

***Guidelines on Enhancing Education Quality in Film and Digital Media  
for Private Universities***

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**Abstract**

This study aims at seeking guidelines on enhancing education quality in film and digital media curriculums offered by private universities in Thailand. By conducting a literature review and in-depth interviews with key experts in film and other related digital media industries: executives of a post production company, an equipment rental company as well as a film making company, film directors, a screenwriter, an acting trainer, cinematographers, a sound designer, an editor, a film critic, a director of acquisitions, a deputy director of Thai Film Archive, as well as a fashion editor and photographer, this research has found that private Thai universities need to devise new strategies for their curriculum development. This should start from admission process, incubation, curriculum design, and learners' language skills so that the private institutions can produce graduates capable of meeting the market demands and competing regionally and globally.

Keywords: Education Quality, Curriculum Development, Film and Digital Media Curriculum, Thailand

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## **Introduction**

In response to the government's digital policy, Thailand is making a transition to digital economy and further developing its potential at regional and global levels. Innovations and technologies are applied to the country's value adding and competitiveness enhancement. Some of these national prime movers have already begun since the implementation of creative economy policy. In fact, the foundation of either creative or digital economy is the driving of economy through knowledge. In many countries, main mechanisms driving digital economy include digital commerce, digital entrepreneurs, digital innovation, and digital content. In terms of digital content, movies, music, TV shows, electronic media, software programs and games are expected to take key roles in digital economy like what is ongoing in the US and Europe. Digital media will replace traditional ones in different platforms and multiply in value.

According to the Eleventh Higher Education Development Plan (2012-2016) as well as the Twelfth (2017-2021), Thailand has been facing rapid changes in society, economy, politics, energy technology, and the environment, which has a far greater impact than before. Examples of these changes include an attempt to keep pace with the global economy and the economic integration under ASEAN free trade agreement with China, Japan, and India. Changes in global society have greatly affected Thai society, namely the coming of aging society, materialistic society, and education quality-based society, especially quality of university graduates. Issues of energy and environmental crisis, particularly climate change, have worsened natural disasters. Therefore, the Thai higher education from 2012 to 2016 needs to progressively develop into a knowledge resource in response to such a crisis and lead to the sustainable development at local and national levels. Further, it should take part in enhancing national and international competitiveness, with a focus on quality in the development of human resource and Thai society. To do so, the higher education should enable people to achieve their potential and meet the needs of labor market so as to support themselves and society, with integrity and responsibility, including being physically and mentally healthy. Subsequently, Thai people will be able to improve the economy using knowledge, technology, innovation, and creativity, on environmentally friendly production and consumption bases, which ultimately leads to the sustainable national development. This can be achieved through the proactive administration of higher education as a main vehicle to the 2016 vision: "higher education is a knowledge source of producing human power of quality, capable of sustainably developing the nation as well as creating a lifetime learning society, in accordance with the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) on the basis of self-sufficiency philosophy, with a leading role in ASEAN and the aim of international quality in higher education" (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2015).

