

**THOSE OF US AT THE BORDERS:
RECOGNITION AND EVALUATION OF FACULTY WORK IN
THE ACADEMIC FIELD OF FILM AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 consists of five main parts.

Part 1: Description of project

Part 2: Scholarship and Faculty Work

Part 3: Pondering “C” Words---Creativity, collaboration and change

Part 4: A new template for work in the field of film and digital media

Part 5: Summary

Chapter 1 provides a broad description of the scope and nature of my approach to this dissertation research topic, including the problem, question, methods, objective and goals, and definitions that have framed my inquiry.

Part 1: Description of project

Part 1 consists of five sections:

- 1) Overview
- 2) Research problem and its four underlying issues
- 3) Research question: The fundamental lines of inquiry
- 4) Research methods
- 5) Central objective and goals

1) Overview

This study is dedicated to all those who, like myself, have suffered the sometimes painful, demotivating, and unforgettable effects of performance evaluations in organizations (La Pelle, 1998, p. xiii).

The need for a relevant and coherent approach for recognizing and evaluating individual faculty work in the field of film and digital media is an underlying issue examined in this

chapter, and throughout this dissertation. Initially, I was inspired to examine this topic as I entered a process of faculty performance evaluation for the purposes of promotion of rank at my workplace. From the outset I noticed that my workplace had no written criteria that pertained to the recognition of artistic, scholarly or professional work in the field of film and digital media. In response, I have attempted to develop a theoretical and practical basis for change in the systems of performance evaluation in higher education settings; with the intention of facilitating greater institutional rewards for artistic, scholarly and professional work by faculty in the field of film and digital media.

At the outset of my inquiry, I was relatively uninformed about notions of what constitutes academic scholarship, and I was unaware of the complex and problematic nature of performance evaluations as important issues for critical study. My encounter with real experience and the literature related to this topic was not mapped, pre-planned, systematic and orderly, and in fact much of my learning has been the result of persistent curiosity, hard work and luck that culminates in the making of systemic connections as I have proceeded in building my understanding. Ultimately, necessity has enabled me to formulate the research question and research problem that are posed in this dissertation.

My initial intention was to conform, reasonably yet loosely, to conventional expectations about the structure and general purpose of a doctoral research and dissertation writing. As a genre of writing, dissertations have traditionally been considered to be a product and site of learning, a new representation of long-held cultural and epistemological conventions about knowledge and the making of meaning(s). A dissertation is commonly perceived to be a unitary and singular product, emerging from a meaning system that strives to be consistent with the ideals of logic and deduction. The conventional expectation is for an organized presentation of

ideas, analytic discourse, and clear argumentation; culminating with recommendations and a conclusion. The requirement for a conclusion represents a realist's expectation for closure, resolution and finality. As I mentioned, I intended to reasonably conform to the traditions and conventions of dissertation writing. However, such reliance could possibly be construed as meaning that I too have intended to make a claim of closure on this subject, but this is not the case. The expectation for closure and finality subsumes knowledge to be verifiable, replicable and certain; but these paradigmatic ideals are contrary to my intentions and inconsistent with the expressive, personalized approach that is common in the arts, in auto/ethnographic research writing, and in many other forms of creative, qualitative, scholarly research writing.

A conventional reading might expect the author to remain malleable, invisible and passive throughout scholarly discourse; and would recoil in horror whenever the author makes use of the *self* as a voice and perspective, concluding prematurely that a personal perspective and locus constitute a breach of canon. Additionally, a conventional assumption would be that human understanding is best served when the intellect transcends the physical and the material, when the mind, with its intellectual tools, operates independently of the body (Hanrahan, 2003). The focus upon *self* in scholarly writing is perceived by conventional expectations as a diversion or digression from the central core of theoretical issues, one that allows for open-ended, ambiguous, and uncertain results, instead of reaching the goal of closure. Finality is not necessarily the ultimate goal nor is it an attribute of my research and approach. I do not intend that my work is perceived to be authoritative in a conventional sense.

