



Communication and Media Studies

TO: Paul van der Veur, Ph.D., Chair, Communication & Media Studies Department

FROM: Communication & Media Studies Personnel Committee

DATE: February 16, 2025

RE: Prof. Samuel Avery's application for **promotion**

The Department of Communication and Media Studies Personnel Committee (hereafter the CMSPC) met on Feb. 11, 2026, to review the application of Prof. Samuel Avery, Associate Professor, for promotion to Full Professor. After careful deliberation, the CMSPC recommends Prof. Avery's application. Since his promotion to Associate Professor in 2019, he has demonstrated continued development in teaching, creative scholarship, and service. The committee's decision is based on the digital portfolio provided by Prof. Avery. The portfolio was reviewed using the criteria set forth by the Communication and Media Studies Department Personnel Policies and section 220 of the SUNY Cortland College Handbook, as well as the Board of Trustees Policies of the State University of New York.

### **Teaching Effectiveness**

Since beginning his appointment as an Assistant Professor at SUNY Cortland in August 2013, Prof. Avery has demonstrated sustained excellence and breadth in teaching across the Media Production, Cinema Studies, and Communication Studies programs. Over the review period, he has taught 18 distinct courses, reflecting a wide-ranging and adaptable teaching profile. His creative practice as a filmmaker and festival director further enriches his pedagogy, frequently incorporating students as collaborators and peers in professional-level projects.

Since 2019, Prof. Avery has maintained an active and robust teaching portfolio across cinema and media production. He has taught introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses, as well as repeatedly supervising senior thesis projects, demonstrating consistent engagement with students at multiple stages of their academic development. His teaching includes both analytical and production-based coursework and reflects ongoing curricular leadership within the Media Production program, including contributions connected to the BS in Media Production.

A notable strength of Prof. Avery's teaching is his commitment to instructional design and accessibility. He developed [www.profavery.online](http://www.profavery.online), a comprehensive teaching portal that houses a full directory of his courses, including syllabi, lessons, assignments, instructional videos, and learning resources. An external observer—the Professor and Chair of the English Department at Tompkins Cortland Community College—reviewed his course COM 203: Introduction to Media Writing and noted: “The site that Sam created is so well organized and easy to navigate, with all parts of the course (syllabus, schedule, grades, modules, etc.) clearly labeled. He provides an excellent example of an educational layout that is very accessible and engaging to a variety of learners. This external evaluation highlights its effectiveness in course organization, clarity, and inclusive instructional design.

Student feedback also strongly supports the committee's assessment of Prof. Avery's teaching effectiveness. His Course Teacher Evaluations (CTEs) and qualitative comments consistently describe him as accessible, engaging, and impactful. One student wrote: “This is genuinely my favorite class I have taken in the entire three years I've been in college... Out of all the classes I have taken, this is one of the few classes where it actually feels like I learned something valuable for my specific career path.”

A consistent and distinguishing feature of Prof. Avery's teaching is the integration of professional practice into student learning. His ProLab initiative provides an optional, co-curricular production environment in which students engage in film projects intended for public exhibition and festival submission. This initiative extends learning beyond required coursework and supports applied, experiential learning aligned with professional standards in media production. To date, ProLab collaborations have resulted in more than 25 short films, several of which have been accepted into regional film festivals, underscoring the real-world impact of his mentorship.

Based on the evidence presented, the Personnel Committee concludes that Prof. Avery has demonstrated excellent teaching outcomes and has made significant contributions to the Communication and Media Studies Department through his instructional innovation, professional integration, and sustained student mentorship.

The committee notes, however, that Prof. Avery's Course Teacher Evaluation (CTE) record for the review period is incomplete, with evaluations missing from Fall 2018 through Spring 2024. The committee encourages Prof. Avery to provide more complete documentation to fully support the assessment of his teaching effectiveness.