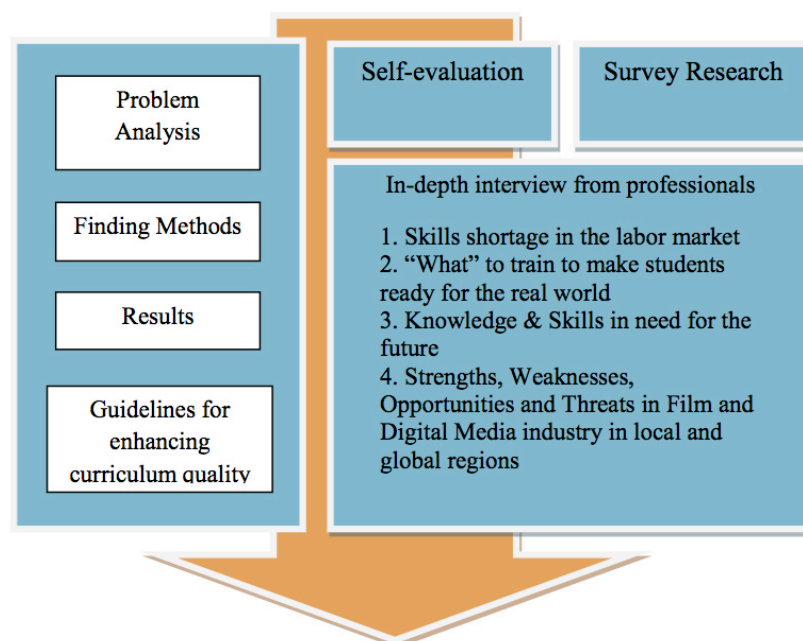
## **II. Research Objectives**

1. To examine the status of film and digital media curriculums offered by universities in Thailand.
2. To indicate guidelines in improving the curriculum for higher quality and keeping up with technology; thereby being able to produce graduates in response to market demands.

3. To analyze and synthesize information regarding the development and management of the curriculum so as to make them more appropriate for the Thai context of private universities, including contribute to the film and digital media industry in Thailand.

### III. Conceptual Framework

This research has drawn on the work of Saylor and Alexander (1974) which proposed a process to build or develop a curriculum in four stages: 1) goals, objectives and domains; 2) curriculum design; 3) curriculum implementation; and 4) curriculum evaluation. In addition, this study has explored the current information and situation regarding the curricular administration of both public and private Thai universities which currently offer film and digital media courses for data collection and analysis. By doing so, the research is expected to provide some insights into managing such curriculums as well as useful guidelines on making them appropriate and relevant to the Thai context of private universities.



### IV. Research Methodology

Based on a qualitative approach, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen key stakeholders. These interviews were carried out between January and May 2016. The research respondents consisted of three producers, two directors, two cinematographers, a screenwriter, an acting trainer, a sound designer, an editor, a director of acquisitions, a film critic, a fashion editor as well as photographer, a CEO of a visual effect company, and a deputy director of Thai Film Archive. The selection of the research respondents were done through judgmental sampling on the basis of their professional achievements recognized in Thailand and overseas. Findings from the interviews were then analyzed in the next step.

## V. Research Results

Research results are divided into four parts in accordance with the research framework. Details are presented below.

### Part 1: Analysis of the current situation of both public and private universities

In Thailand, public universities have an advantage over private ones in admission process through a centralized system of admission and a direct admission. On the contrary, private universities are open for all with an admission process not as strict as that of the public ones. Thus, main factors in choosing a private university include the renown of that university, a curriculum, modern teaching equipment with sophisticated technology, famous alumni and teaching staff, including the number and type of national rewards received by students of that university, namely those received at Thai Short Film and Video Festival, hosted by Thai Film Archive (a public organization) in collaboration with Thai Film Foundation, which is ongoing and well-recognized for 20 years in a row.

<b>Table 1:</b> The number of awards received at Thai Short Film and Video Festival		
<b>Competition Category</b>	<b>Public Universities (14)</b>	<b>Private Universities (3)</b>
The White Elephant Award (Short Film)	79	37
The Duke Award (Thai Documentary Award)	3	1
Vichit Matra Award (for the outstanding short in some way)	21	4
The Kodak Award	4	8
Popular Vote	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>52</b>
Note: the number of awards was counted from the number of university students submitting their works for competition from the first year to the 19 <sup>th</sup> , from 14 public universities and three private ones. Source: <a href="http://www.thaifilm.com/">http://www.thaifilm.com/</a> , Thai Film Foundation (2016), and additional information from interviews		

As displayed in Table 1, at Thai Short Film and Video Festival from the first year until the 19<sup>th</sup>, awards in the White Elephant category, in which most of the contestants have submitted their pieces of work, were received by students from both public and private universities, that is, a total number of 79 pieces from 14 public universities and 37 pieces from three private ones. This means that both quality and work of students from private universities are not inferior to those from public universities. In all categories, students from these public universities received 109 awards while those from the private ones won 52. In other words, the private ones have a larger proportion in terms of participation and the number of awards received.

However, public universities, as earlier mentioned, have an advantage in admission process. Thus, private universities have to initiate strategies covering both academic and commercial dimensions in order to enable their students to attain quality and competitiveness which satisfy the needs of the labor market at the same extent as those from public universities.

