My aim is to study the contribution of film critics and film criticism to the transnationalization of Hollywood. An ongoing focus within my decades-long scholarship on the institutional production of media culture is cultural voice and authority: who speaks, how, and the ways in which appraisal matters to cultural legitimation. My goal is to better understand the ways in which professional critics are able to speak with credibility and authority to diverse taste publics in contemporary society. To this end, my research focuses on the career and writings of Roger Ebert (1942 - 2013), the first-ever film critic to receive the Pulitzer Prize in Criticism, to better understand how he engaged the social and artistic interests of the film industry as well as consumers of popular culture. Ebert’s work embraced imported and independent films and filmmakers alongside domestic ones, and among the questions explored for the FAM project will be to what extent Ebert’s work reflected an understanding of French films and Franco-American co-productions that suggested particular ways of seeing and valuing French directors and actors. Whether Ebert’s work was followed in France may also be explored. My intention is not to resurrect discussion of auteur theory, although that may well be a backdrop that brings interesting history to the FAM project’s stated goals. Instead, I anticipate that my project will contribute to a better understanding of the transnational circulation of professional careers and content, and to the impact of digital media on transnationalization of appraisal, although that remains a subsidiary goal.

Research schedule:

2016-2017: Work on database; analyze data; draft initial results

2018: Writing and publishing results