

Key Takeaways from Entertainment Industry Advisory

Summary

The LARC Regional Program Advisory on the Entertainment Industry convened community college leaders and industry experts to analyze the current state and future of LA County's cornerstone sector. Data presentations revealed an industry in transition, marked by post-pandemic employment corrections, recent labor disruptions, and a structural shift away from traditional motion picture production toward live events and digital content. While the industry offers high average wages, significant challenges remain, including stagnant real wage growth in some segments, a lack of entry-level roles, and persistent diversity gaps.

Emerging Trends

- **Shift in Content Consumption:** The industry is adapting to changing audience habits, particularly the dominance of **short-form content** (TikTok, YouTube Shorts) and on-demand streaming.
- **Globalization and "Runaway Production":** Major studios are increasingly moving CG and production jobs overseas to markets like Canada, mirroring a long-standing trend in live-action.
- **The Rise of AI as a Tool:** Panelists unanimously view **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** not as a replacement for human creativity but as an emerging tool. Generative AI for creative roles is viewed with extreme caution due to unresolved copyright and ethical issues.
- **Streaming vs. Theatrical:** The business model for distribution remains in flux. While animation is dominating the box office, studios are still grappling with how to effectively market and monetize content on crowded streaming platforms with massive libraries.

Workforce Needs

- **Technical Skills:** There is a demand for proficiency in industry-standard software. Specific platforms mentioned include:
 - **Project Management:** Slack, Asana, and other project management tools.
 - **3D/VFX:** Blender, Twinmotion, and gaming engines like Unreal Engine.
 - **Animation/Storyboarding:** Toon Boom Storyboard Pro, Photoshop.
 - **Production Management:** Flow (formerly ShotGrid).
- **Understanding of Business Operations:** Panelists stressed the need for students to learn about **production development, contracts, and finances**.
- **Versatility Across Sectors:** There is a need for talent that can work across different segments of the entertainment industry (e.g., film, themed entertainment, live events, gaming).

Challenges

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** The data shows a significant underrepresentation of **Hispanic and Asian workers** and a persistent **gender gap**. Panelists were passionate about the need to break down systemic barriers, citing the lack of diversity in leadership roles and the "nepotism model" as major hurdles.
- **Economic Disparity and Low Entry-Level Wages:** Low pay for entry-level roles (e.g., Production Assistants) and the prevalence of **unpaid internships** create significant barriers to entry for students from low-income backgrounds, disproportionately affecting underrepresented communities.
- **Disconnect Between Industry and Community Colleges:** There is a critical relationship gap. While private universities like USC are in "constant contact" with studios, community colleges are not as engaged. This lack of proactive relationship-building means their students, who represent a diverse talent pool, are often overlooked.
- **Lack of Career Pathway Awareness:** Students often have a narrow view of industry careers, focusing only on high-profile roles like "director" or "writer." They are often unaware of the vast number of crucial, high-paying jobs in production, operations, and technical fields.

LARC Industry-Academia Strategic Sessions

Date: September 16, 2025

Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Location: HartBeat Studios, Stage 2

Address: 20932 Osborne Street, Canoga Park, CA 91304

Summary of Advisory

The LARC Regional Program Advisory on the Entertainment Industry held on April 29, 2025, convened community college leaders and industry experts to analyze the current state and future of LA County's cornerstone sector. While the industry offers high average wages, significant challenges remain, including stagnant real wage growth in some segments, a lack of entry-level roles, and persistent diversity gaps.

Key Takeaways from Our Discussion at the Strategic Session

- **The Skills Gap is Evolving:** Beyond specific software, there is a critical industry need for talent with a strong understanding of business operations, data analysis, and essential soft skills like curiosity, humility, and professionalism. Foundational artistic and technical training remains crucial, even as AI emerges as a tool.
- **Experience & Portfolio > Formal Degrees:** Industry leaders, particularly in animation, emphasized that a high-quality portfolio, practical experience, and a demonstrated passion for the craft are more valuable than a formal degree. This insight is a powerful opportunity for our community college talent.
- **The Relationship Gap is the Real Barrier:** The primary hurdle for community college students is the lack of consistent, proactive relationships between their institutions and industry employers. Building direct, intentional bridges is the most critical step to creating equitable access.
- **Economic Equity is Non-Negotiable:** The conversation repeatedly highlighted that low entry-level wages and unpaid internships are significant barriers that disproportionately impact the diverse talent pools our community colleges serve.

Our Collaborative Action Plan

- **Build the Bridge with "Classrooms in the Studio":** We will immediately coordinate with Kevin Clark and Munir Mahmud to develop a structured program for students to gain hands-on experience and mentorship at Hartbeat Studios. This pilot will serve as a model for embedding learning directly within industry spaces.
- **Conduct a Regional Asset Map:** We will lead an ecosystem scan to identify and map all existing resources, from sound stages at community colleges (like the one at West LA) to union-partnered training programs (like Hollywood CPR). This will prevent duplication and create a clear directory of opportunities.
- **Define and Champion In-Demand Skills:** We will synthesize the curriculum insights shared by partners like Sony Pictures Animation to create a "live" summary of the most in-demand technical and soft skills, providing a clear guide for faculty to align their programs.
- **Foster Direct Connections:** Our team will facilitate direct introductions between industry partners and community college leaders to create more mentorship opportunities, paid internships, and a streamlined process for sharing diverse career pathways with students. We need buy-in from DEO and City of LA and showcase our collective impact and power.