The first priority is that private universities should set a clear goal and objectives to develop their curriculums: whether they want to go for commercial purposes or the

production of graduates for film industry. If they aim to contribute to the film industry, they can do so by adjusting their admission process, reducing the number of students for a lecture, as well as focusing on feedback and more activities in the classroom. As an example, the research respondents cited a film and digital media institute under a private university overseas which offers courses with high tuition fees, strict admission, and high quality education. This institute accepts approximately 100-200 new students each year, only those with an intention and clear goal. Incubation through different processes enables students to further develop their potential, which established the institute as one of the best recognized for producing graduates with high quality.

## **Part 2: Admission process and teaching methods**

In this highly competitive era, socio-economic structures have swiftly changed locally and internationally, which pushes private universities to speed up development for quality and sustainability. Private universities might have to add some more admission process for an outstanding program, tailored for students with specific purposes e.g. project-based learning with a focus on project work for festivals. In so doing, they should support students with partial fund. This also includes other result-based projects for students at higher level and supports for students with a range of scholarship programs. For teaching method, some subjects can be taught online or through the use of blended learning which blends online with classroom teaching; most of the content is done online with some classroom meetings. As defined by such researchers as Graham (2012) and Horn and Staker (2011), blended learning for K-12 grade students means a learning process where learners have freedom in their learning experience through computer networks; thereby students being able to control learning factors by themselves in terms of time, place, learning method, and learning ratio. Additionally, this can reduce teaching costs for both students and universities. Students also have more time for weekly self-study.

## **Part 3: Comparison among film and digital media curriculums offered by universities in Thailand**

In Thailand, there are approximately 40 public and private universities providing film and digital media courses. The selection criteria of the sampled universities were based on the students' works awarded in Thailand and overseas, academic richness of teaching staff, and wide recognition in the film and digital media industry.

**Table 2:** Comparison among public and private universities recognized in film and digital media in terms of the number of credits required in their curriculums

	Public University No.1 (2008)	Public University No.2 (2013)	Public University No.3 (International)	Public University No.4 (2012)	Public University No.5 (2012)	Private University No.6 (2012)
General Ed.	51	30	52	30	30	35
Core Subject	32	51	28	50	30	36
<b>Major</b>						
Major	28	30	84	36	26	48
Elective	12		16	24	24	15
Free Elective	6	6	8	6	6	6
Minor	18	15			15	
Total	147	132	188	146	131	140
<b>Note:</b> A comparison among the sampled universities in terms of film and digital media curriculums between academic years 2008 and 2016						
<b>Source:</b> Data from the websites of the sampled universities						

As seen in Table 2, difference in arranging subjects was found. University No.3 required the highest credits and made students take the highest number of major subjects compared to other universities. This is the same with university No.6 which required students to take the highest number of major subjects compared to other general or core subjects. On the other hand, university No.2 offered several core subjects with a number of credits, making students take fewer subjects in film major as opposed to other universities.

Another interesting issue is that universities No.1, No.2, and No.5 allowed students to take major electives in accordance with individual interests with some limitation on the number of credits. On the contrary, the rest of the universities indicated a list of subjects required by their curriculums and allowed students to choose nine free electives solely.

### Comparison among core subjects in the film and digital media curriculums

Having considered each curriculum in terms of core subjects, we can see that the curriculums offered by universities No.1 and No.2 were designed for teaching students to gain general understanding of communication arts because students were required to study introductory subjects of each available course, e.g. Introduction to Mass Communication, Introduction to Advertising, and Introduction to Public Relations, so that students can choose their minor or extra subjects of interest in subsequent semesters.

Interestingly, the curriculum offered by university No.5 placed English as one of the core subjects, which allows students to learn and practice English for their future career. Moreover, it also focused on subjects related to theories and other business-oriented subjects. This is very much the same as university No.4 which emphasized on marketing and economics. While there was no English as a core subject here, English for Career was offered as an elective subject, which reflects the importance of English for media people. As for the curriculum of university No.3, there was no focus on English because it was an international curriculum. Instead, this university placed more emphasis on major subjects. Finally, university No.6 placed importance on law and ethics in media on the curriculum.