I am not moving my work toward the elusive sense of finality because such an expectation is illusory. If, however, a reader is unable (or unwilling) to straightforwardly access the meaning of my work because of this chosen method or approach, then that reader might

question the authority of my work and remain disinterested in the issues being raised---and this unfortunate possibility is response I seek to avoid. I ask readers to approach my work with an open mind and a sense that this is a beginning step in a process of change, not an ending.

I confidently acknowledge the risks posed by taking an alternative approach and I accept the responsibility of any consequences. I hold a belief in multiple ways of knowing---a *finding* that has resulted from my work throughout my doctoral research. I borrow from the philosophical and critical approach of auto/ethnographic writing---particularly the idea that no text is ever perfect, no interpretation is ever complete, the explication of meaning is never final, and no insight is beyond challenge. I am an individual struggling for a sense of meaning and self-identity within the faceless monolith of institutional and organizational structures and systems; and I am using a scholarly and personalized voice in my writing as strive to heard.

Auto/ethnography offers a creative, personal opportunity to explore and reflect upon one's experiences through narrative stories, memories, and other narrative accounts in a scholarly context; in addition to being an opportunity to integrate learning that has emerged from the study of the ideas of others. I consider this approach to be an important, creative, systematic, reliable, and disciplined method for discovering new ways of looking at my *self* in social, intellectual and personal contexts---an explorative struggle for the expression of knowledge through lived experiences. During the process of my auto/ethnographic inquiry I have also encountered the nuanced difference in language used by many writers in their various texts. New questions and new understandings have emerged from a range of sources, and narrative responses have been gleaned from participant interviewees, in written form and from conversations. In response to each of these sources of data I have engaged in analysis, interpretation, and synthesis for the making of meaning relevant to the phenomenon being

studied.

Therefore, this dissertation does arguably resemble a conventional approach with a beginning, middle and an end, with the end being in the form of a conclusion---but my journey is personalized and auto/ethnographic, in tandem with other qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry, and in no way represents the end of the story. What I have written will hopefully serve as a beginning, a catalyst for change. I also hope that my research and dissertation will be perceived as a theoretical and practical starting point that facilitates greater understanding and positive action that benefits other academic fields and disciplines, for example, for the recognition and evaluation of a wide range of artistic, scholarly and professional work by faculty in the performing arts, fine arts, social sciences and humanities.

2) Research problem and its four underlying issues

The second section of Part 1 is composed of four sub-sections.

- a) Scholarship and Faculty Work
- b) At the boundaries of contemporary scholarship: A New Template
- c) Pondering “C” Words: Change, Collaboration and Creativity
- d) Recognizing and Evaluating Faculty Work in Film and Digital Media

The research problem of this dissertation project is: artistic, scholarly and professional work by individual faculty in the field of film and digital media is not being adequately recognized or rewarded as scholarship in educational institutions. Challenges posed by the research problem are significant and substantial, and the stakes are high. Inherent to the problem are four underlying issues that frame the scope and nature of this chapter:

a) Scholarship and Faculty Work

What is scholarship? What is faculty work? This section explores conventional and alternative perspectives about scholarly work by faculty.

b) At the boundaries of contemporary scholarship

Important and essential aspects of artistic and other faculty work remain under-rewarded or unrecognized because (some):

- Evaluation systems arbitrarily compel paradigms from scientism and the approach of scientific research over all other paradigms and approaches;
- Evaluation systems lack appropriate expertise with specific and unique aspects of scholarship activity in the field of film and digital media;
- Evaluation systems rely upon irrelevant criteria to protect the conventional status quo for evaluation scholarly work in the field of film and digital media;
- Evaluation systems for recognizing faculty performance in many academic institutions of

higher education are too narrowly focused.

