Summary of LARC Regional Program Advisory on Entertainment Industry

April 29th, 2025

## 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. The industry panel confirmed these trends and provided critical insights into the skills, challenges, and opportunities facing the next generation of talent, emphasizing the need for stronger, more intentional collaboration between educational institutions and employers to build a more resilient and equitable workforce.

## 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. This has shortened audience attention spans and is forcing content creators, like Sesame Workshop, to reimagine traditional formats.
- **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. This creates a new workflow model where projects may start and end in Los Angeles but are produced globally, impacting the availability of local jobs.
- **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. Its primary applications are in operational efficiency, data analytics (understanding viewership metrics), localization (subtitling/dubbing), and speeding up technical processes (e.g., in-betweening in animation). 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 are essential for team-based work.
    - **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. This business acumen is critical for navigating the industry, especially for freelance and contract work.
- **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) rather than being siloed in one area.

## Growth Areas

- **Live Events and Themed Entertainment:** Data and panel discussions both highlighted significant growth in the performing arts and spectator sports sector. As audiences seek in-person experiences, there is a growing need for live event crews and professionals skilled in creating immersive environments.
- **Streaming and Digital Content:** While hiring has cooled from its post-pandemic peak, the demand for digital content and the operational roles that support streaming platforms (e.g., content delivery, data analysis) remains a key area of employment.
- **Niche and Specialized Roles:** The industry has a need for highly specialized talent, such as **puppeteers**, which requires targeted outreach and dedicated mentorship programs to build a sustainable pipeline.

## In-demand Soft Skills and Credentials

- **Soft Skills are Paramount:** Every panelist emphasized that soft skills are as important, if not more so, than technical skills for entry-level success and long-term growth. The most critical soft skills include:
    - **Cross-Functional Collaboration:** The ability to work effectively across different departments and with diverse personalities.
    - **Agility and Adaptability:** Being a "multifaceted" self-starter who can pivot between roles and wear multiple hats, especially in smaller companies.

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- o **Natural Curiosity:** An investigative mindset and a willingness to learn and improve processes.
  - o **Communication & Professionalism:** Knowing how to network, write a proper cover letter/resume, and maintain a positive professional reputation.
- **Credentials:** A bachelor's degree is held by over 40% of the workforce, but an associate degree or some college is also a strong credential, held by over 26% of workers. This signals that community colleges are a vital part of the talent pipeline.

## 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.

## Conclusion & Call to Action

The entertainment industry in Los Angeles remains a global powerhouse, but it stands at a critical juncture. To ensure its future resilience and build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the county, intentional and sustained collaboration is essential. The talent exists within the LA 19 Community Colleges, but the bridges to opportunity must be actively built and maintained.

**Call to Action:**

1. **For Community Colleges:** Proactively build and maintain relationships with studios and industry organizations. Appoint dedicated liaisons to engage with talent acquisition teams, invite professionals to campus, and actively promote student work. Integrate resume writing, networking skills, and career pathway education into curricula.

2. **For Industry Partners:** Commit to ending unpaid internships and raising entry-level wages to create more equitable access. Partner with community colleges to create structured mentorship programs, provide guest lecturers, and offer paid, project-based learning opportunities to build a diverse, local talent pipeline.

3. **For LARC and LAEDC:** Facilitate a structured series of "meet-and-greet" events connecting community college faculty with studio talent acquisition and university relations teams to foster the relationships needed to close the existing communication gap.