## **Comparison among majors of the film and digital media curriculums**

Film studies at university No.1 was oriented toward the foundation of filmmaking in accordance with their progression to the next year, starting from subjects like screenwriting, film and video techniques, production preparation, directing, editing, visual arts, including theory and practice in film criticism. This was a theory-based learning to prepare students for general knowledge and understanding of the filmmaking process from screenwriting through editing and criticism. As for university No.2, this university also provided general knowledge, but not in every aspect, starting from directing, screenwriting, photographing and theories, with an emphasis on subjects like storytelling and concept thinking. In the meantime, teaching method of universities No.3 and No.4 was both general and detailed, starting from screenwriting, and so on. It is noteworthy that university No.6 put more emphasis on screenwriting than others, including planning of shooting, directing, photographing, acting and editing. University No.3, apart from script analysis and shooting, it also placed importance on editing in post production process and sound production in order to enable a single student to learn the whole process from the pre to post production. Another outstanding point of university No.3 is that it provided subjects oriented toward film production. In comparison, university No.4 offered two film production subjects, three by university No.5, and four by University No.6. Yet, university No.3 offered six subjects, plus two core subjects as an independent study making eight subjects in total. This means that the curriculum of this university placed prime importance on providing students with film production experience while universities No.1 and No.2 offered one film production subject each.

In terms of major electives, university No.1 was identified as offering a variety of electives: documentaries, advertising, short film production, script analysis, film research, and film aesthetics. This curriculum allowed students to choose theory subjects according to their interests and continue from the core subjects previously studied. In the meantime, university No.3 had a number of general and core subjects so there were not so many electives offered by the faculty itself, but it allowed students to choose electives from other faculties. As for electives in film studies of university No.3, there were subjects on film history and production of other types of film in order to prepare students to explore other things than film and thus provide them with more career choices. Further, university No.4 offered electives as a continuation from core subjects, e.g. moving image 2-3, screenwriting, advanced editing, theory and practice in arts. On the contrary, university No.5 provided no extra electives on film studies but students may choose electives from outside of their department or major. Lastly, at university No.6, electives were mostly screenwriting subjects.

In general, most of the subjects contained in the curriculums were wide and diverse, which enable students to understand the whole picture before finding their own interests in later years. Yet, there were a few other universities training students for specialized knowledge. For example, screenwriting of university No.6 featured both writing for film and TV drama, which makes their curriculum quite unique compared to those offered by other universities and also addresses the flaw of Thai film industry where scripts lack originality and also a shortage of screenwriters. Similarly, the curriculum offered by university No.5 divided their courses into film production, acting and directing actors, including design for film and digital media. As for acting

and directing actors, university No.5 managed their courses jointly with the acting department of the same university in order to produce quality actors and directors, especially for film industry. However, there has been no course that appears to adequately meet the needs for the production of graduates with specialized skills.  
(Source: Data from the TQF2 Curriculums of the sampled universities)

## Part 4: Curriculum design with focus on specialized skills

### 1. Skills and cluster subjects for screenwriters and directors

Interviewed experts pointed out that both screenwriters and directors relatively share similar skills: storytelling and communicating. Directors might also have to understand a film production unit though. These two careers may take the same subjects until the first semester of junior year. When they start the second semester of third year, directors should focus on the filmmaking process while screenwriters should practice more writing. The experts have seen that many directors in Thailand often do both the screenwriting and the directing as directors are those who best understand the whole story.

	Courses	Scope
Screenwriter Director	Script Analysis Screenwriting: various levels Directing Actors Research and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arts of storytelling</li> <li>Structure of narrative arts</li> <li>Treatment development</li> <li>Plot</li> <li>Act 1, Act 2, Act 3</li> <li>Directing Skills</li> <li>Communication skills</li> </ul>

In terms of script analysis and storytelling, if students can start analysis from the foundation of screenwriting, they can write a good script, with understanding of each plot structure, namely the Blake Snyder Beat Sheet so as to analyze a script within two hours; how they understand plot structure, timing, mood and tone of film, including where the film problem is (Snyder, 2005). When they learn and understand plot structure from masterpieces, they can develop their own script better.