This dissertation intends to develop a useful model that fulfills an unmet need for paradigmatic change.

c) Pondering “C” Words: Change, Collaboration and Creativity

In higher education, at institutional and departmental levels, there is observable resistance for fully acknowledging or recognizing that artistic, scholarly and professional work by individual faculty in film and digital media can meaningfully co-exist alongside conventional text-based research publications in the pantheon of what constitutes faculty scholarship; and that the comparatively unique and specific qualities of work by faculty in the field of film and digital media do constitute forms of scholarly activity. The emergence of change at institutions of higher learning for recognizing and rewarding creative and collaborative scholarship has been slow. The emergence of real change at deeper levels within the institution will be slower. Paradigmatic change in systems of evaluation calls for a new ontology to re-define scholarship and scholarly work by faculty (Boyer, 1990). The ontological framework and change advocated in this dissertation recognizes that artistic, scholarly and professional work by faculty in the field of film and digital media should not narrowly emphasize the results of a work in isolation from process and approach (Diamond and Adam, 2000 p 6-7).

This section discusses an evolving understanding of what constitutes scholarship and what are the characteristics that describe the faculty reward system, supported by a range of ideas that advocate and acknowledge *difference* and disciplinary uniqueness, reinforcing and giving value to the notion of individual faculty paths (Diamond and Adam 2000, p 1). This section also explores a notion of change that occurs when an institutional climate is conducive to change is established, and when those affected by the changes---faculty, chairs, and deans---are inclusively

involved in the change process (Diamond, 1993c).

d) Recognizing and Evaluating Faculty Work in Film and Digital Media

Although it is important and useful in previous sections of this dissertation to build a larger and more expansive meaning of what constitutes scholarship and scholarly activity by faculty, the real issue that is explored in this section focuses upon finding fair and meaningful ways to evaluate, assess, and ultimately find ways to reward new, alternative and innovative forms of scholarship and scholarly work.

3) Research question: The fundamental lines of inquiry

The research question that frames this inquiry is posed in response to the research situation and problem. The research question is: What work and activities by faculty in film and digital media should be recognized and rewarded as scholarship during a performance evaluation in an academic setting? The research question represents a guiding core in my inquiry. Three fundamental lines of inquiry have emerged from the research question, and from my reading of secondary literature, relating to performance evaluation and alternative forms of scholarship by faculty, including:

- What constitutes faculty scholarship and scholarly work by faculty in the academic field of film and digital media?
- What are the essential attributes of a performance evaluation and reward system for faculty scholarship in the field of film and digital media?
- What explains institutional resistance to change in the practice of performance evaluation in academic institutions?

4) Research methods

The research methods for this inquiry are intended to explore the nature, meaning, prevalence and impact of problem(s) facing faculty in the field of film and digital media, and to facilitate practical solutions, including the development of a useful model that can be used for recognizing and evaluating artistic, creative and professional work by faculty in the field of film and digital media. As further detailed in Chapter 3, my use of research methods includes:

- Auto-ethnographic inquiry and reflection upon my experience---as a faculty member and professional filmmaker---contextualized by a comprehensive review of literature.
- Quantitative and qualitative inquiry using an open approach to many sources of data, including a survey and interviews with a number of faculty members in the field of film and digital media, exploring individual/personalized experiences and theoretical analyses concerning the recognition and evaluation of faculty work in the field of film and digital media.

5) Central objective and goals

The central objective of this dissertation is to provide practical and theoretical help and support for the benefit of administrators and committee members, facilitating a more fair process of recognition and evaluation of the spectrum of work by faculty in the field of film and digital media; yet also with applicability to faculty work in many other creative, artistic and professional fields. Through critical inquiry, this dissertation seeks to build a nuanced body of knowledge that facilitates paradigmatic change at institutions of higher learning. This dissertation aims to challenge long-standing conventions, conceptions and expectations about academic faculty research practice and output; then advocates alternative, sometimes opposing values and systems

of thought that re-frame the scope and nature of what constitutes academic scholarship by faculty, particularly for those in the field of film and digital media.

The goals of this dissertation, as I have engaged in research, have been five-fold:

- To use auto/ethnographic, qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the scope and nature of the research problem and question, and to search for effective solutions;
- To explain the scope and nature of artistic, scholarly and professional work in the field of film and digital media;
- To understand what has undermined the process of change in systems performance evaluation of faculty work in the field of film and digital media;
- To identify the attributes of useful performance evaluation systems of faculty work in the field of film and digital media (this also may be applicable to other creative fields); and
- To synthesize the data and then create relevant and useful theoretical and practical groundwork that facilitates change in systems for recognizing and evaluating artistic, scholarly and professional work by faculty in the field of film and digital media.

