

## Panel B1

Auditorium

### Education and Animation II

Timothy Jones

#### What Next? Job, internship, and incubator placement in for-profit animation education



The animation industry in India has expanded dramatically over the last two decades. Increasing educational capacity has been a key driver of this growth, but instructional quality remains a significant limitation. Prior to the rise of the outsourcing economy, entry-level staff could largely be sourced from public institutions like Ahmedabad's National Institute of Design (NID). However by the early 2000s the rising staffing demands of the now-globalized Indian industry – and the education sector itself – drove the emergence of franchise training institutes. As growth has stabilized in recent years, a larger number of graduates face difficulty securing anticipated employment, while hiring managers find it more difficult to sort through a growing pool of similarly-qualified applicants, both trends that have been mirrored in many other national contexts.

In this paper, I draw upon this Indian industry case study to examine methods by which practitioners in the now global for-profit animation training sector address evolving boundaries between learning and work, and what their testimony reveals about their own professional identities. Training administrators conceive this transition in markedly different ways, but at most institutes it begins with placement counselling. For some this may be as informal as a teacher-student conversation; for others, a clearly-articulated rite of passage involving a range of specialized resources based on student interest, aptitude, and tuition-paid. The outcome may be a job, an internship, or increasingly, a seat in a liminal workplace incubator program.

When it comes to employment, major training brands claim to provide their students with 100 percent placement assistance, but it is not always clear what this entails. Given a limited number of positions, administrators describe strategies to most equitably 'screen' students for different kinds of work: from desirable animation studio positions, to rotoscoping jobs, even in-house instructor contracts. As an alternative to such direct placements, many animation institutes now market capstone experiences that place students in their final stages of their training into a production pipeline for commercial clients. This is touted as easing the transition from school to professional life. While this may make small numbers of graduates more employable, the rising prominence of workplace incubation does increase the risk of self-exploitation, literally paying to work.

The greater the incentive that the educational provider has to use student-learning for other means – like a revenue stream in its own right – the more problematic this becomes. While both administrators and students emphasize a close relationship between training and industry, outside critics attribute the 'failings' of animation training to the lack of such engagement, some even suggesting that training now constitutes a wholly separate industry. As a result for-profit animation instruction exists in a constant state of tension. I reveal how institutional leaders respond to criticism by reframing challenges as opportunities, developing interventions that increasingly blur the line between education and employment. Ultimately, what is at stake is not simply the precarity of employment, or

the flexibilization of professional identities, but the sustainability of a whole culture of production that is founded upon such a tenuous balance.

## Biography

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Timothy Jones is the Production Manager in the Office of Instructional Enhancement (OIE) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Extension where he conducts research and development for engaging online and distance education courses. His responsibilities include instructor training and professional development, as well as coordinating the Strategic Exploration and Education Design (SEED) Lab, a test kitchen for new instructional tools and learning experiences. Timothy's personal research interests include animation pedagogy, professional development, virtual reality, and games. Timothy's recent dissertation "Animating Community: Reflexivity and Identity in Indian Animation Production Culture" investigates how Indian animation practitioners represent their practice theoretically as well as the impact of this upon their professional identities and community structures.

Timothy is an active member of the Society for Animated Studies, assisting with the website, journal, and contributing to the archives working group. He is co-chair of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) Animated Media Scholarly Interest Group (SIG), and also participates in the ASIFA Hollywood Animators Educators Forum and AnimationResources.org. His publications appear in the journals *Animation: an interdisciplinary journal*, *Animation Practice, Process & Production*, *Animation Studies Journal*, and *The South Asianist*, as well as *Animation Studies 2.0*. and a forthcoming Routledge edited volume on global film policy.