### 2. Skills and cluster subjects for directors

Students who want to be directors should take the following subjects.

	Courses	Scope
Director	Space, Time, Sound and Moving Image Directing Actors Film Authorship Character Studies & Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fine-tuning sensory</li> <li>How to communicate and direct</li> <li>Framing and "Mise-en-scène"</li> <li>Learning from masterpiece and concept &amp; theories, communication</li> <li>Character studies and development</li> </ul>



### 3. Skills and cluster subjects for screenwriters

As for students who want to be screenwriter, they should take the following subjects.

	Courses	Scope
Screenwriter	Research for Screenwriter Advanced featured-length screenplay Structure of Narrative Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inspiration, imagination, reason</li><li>• Industry partnership</li><li>• Analysis and Comparative studies</li></ul>

### 4. Skills and cluster subjects for directors of photography

Interviewed experts gave an opinion that this position requires those with accumulated experience in art appreciation and film viewing, with building a portfolio and turning it into a show reel. The essence of directors of photography is a point of view and storytelling in images, rather than image quality. Students are recommended to study the following subject to continue from core subjects.

	Courses	Scope
Cinematographer	History of cinematography Directing for the Screen/ Acting Lighting Art Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negative film to digital</li><li>• From science and chemistry to digital technology</li><li>• Actor's emotion and camera movement</li><li>• Studio, interior and exterior lighting</li><li>• High-key, Low-key</li><li>• Hot and Cold Lighting</li><li>• Art, composition, aesthetic experience</li></ul>

### 5. Skills and cluster subjects for editors

Interviewed experts said that practical subjects for students aiming to editing jobs for both picture and sound are the art of storytelling, starting from editing theories, learning and practicing a range of editing programs so that they can make use of these editing tools in storytelling creatively and efficiently.

	Courses	Scope
Editor	Editing Technology Editing Aesthetics of Editing Color Grading Advanced Editing Editing Teaser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Software, technology, workflow</li><li>• File management</li><li>• Process, techniques</li><li>• Film language, editing masterpiece</li><li>• Re-writing tool</li><li>• Symbolic, storytelling &amp; comparative</li><li>• Color theory, color psychology</li><li>• Mood and tone</li><li>• Same Footage, different storytelling</li><li>• Audience impact</li></ul>

## 6. Skills and cluster subjects for sound designers

The key experts suggested that sound is a science different from filmmaking. Students have to understand the science and skills of sound and know how to distinguish a range of sound, including functions of sound in creating emotions and feelings. They also have to study the cinematic art and film history so as to understand the sound development in film.

	Courses	Scope
Sound Designer	Basic Audio History of cinematic sound Sound recording Sound design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concept design</li><li>• Fundamental of sound</li><li>• Functions of sound</li><li>• Sound development and technology</li><li>• Theory and practice</li><li>• Recording techniques</li><li>• Quality control</li><li>• Concept design, creativity</li><li>• Sound invention (ghost sound, jinn sound)</li><li>• Taste, Sense of hearing &amp; choosing</li></ul>

## 7. Skills and cluster subjects for producers and film entrepreneurs

Key experts said that producers and film entrepreneurs are careers which need to understand the whole process of filmmaking, starting from directing, screen writing, film criticism, marketing, location, equipment rental, funding, and distributing. If students have only limited knowledge, they may end up as production manager level. Yet, film producers are far more important. As an example, experts cited Hollywood industry in which many movies happened because producers wanted to make them; producers then secured a screenwriter, a director, a cinematographer, and an art director. Producers have to understand how to make movies, creativity, and final work. They also need to put the right people to the right job: know what kind of movies directors are good at, what kind of scripts screenwriters are keen on, including do the optimal budget management as well as sell movies or find sponsors.

In addition, experts added that to be a producer for animation and visual effects, third language ability is an asset that can open up career opportunities, especially the access to the global market.