As detailed in Chapter 3, a range of data gathering and interpretive approaches have been employed for the purpose of discerning a broad range of perspectives, and for building a deeper understanding of the research problem and question that underpin this dissertation. The following section provides a more complete description about each goal:

- The use auto/ethnographic writing, and appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods has facilitated an exploration of the scope and nature of the research problem, and to search for effective solutions

Auto/ethnography, a form of personalized writing and inquiry in the methodological category of qualitative research, explores, interprets and expresses knowledge from a first-person

perspective. Auto/ethnography is a form of personalized writing for scholarly inquiry that is less reliant upon the hegemony of conventional expectations in scholarly writing. Also of great benefit to this research is the fact that some faculty who participated in the survey were willing to share their account of personal experiences and problems that emerged during the process of recognition and evaluation of their work. This quantitative and qualitative data reveals much about the scope and nature of the problems that face many faculty in the field of film and digital media, and across many other disciplines, at many institutions of higher education that seek recognition and rewards for a broad range of their own professional and scholarly activities.

- To explain the scope and nature of artistic, scholarly and professional work in the field of film and digital media.

I have chosen to use a combined qualitative and an auto/ethnographic approach to write about the process of filmmaking, from technical, creative and professional practice perspectives. My goal in describing the processes of work in filmmaking is to identify, understand, and explain the complex scope and nature of its artistic, scholarly and professional dimensions---its unique methodological and stylistic approaches, its specific work-related activities, and its range of intended outcomes---forming an integrated whole that should be recognized and rewarded as scholarly work during the evaluation in the field of film and digital media. I have relied upon my own experience and voice, upon in-depth interviews with project participants, and upon an open approach to literary and other data sources. In this way, the dissertation builds a new paradigm for faculty performance evaluation with specific recommendations that pertain to creative scholarship and professional work in film and electronic/digital media, enabling faculty performance to be more fully and fairly recognized for institutional rewards.

- To understand what has undermined the process of change in systems for recognizing and

evaluating faculty work in the field of film and digital media.

Freed from notions that describe and explain individual and group behavior as historically inevitable, predictable or the result of instinct, and empowered by the knowledge that man's behavior and social systems are learned and not genetically inherited, I explore ways to negate and denounce the accepted limits that are maintained in the status quo, particularly the traditional template for performance evaluation in higher education, through an awakening of my critical consciousness and expression of my discontent.

- To identify the attributes of systems in higher education settings for recognizing and evaluating faculty work in the field of film and digital media (this also may be applicable to other creative fields).

I have gathered and analyzed a range of written, established criteria that exemplify what can be considered as the best practices and procedures for recognizing scholarship in other academic fields and domains, then compared those with (non-) existing practices and procedures pertaining to the recognition and evaluation of scholarly and artistic, scholarly and professional work by faculty in the field of film and digital media. I have sought to understand phenomena relating to the recognition and evaluation of artistic, scholarly and professional work by gathering and analyzing the philosophical underpinnings of performance evaluation and the recognition of scholarly work in notions of scientism, through analysis of primary and secondary textual writings, and analysis of data feedback collected from a survey of project participants (Appendix C Survey)---in addition to my producing my own personalized, auto/ethnographic account.

- To synthesize the data in all its forms and then create specific, relevant, and useful guidelines for performance evaluation of artistic, scholarly and professional work by faculty in the field of film and digital media.

Data demonstrates that faculty performance in scholarly research, with application in teaching and service as well, should be evaluated on its own terms, by informed colleagues that share an understanding of the unique and distinct theoretical underpinnings of practice in the field of film and digital media. This dissertation advocates for the implementation of written, reasonable, and specific criteria that will enable administrators and performance evaluation committee members, those who may lead and set policy in a university setting, to more effectively recognize, assess and reward the broad range of artistic, creative, scholarly and professional work(s) by faculty in the field of film and digital media (this model may also be applicable to other creative fields).