriculum as well as co-curriculum. Classes wrestle with development issues like identity and spirituality, while the personal nature of some assignments, small class sizes and accessible faculty all help identify students in crisis. This seamless ethos of commitment to students is, again, a program strength worth noting.

#### **Commendations:**

1. The combined efforts of student life staff and faculty to the development and welfare of students is a considerable strength of the program; kudos for the holistic developmental approach.
2. Tutorials provide practical guidance on etiquette and other developmental skills.
3. The director of student life has a strong relationship with students and utilizes her background in media and youth ministry to address the needs of college age students.
4. The Thursday night event at the directors' house is well-received by students and allows students the opportunity to discuss emerging issues, including challenges to faith.
5. The Matthew 18 approach to conflict is an effective approach and reminder for students that scripture is alive and relevant and is particularly important to a program that thrives on teamwork. This Matthew 18 approach is described in the student handbook and forms a respectful basis for community support for the Community Covenant or Behavioral Code.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. We support professional development opportunities for all staff, and believe that is of special importance for the Director of Student Life's given the relative isolation and responsibility of her role. A network of professional camaraderie and conversation, which is now happening through a phone network, can be strengthened through other professional opportunities. For the program as a whole, in addition to the invaluable perspectives from professional film experience and ministry, student development issues and theory may hold valuable insight.

2. Consider support/relief options for the RD, who is on call 24/7. Regular “off-call” nights are good practice on campuses, and may well be helpful in the context of BestSemester programs as well. Support could take the form of hiring a Resident Assistant or there may be shared responsibility for call (more challenging, admittedly, in a stand-alone program than in a university setting, so different solutions may apply).

## **VI. Christian faith integration and faith formation**

### **Observations:**

The faith integration at LAFSC begins with an overall vision of serving the film industry in a priestly role; it is clear that faith in Christ, lived out meaningfully in a challenging and fast-paced industry, gives foundation and direction to the program. This faith focus was evident in class, in conversation and in program ethos.

While the pace of the program is fast and students remain very busy throughout the term, presenting for some a challenge to involvement in regular faith communities, from the very first day this challenge is addressed. At the initial orientation session, the director recommends an app, *Jesus Calling*, to support regular devotional time. In addition, numerous resources are offered and encouraged, including involvement in one of the many arts-oriented faith communities that are nearby. Church attendance is encouraged; LAFSC has lists of churches where previous students and alumni have worshipped. To help students locate strong churches, LAFSC alumni and staff offer to take students to their home churches during the early weeks of the term.

During orientation students are introduced to the new culture they will soon be entering. As part of that introduction, guest speakers talk about opportunities to live and share their faith in the challenging Hollywood entertainment arena. Suggestions on how to navigate the uniqueness of Hollywood culture are offered by long-time industry professionals.

There is a Thursday night gathering, as was mentioned in the student life discussion, where community members are encouraged to gather to talk about matters of faith at the home of the Resident Director. As was noted, this is a discussion in which all students, no matter their background or views, report feeling warmly welcome.

In addition to encouragement to live out faith in personal and community life, matters of faith are integrated into coursework. For example, the Faith and Artistic Development course articulates several faith-specific objectives:

- To develop a worldview inclusive of Hollywood cinema and faith.
- To balance individual beliefs with the pluralistic culture of Hollywood.
- To articulate what it means to be a filmmaker and artist as a person of faith in the Hollywood entertainment industry, and to explore it as a vocation.
- To develop a thoughtful, holistic Christian worldview and exhibit Christ-like attitudes and habits.

In other words, appropriately, perspectives and conversations of faith permeate the program, throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum. This is especially important and meaningful given the Hollywood context where discernment regarding complexities of Christian perspective may be especially challenging, as one program document described. Interestingly, among comments from alumni regarding how their faith had been developed, it was the theme of considering vocation that came up with particular frequency. It appears that the goal of helping students develop a worldview perspective, where faith is integrated into life-long perspectives on career, was a place where people believed that program had particular meaning for them.

