



University of Connecticut

Testimony

by

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**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
and
Commerce Committee
Joint Public Hearing**

February 26, 2008

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of both the Higher Education and Employment Advancement and Commerce Committees, thank you for providing me with an opportunity to testify today on the film industry legislation that is under consideration before your Committees. My name is Gary English and I am the Head of the Dramatic Arts Department and the Artistic Director of the Connecticut Repertory Theatre at the University of Connecticut.

I support the legislation you have raised to encourage the development of new educational programs to support the workforce needs of the film industry. At the University, we can provide the most assistance – with additional state resources -- in the area of digital media. Before I get into the specifics of the type of digital media program that is possible, I would first like to take a moment to provide you with some background as to why this type of investment is necessary.

As the result of significant tax incentives Connecticut has put in place, film production in the state has exploded over the last two years. There is every reason to assume that Connecticut can experience an ever increasing market expansion in the film industry if the State can continue to build on it's commitment to create an environment conducive to the film industry in general. Some have referred to this effort as the creation of "Hollywood East."

Already, significant indications continue to demonstrate that this is a realistic expectation. Most recently, two major film studios have taken up residence in Connecticut in order to take advantage of these tax incentives. Baldwin Entertainment, who produced the award winning bio-picture, *Ray*, has taken residence in New London

with Sonalyst's Studio, a film production facility. More recently Blue Sky Productions, the award winning production company working primarily in digital animation that produced *Ice Age*, starring Ray Romano has announced that it will be moving it's headquarters to Connecticut.

One of the significant problems the film industry faces here is building a resident production staff infrastructure that includes a variety of job opportunities for Connecticut residents. This is an imperative problem to solve as the absence of this infrastructure requires film production companies to hire production staff out of New York and pay both transportation and per-diem costs that affect the profitability and production expenses incurred while on location. While some of these job opportunities are appropriately within the province of organized labor, such as electricians, stage hands, prop and wardrobe personnel, teamsters, carpenters etc., there remains another significant component of personnel required for film production and post production that can and should be educated and trained at centers of higher education.

The relatively high-end positions include artists and technicians that can create special effects and digital animations, serve as art directors and set decorators, production designers and costume designers, computer programmers to support digital animation, motion graphics designers, storyboard artists, personnel for sound production and editing, and a variety of post production personnel including graphic artists for film. In addition, we will need conceptual artists in script development and writing for the screen.

Clearly, the University of Connecticut is in a unique position to develop a film based digital media program that can educate and train personnel that will be necessary if the film industry is to thrive in Connecticut long term.

The program in Digital Media will be set up in the School of Fine Arts and will recruit majors from many disciplines. While the primary faculty will be in residence in the School of Fine Arts, every major will be required to have a home department such as Dramatic Arts, Computer Science, Communications, Journalism, Art and Art History or Music. The program will have a Director who answers to the Dean of Fine Arts. This is a common model for many similar areas of study, such as International Relations, or Human Rights that are interdisciplinary in nature.

The program requirements themselves will include courses in film writing and script development, digital animation and film editing, production and costume design, graphic design, sound production and editing, cinematography, lighting, special optical effects and computer programming for production systems. Each student, however, will come to the program with a disciplinary interest from a particular department. So for example, English majors might focus on script development, while computer science majors might focus on animation and special digital effects. Each student will elect courses that fit with their home major in order to create a practical and in depth approach to specialization and career development. In the final year of the program each student will have significant professional opportunities through internships, field study and other structured methods for professional transition.

The program will be designed to meet the work force needs of a film and television industry in Connecticut in three to five years, when the production companies and other possible industry partners, such as ESPN, will be in need of middle to high-end operators, technicians, designers and artists as they set up business full time in Connecticut.

If this program is approved, we will recommend accepting students by 2009 and we imagine a program with about 40 total students once it is fully operational. This would graduate roughly 10 a year, which is a good number for a growing industry to begin with, and would guarantee a very competitive and high-quality program. We can expect significant buy in from the industry and look to current industry partners to help provide faculty and professional contacts for students as they transition into the profession. These professionals will take on teaching duties as adjunct faculty when not engaged full time in film production activity. It is important to note that the Department of Dramatic Arts in particular has had a very successful record of bringing a diverse array of entertainment professionals to campus who then take a significant interest in our students' developing careers. Significant elements for this program already exist on campus. These elements include faculty specialists in production design and technical production, animation and film editing, graphic design and sound. We also have close connections to many industry professionals who can immediately take a role as guest artists and part time faculty.

To conclude, much has been claimed regarding the power of the film industry as an engine of economic development. These claims are consistent with over 40 years of arts and entertainment study and research. The University of Connecticut is well placed to make a significant contribution to workforce development in this important new industry.

In order for this program to be successful, however, some number of new faculty will need to be hired. Additional support staff and operating income will need to be obtained as well as one-time equipment costs.

Taking into account some redirection of existing resources, we request funding for faculty, staff and operating expenses that would be considered a permanent appropriation totaling \$1 million and \$500,000 for equipment in one-time surplus funding.

To conclude, much has been claimed regarding the power of the film industry as an engine of economic development. These claims are consistent with over 40 years of arts and entertainment study and research. The University of Connecticut is well placed to make a significant contribution to workforce development in this important new industry.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today, for raising these important bills, and for your continued support of the University.