## **Scholarship/Creative Activity**

Prof. Avery's scholarly and creative activity centers on film production, festival curation, and collaborative media practice, areas that are well aligned with disciplinary expectations in media arts, where scholarship is frequently expressed through creative production, public exhibition, and sustained professional engagement. His record reflects both depth and continuity in creative inquiry, as well as significant contributions to the infrastructure that supports independent filmmaking and public media culture.

The most substantial and sustained component of Prof. Avery's creative work is the Blackbird Film Festival, which he founded in 2015 and continues to direct. The festival operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with year-round programming that includes grant writing, fundraising, artist outreach, student training, and public engagement. Through this work, Prof. Avery has demonstrated long-term creative leadership and administrative responsibility, while also expanding opportunities for student participation and enhancing the visibility of regional arts and media production.

In recent years, Prof. Avery's creative focus has evolved from primarily individual authorship toward the development and maintenance of collaborative creative spaces that enable independent filmmaking. In addition to his individual filmmaking and his leadership of the Blackbird Film Festival, he has sustained a collaborative production practice through ProLab, an initiative he launched in 2018 that functions as an ongoing, semester-to-semester creative engine at SUNY Cortland. ProLab integrates creative production, mentorship, and public exhibition, and exemplifies a model of practice-based scholarship that bridges teaching, creative work, and community engagement.

This body of creative work has been supported by sustained external funding, including CNY Arts grants awarded from 2019 through 2025, with additional funding pending for 2026. The committee recognizes this continued success in securing external support as evidence of external validation, professional relevance, and the ongoing impact of Prof. Avery's creative activity. Collectively, his creative initiatives demonstrate a strong integration of pedagogy, production, and community-facing scholarship that is fully consistent with standards of creative excellence in his field.

## **Service/leadership**

Prof. Avery demonstrates a sustained and substantive commitment to service and leadership. His service focuses on creating and managing lasting structures that benefit students, the institution, and the wider community. Rather than serving on individual committees, he has taken on long-term responsibilities that strengthen the institution and provide steady leadership within the department and beyond.

His most significant and sustained leadership role is as the founder and Executive/Artistic Director of the Blackbird Film Festival, a position he has held continuously since establishing the organization in 2015. In this capacity, Prof. Avery has built and maintained a professional-level platform that serves students, SUNY Cortland, regional audiences, and independent filmmakers operating outside commercial distribution systems. The festival's scope and longevity demonstrate a high level of organizational leadership, public engagement, and administrative responsibility, including year-round programming, fundraising, grant writing, artist outreach, and student mentorship.

Within the department, Prof. Avery has made substantial contributions to program development and student support. He was a key contributor to the design and development of the BS in Media Production, which launched in Fall 2020. He also serves as a primary Senior Thesis advisor for students in both the Media Production and Cinema Studies majors. Since 2022, this role has involved supervising between six and eight thesis students per semester in COM 499 and CIN 499, representing a significant and sustained advising commitment.

Since his previous promotion, Prof. Avery has also contributed consistently to departmental governance through service on the Personnel Committee and Curriculum Committee. He is currently serving as Search Chair for the ongoing Assistant Professor of Media Production search, a role that entails substantial responsibility for faculty recruitment and departmental planning.

Prof. Avery's service further extends to community and professional leadership. He served on the Cortland County Convention and Visitor Bureau Board from January to November 2021, continues to serve as a CNY Arts grant reviewer for Onondaga County, and holds the role of inaugural Director of the Academy at Syracuse Studios. Collectively, these activities demonstrate meaningful engagement with regional arts, media education, and professional development initiatives. In addition, in Spring 2023, he served as one of two external reviewers for SUNY Brockport's Journalism and Broadcast Program, alongside Dr. Patricia Swann of Utica University, reflecting recognition of his professional expertise beyond the institution.

## **Conclusion**

The CMSPC concludes that Prof. Samuel Avery's record since his promotion to Associate Professor demonstrates continued contributions in teaching, creative scholarship, and service that meet the criteria set forth in section 220 of the SUNY Cortland College Handbook for promotion to Full Professor. The committee finds sufficient evidence of