### **Commendations:**

1. Faculty are united in part by faith commitment; they appear to model well the ability to remain united by faith while holding some different views and perspectives, an excellent model for students.
2. The production workshop class visited during the review offered an environment of substance, openness and vulnerability; it appears that this characterizes the program in general. Diversity of faith beliefs among the students seemed not to jeopardize inclusion or a warm sense of community; in fact, diversity appeared to be accepted, and as a prompt for growth and expansion in faith and thinking. The safety of the environment was described by a student who said this was the first place he had been able to explore doubts. Matters of difference on issues of religion or sexual orientation, that divide so many communities, did not appear to be sources of division in this environment.
3. As mentioned, the Resident Director's Thursday night session with students is a welcoming place for direct conversation about diverse matters of faith.
4. Information about available church options seems to be widely appreciated by students; many have found worship communities that are meaningful and welcoming. Students seem to feel warmly encouraged in their faith in a way that is meaningful in the Hollywood environment.
5. The director's affirmation of the importance of regular time for Bible reading, worship and reflection is a meaningful and important discussion at the start of the program.
6. The director of the internship program is particularly attentive to challenges to faith and values that may arise in internship settings, and walks alongside students in resulting conversations.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Although staff members work hard to encourage and nurture practices of faith, students are very busy, and simply need to be attentive that their spiritual formation isn't lost in the shuffle. In many ways this is a good challenge—probably far better to deal with the realities of a busy professional schedule when still living in a community that cares about their faith development, than to deal with this in isolation later on. Still, it is a matter for ongoing attention in any program, and particularly in this complex environment.
2. It would be helpful in building community and extending understanding of faith traditions to offer specific focus on different faith backgrounds from the variety of universities represented. This is a unique opportunity for these conversations since this program brings together students from a range of universities within the CCCU.
3. The challenge to faith in Hollywood can certainly raise doubts about faith, and certainly can give permission to articulate doubts perhaps unspoken. If this has not been an active point of regular conversation, it is probably an important one.
4. The topic of Christian virtues is one that is worth considering as a basis for helping students consider how to live out faith, particularly in a difficult environment. Traits of courage, compassion, humility—what is it like to live out virtues in a culture whose values may be quite antithetical?
5. Faith and learning can take many specific forms—e.g., focus on virtues and/ ethics, consideration of vocation, examination of cultural values through a lens of faith, and so forth. In addition, Christian worldviews can be articulated differently out of different faith and intellectual traditions. In general, the more that can be done to educate students about what those concepts mean in the context of this program, the more helpful that will be.
6. We affirm the priestly role of the filmmaker as a meaningful one for thinking about faith and vocation. In addition, we recommend exploration of the prophetic side of each person's calling as well. What does it mean to be a prophetic voice for values of faith in a Hollywood context?

## VII. Program assessment

### **Observations:**

The following are areas of focus and expectation for the program review of assessment strategies: clearly stated and measurable program objectives, regular systems of evaluation/assessment, and evidence of a feedback loop through which evaluation data is channeled into program planning. In addition, we looked for evaluation at both the class and program level, with clear criteria for evaluation. Finally, we hoped to find evaluation tools that offer students opportunities to give anonymous feedback.

As mentioned earlier, program objectives are explicit and clear, and emphasize life-long learning (to provide meaningful education for students, whether or not they continue work in the entertainment industry); these objectives guide course planning and evaluation. The Curriculum Planning Map outlines this process in detail. Similarly, course objectives, outline in class syllabi, give clarity regarding the major purposes and values of the courses; even internships are guided by learning contracts, and so educational goals are explicit and clear for all academic experiences.

There is one particular observation of note with regard to course objective: these aims (e.g., collaboration) are holistic and practical and speak to the values of the program as well as to cognitive or technical aims. In addition, they are objectives that are essential to industry success, so they set students up well for life and career, as well as for specific courses.

In surveys, students have a chance to comment on class effectiveness as well as program goals (e.g., the impact of the time in the program on their faith). It is telling that a wealth of alumni data is available (many pages of ratings and comments) and that responses overall are very positive. Here are a few items of note: alumni rate internships very positively, they affirm the importance of the faith environment as helping them consider their vocations and they consider the program to have been valuable even when they did not enter the film industry. Also, surveys are sent not only by the program but by the CCCU, so there is opportunity to give anonymous, non-identifiable feedback.

A regular feedback loop from assessment to planning is both formal and informal. Numerous examples of feedback from students and alumni resulting in program/course modification were evident in the program review. As one example, the Hollywood Production Workshop was modified because of changing needs of students and students' stated desire "to have a greater sense of agency." As a result, students were given responsibility for selecting their own production crews—one concrete example, out of many, of taking student input seriously.

On a final assessment topic, assessment of students in the form of grades is taken seriously. The standard CCCU grading policy and criteria are repeated consistently from course to course. Although specific rubrics in creative programs can be challenging, information on grading is made as clear and specific as it can be. Notably, while students reported being busy and challenged, none reported being graded unfairly.

### **Commendations:**

1. Learning objectives for both courses as a whole and for the program overall are clearly stated. They are also consistent with the program's mission and overarching values of the CCCU.
2. An Assessment Map outlines program objectives, where program objectives are addressed, what direct and indirect measures are employed, and what levels of performance are expected. This clear mapping offers both an instructional and assessment plan that is detailed and thorough, gives direction to

instruction, and offers program staff regular feedback on the extent to which program goals are addressed.

3. Numerous anecdotes of responsiveness, offered by both faculty and students, indicate that program staff members take assessment results seriously.
4. A particular strength is the involvement of alumni in giving feedback (surveys from 2008 and 2016) and in consulting on curricular changes through the alumni council.
5. Students are challenged, and evaluated and meaningful dimensions of work, but there is an ethos of trust, fairness and faculty accessibility that is evident.
6. Perhaps most impressive is the success of alumni in securing roles in the entertainment industry—and the appreciative view of the program from alumni who do not work in entertainment. While this is an indirect measure of program effectiveness, it is perhaps the most important measure of all.