	Courses	Scope
<b>Producer Film Entrepreneur</b>	Script Analysis Directing and Acting Production Techniques Budgeting and Scheduling Film Business Analysis Marketing and Distribution Foreign Film Production Service Third Language Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to Analyze both quality and salability</li> <li>• Understanding director</li> <li>• Creativity development</li> <li>• Understanding equipment</li> <li>• Production solution</li> <li>• Production planning, budget control, balance sheet, budget allocation, time management</li> <li>• Making money or not</li> <li>• Ability to differentiate</li> <li>• Target</li> <li>• Advantages and Disadvantages</li> <li>• Selling Point</li> <li>• Marketing Strategy, distribution, festival and cinema, funding</li> <li>• Positioning as outsource</li> <li>• One-stop service (Laws and Permissions)</li> </ul>

## 8. Skills and cluster subjects for film curators

Key experts gave an opinion that students should have well-rounded knowledge of film and adequate experience in film viewing and art appreciation. As for programming of film festivals, students of film studies and film business are perfect choices for planning and management of such festivals.

	Courses	Scope
<b>Film Curator</b>	Film Aesthetics Programming Festival Promoting Screening and Exhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Film as art, critical skills</li> <li>• Presentation, films grouping</li> <li>• Marketing &amp; Public relations</li> <li>• Uniqueness, originality, separation</li> <li>• Technical knowledge, projection system, sound and light, cinema experience</li> </ul>

## 9. Skills and cluster subjects for visual effects artists

Experts indicated that students in this area must have storytelling skills and be able to create a story from computer programs, starting from drawing, character design, lighting, and other techniques. Visual effects are matters of art, imagination, and creativity blended with sophisticated technology. With film knowledge, students can further apply to other relevant fields. Apart from art appreciation as well as a wide and deep understanding of technology, they should study key subjects as follows.

	Courses	Scope
Visual Effect Artist	Film Language Light and Shadow Modeling Digital Sculpture Compositing Dynamic Simulations Advanced Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camera movement, size of shot</li> <li>• Imagination</li> <li>• Reality reinforcement, lighting and rendering</li> <li>• Concept, character design, mapping</li> <li>• 3D Modeling, retopology</li> <li>• Conceptual studies</li> <li>• Technology implementation</li> <li>• Snow, storm, fire, smoke effects for film</li> <li>• Complicated softwares</li> <li>• VFX Mastering</li> </ul>

## 10. Skills and cluster subjects for photographers

Experts revealed the key for photographer is to acquire their own style and taste. They must know what they can are good at and keen of, they should learn a range of photos and ideas from prominent photographers. Photographers can make for a variety of career paths and futures. Apart from art theories, they should study and practice the following.

	Courses	Scope
Photographer	Theory & History Photography Business Lighting Techniques Image Editing and Application Fashion, Landscape, People, Studio, Journalism & Documentary, Commercial Digital Printing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and Marketing</li> <li>• Early to Digital Age</li> <li>• Professional Techniques</li> <li>• Look Book, Online marketing</li> <li>• Model and product presentation, campaign, character branding, magazine design, visual arts, idea, implication, juxtaposition</li> <li>• Learning from masterpiece</li> <li>• Communication design</li> <li>• Post-production techniques</li> <li>• Dimension, texturing, color, tone, grading</li> <li>• Emotional communication</li> </ul>

## 11. Skills and cluster subjects for acting trainers and actors

Experts gave a view that acting for film is different from plays and TV drama. Students can learn acting for different kinds of media or some more of directing skills, this will increase more career opportunities. For those studying to be an acting coach, they have to acquire such skills as understanding scripts, psychology, communication, interaction and persuasion.

## VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to enhance education quality of film and digital media curriculums offered by private universities in Thailand, the private institutions will have to adjust a strategic direction in developing such curriculums: whether the curriculum is for commercial purposes or to contribute to the development of film graduates and film industry. The curriculum development should start from admission policy, screening students based

on their goals, incubation of students with innovative teaching methods, curriculum design which keeps pace with the ever-changing technology and responds to the needs of the film industry, including students' language skills. If the recommended guidelines are consistently applied to the Thai context of private universities, it is likely that these private institutions with good human resource and facilities will be able to produce film graduates capable of satisfying the demands of the industry and competing both in Thailand and overseas.

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