

# Response to Promotion Recommendation:

## Clarification and Reconsideration of Creative Activity Classification

Samuel Avery

4/15/2026

Dear Dean Mattingly, Provost McClellan, and President Bitterbaum,

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing my application for promotion. I appreciate the recognition of my contributions in teaching and service. I write to address a central issue in the evaluation of my record: the classification of my creative work.

I will be direct, as this point is fundamental to the outcome of my application: the conclusion that my work does not constitute sustained creative activity appears to rest not on a lack of output, but on a reclassification of that output. **I respectfully but firmly disagree with that reclassification.**

With regard to my film work, including projects developed through ProLab: the films included in my portfolio are original works that I have written, directed, and produced. The involvement of students reflects the collaborative nature of filmmaking and does not diminish authorship. These projects extend beyond formal course requirements and represent independent creative production.

Importantly, the integration of student collaboration within my creative work has been consistently recognized in prior evaluations as a strength - not a basis for reclassification. In Dean Mattingly's 2019 evaluation, my work was described as follows: **"His creative activities are fully integrated with his teaching, as he involves students in many aspects of the production process."** This understanding is reinforced in my 2018 reappointment, where my films were recognized for regional, national, and international impact, alongside the observation that I **"actively engage students in the creative process."** At no point was this integration treated as disqualifying creative activity. On the contrary, the recommendations provided in my 2019 review cycle encouraged the continued integration of creative production, student collaboration, and public-facing work which is **precisely the model I have deliberately sustained since that time.**

Similarly, while I fully recognize that the Blackbird Film Festival represents a significant service contribution, **it has never been evaluated as service in isolation.** From its introduction in my 2016 reappointment, both as a creative initiative and as service to the community, through subsequent reviews, **Blackbird has consistently been evaluated as part of an integrated body of work that includes film production, student collaboration, and public-facing creative practice.**

Across my reappointments, promotion to Associate Professor, and continuing appointment, this integrated model was evaluated collectively and found to meet expectations for creative activity. At no point was this structure identified as insufficient or ineligible as **part of a sustained creative trajectory.**

Further, to ensure that the full scope of my creative activity is clearly represented, I would like to highlight the following independently developed work completed since my last promotion:

- *Romeo and the Rejects* — 138 page feature-length screenplay (2019; revised 2021)
- *MyGene* — short screenplay (2020), finalist for the CNY Arts Film Fund (\$40,000 grant)
- *The Catch, Nutz & Bolts*, and *Cravings* — short films (2019) with festival selections and awards spanning 2019–2021; made without student involvement.

- Films **independently written/directed** by me since my last promotion in collaboration with students engaged with my ProLab initiative: *The Mayor* (2019), *Managed* (2023), *The Proposal* (2023) *Brian's Special Pencil* (2024), *Call Back* (2024) *Cherub* (2024), *JAAQ* (2024)
- Interdisciplinary film collaboration (2023–2024) with faculty in Literacy Education to produce a three part Literacy Coaching Film Series ([LINK](#))
- Ongoing development of a feature-length screenplay, *Last Wish, LLC* (sabbatical approved for Spring 2028)

Taken together, this body of work reflects sustained, ongoing, and independently generated creative activity in screenwriting, film production, and interdisciplinary media work since my last promotion.

Given this record, **I find it difficult to reconcile how both this independent work and the integrated model of my creative practice (previously recognized across multiple levels of review) are now being interpreted in a way that excludes substantial portions of that work.**

The current evaluation acknowledges that this work has made “**a significant and sustained contribution to the independent film industry,**” yet concludes that it does not meet the standard of creative activity. This presents a clear and unresolved tension between disciplinary impact and evaluative classification.

I would also note that my application was recommended for promotion by both the department personnel committee and the department chair - colleagues working within the field of communication and media production. The divergence between those discipline-based evaluations and the current recommendation raises important questions about how creative work in collaborative, production-based disciplines is being interpreted at different levels of review.

If original films that I have written and directed are classified as teaching due to student involvement, and if curatorial and programming work is classified solely as service, **then a substantial portion of creative practice within film and media risks being systematically excluded from recognition as creative activity.**

Finally, I would like to clarify the issue of missing CTE data. I have consistently requested and reviewed course evaluations throughout my time at SUNY Cortland. The absence of earlier materials in my file is the result of a transition in the college's evaluation storage system, which rendered those records inaccessible. This was not an intentional omission, and I regret not recognizing the need to independently archive those materials prior to that transition. I am currently exploring options to retrieve this data, should it still be available.

**In light of the clarifications provided above, I respectfully ask that you reconsider your evaluation of my record, particularly as it relates to the classification of my creative activity.**

I fully respect the standards for promotion. At the same time, I believe it is important to clearly articulate when the application of these criteria may not fully align with the nature of creative work in a given discipline, particularly when prior evaluations have consistently recognized that work differently.

I remain committed to my work as a filmmaker, educator, and contributor to the field. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sam Avery

Associate Professor

Communications and Media Studies, SUNY Cortland