## **VIII. Program health and sustainability**

### **Observations:**

Although there has been a drop in enrollment numbers in recent semesters, LAFSC remains one of the larger BestSemester programs and enjoys a strong reputation. Rebecca, to her credit, has done research to try to determine why there's been a recent decrease in numbers. At the moment it appears that the primary factor is a demographic and temporary one. In addition, spring registration numbers already appear hopeful.

Meanwhile, long-term program health and viability is a concern for every program—and especially for one that is preparing students to enter a world that is changing so quickly. Rebecca and other program staff are very aware of this challenge. While the program currently gives evidence of health and promise, they are wise to be focused on the long-term future.

### **Commendations:**

1. The SAPC review committee commends Rebecca for her entrepreneurial spirit, identifying sources of revenue (e.g., graduate courses, equipment rentals) that may help strengthen the financial resources and long-term viability of the program.
2. In addition, advisory structures (especially the alumni council) are very wise to prevent the program from becoming insular, disconnected from the world that they are seeking to prepare students to enter.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Strategic planning for a longer term may be very helpful—particularly if the plan is used more as a set of moorings than as a blueprint. In particular, if external professionals are drawn into this process that can serve a public relations function, further cementing relationships and drawing others into investment in the program's success. Admittedly, two significant challenges to long-term planning for LASFC are:
  - The quickly-changing Hollywood/entertainment environment
  - The multiple audiences served by the program (external professional constituents, the CCCU organization, member institutions/faculty, students)
  - The rapidly changing and expensive equipment and technology needed to remain current in the filmmaking industry.

However, even with these challenges, long-term strategic planning may have great value for addressing anticipated needs and challenges.

## IX. Concluding reflections

The SAPC review team agrees with LAFSC's self-assessment that the following are significant program strengths (review team comments added in parentheses):

1. Dedication and commitment of faculty and staff of the program, personally, professionally, and spiritually (the impressive faculty and staff, we agree, are the number one strength of the program)
2. Strong internship opportunities that bridge the gap between an academic career and a professional career (this was confirmed as a strength in alumni surveys)
3. Robust curriculum that allows students a wide variety of experiences and training over a short period of time (this was verified by students, just a few weeks into the program—even those who came from campuses with highly-developed film programs had high praise for all that they had learned already at LAFSC)
4. Cutting-edge technology that exceeds what is available at most home institutions (again, this was reiterated by current students)
5. Connection to community in Hollywood through guest speakers, alumni programs, and faith opportunities specific to arts communities (staff, faculty and alumni have a rich range of connections in the entertainment industry).

In addition to the strengths outlined above, we would highlight three strengths mentioned earlier in the review:

1. The faith and learning ethos that is integrated into both curriculum and residence life programs.
2. The particular curriculum strength or emphasis in storytelling, the practical, hands-on training in skills needed for employment in the entertainment industry.
3. The exceptional alumni program—a network of support and professional development that is an invaluable resource for students and former students.

We also agreed with challenges as articulated by the LAFSC staff:

1. The considerable variety of backgrounds and experiences presents challenges to faculty. Notably, students reported far less concern about this than faculty. Perhaps student needs are being met effectively through individual tutorials and faculty access. However, if this continues to be a concern that, as a stand-alone program, it's difficult to address, there appear to be at least two options:
  - A pattern of more level-specific curriculum and admissions (perhaps fall being introductory and spring being advanced, for example). Again, we did not pick up this need from current students or alumni responses but this is a response to faculty concerns.
  - There are regional programs (e.g., Fuller Seminary) that might offer resources to assist with mentoring/support for introductory students. Particularly with the addition of graduate credits, there may be Graduate Assistantships or other opportunities that could in turn provide instructional resources for LAFSC.
2. The second challenge is the challenge of enrollment, given the recent dip in numbers. While we know that there are numerous important efforts already underway to build relationships with CCCU faculty, any additional initiatives to build those relationships (e.g., a faculty advisory council) seem worth brainstorming with staff.; film studies faculty seem like an especially important contact group. In addition, a list-serve that builds communication among faculty running film programs may be helpful.
3. Technology needs are an additional expense and burden on the program. While much has been done to enhance revenue and make resources available, this remains a difficult issue. In campus programs, usual revenue options include: grant or donor funding, regional cooperative relationships, revenue-generating programs, curricular focus that narrows equipment needs.

We do not take these challenges lightly. Still, the program has such considerable strengths that we remain hopeful for the future. The talented and warmly committed staff, the exceptional network of entertainment industry relationships, the excellent education and the deep commitment to thoughtful faith in a complex and challenging environment all commend the program and its future.

As one former student said in an alumni survey:

*LAFSC provides a well-rounded glimpse at what it's like to live and work as a Christian in Hollywood. This program is an opportunity to test your career goals in a safe, Christian environment...My professors...shaped my worldview on how to be a Christian in any work environment. They taught me how to be a servant leader, share the Gospel by establishing relationships with my co-workers and show Christ-like leadership through my work ethic.*