I. A Student-Driven Initiative

In fall 2015, a small group of undergraduate film and digital arts students at Chapman University Dodge College of Film and Media Arts sought faculty support to make a short virtual reality narrative experience. The students were disappointed to discover that, although Dodge College is renowned for its state-of-the-art facility and faculty with extensive industry experience, the school did not own any VR or 360 technology, nor did the faculty have any experience with immersive media production.

And yet, one year later, Dodge College students had successfully produced a six-minute VR narrative experience, *The Harvest*, funded by the technology company AMD; and the following year, fall 2017, Chapman University approved the creation of a new Minor in VR and AR at Dodge College. As the faculty member entrusted with the responsibilities of writing the academic proposal for the minor, creating the curriculum, and hiring the faculty to teach it, I will discuss the process of converting a student-led initiative into an academic reality in step with changing technology.

II. Writing the Academic Proposal

Film schools within universities tend to be walled gardens, limiting the use of expensive, specialized resources to enrolled film and media students. However, VR and AR have applications across disciplines as varied as entertainment, journalism/news, science, medicine, psychology, education, business, travel, military training, product design, architecture, engineering and construction. Therefore, we determined that the minor in VR and AR should be open to all majors at Chapman University; all students would be able to explore immersive media as a storytelling tool in service of their areas of interest. The university’s core value of interdisciplinarity, coupled with the film school’s emphasis on storytelling, served as key elements of our proposal.

The curriculum was developed in consultation with industry professionals. A required course in Computer Science and an elective in Business enhanced the element of interdisciplinarity. Also included in the proposal were a list of learning outcomes and a plan for program assessment.

The proposal was approved by the University without revisions, and the Minor in VR and AR was officially launched in fall 2018, three years after the first group of students had expressed a desire to shoot an immersive experience.

III. Outcomes and Conclusion

Designing an academic program based on emerging technology requires resources, research, and the flexibility to consider new hardware and software. Many universities now offer VR/AR programs in collaboration with engineering or computer science departments, but it is perhaps less common to develop one within a narrative-driven film school. I will share the steps, and missteps, involved in creating and maintaining a program designed to explore immersive media as a storytelling tool.