

MASON GROSS - New Brunswick Strategic Planning Proposal

Proposal Title:

"Bridging Art, Science, and Humanities through Digital Filmmaking"

Proposal Initiator:

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Primary Strategic Priority/Foundational Element/Integrating Theme Addressed (Select one):

- Envision Tomorrow's University
- Build Faculty Excellence
- Transform the Student Experience
- Enhance Our Public Prominence
- Strong Core of Sciences and Humanities
- Inclusive, Diverse, and Cohesive Culture
- Effective and Efficient Infrastructure and Staff
- Financial Resources Sufficient to Fund Our Aspirations
- Robust Shared Governance, Academic Freedom, and Effective Communication
- Cultures, Diversity, and Inequality—Local and Global
- Improving the Health and Wellness of Individuals and Populations
- Creating a Sustainable World through Innovation, Engineering, and Technology
- Educating Involved Citizens and Effective Leaders for a Dynamic World
- Creative Expression and the Human Experience
- Measuring Progress and Defining Success

Proposal Abstract (brief summary of the proposal – 250 words):

"Bridging Art, Science, and Humanities through Digital Filmmaking"

The proposal seeks funding to build a strong infrastructure for the Film Bureau of the Rutgers Center for Digital Filmmaking. The Bureau's interdisciplinary projects promote and enhance the image of the University by placing its work on display.

The Film Bureau has created a film production program unlike any other in the nation, one that links the University's arts conservatory to units in the sciences, humanities, social sciences, and student services. The work takes students beyond the confines of the classroom and out into the field. Students have completed these assignments with a fuller appreciation for critical global issues confronting our society, such as climate change and childhood obesity. They speak about how they feel more comfortable with subjects that had once intimidated them

In two short years the Rutgers Film Bureau has established a solid track record of producing professional documentary films that have reached a large, national audience. Thus far funding for individual projects has been obtained through internal partnerships and external grants. The present proposal seeks to build the Bureau's infrastructure to enable the program to regularly deploy professionally trained student-based documentary crews throughout New Jersey and around the world to capture stories of important Rutgers research in action.

The work of the Film Bureau fulfills multiple elements of the Strategic Plan:

- 1) Transform the undergraduate experience
- 2) Enhance the university's public prominence
- 3) Creative expression and the human experience
- 4) Diversity, including and representing many cultural voices
- 5) Educating effective leaders for our dynamic and technology-based future

MASON GROSS - NEW BRUNSWICK STRATEGIC PLANNING PROPOSAL

A. WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED?

"Bridging Art, Science, and Humanities through Digital Filmmaking"

The present proposal seeks funding for infrastructure support to sustain the innovative, interdisciplinary Film Bureau of the Rutgers Center for Digital Filmmaking until revenues from the soon-to-be-launched BFA program take effect. The Bureau has the potential to significantly impact the learning of undergraduate students at Rutgers, particular those in STEM fields, while increasing the prominence of the University through its documentary filmmaking.

Through the Film Bureau, students are intimately involved in each stage of documentary-film production. But this isn't just about film: The Bureau's work nudges students to grapple with diverse topics from a fresh perspective, taking students far beyond the confines of the classroom and out into the field. They work alongside the principal investigators of groundbreaking research projects. They observe these projects as they unfold; the abstract is made concrete. As the student filmmakers work to translate these sometimes-arcane topics to a wider audience, they assume the role of investigator themselves and, in the end, engage with the projects on a deeper, more sophisticated level.

Students have completed these assignments with a fuller appreciation for critical global issues confronting our society, such as climate change and childhood obesity. They speak about how they feel more comfortable with subjects that had once intimidated them. It has been recognized that through the *process* of documentary filmmaking, this model is giving students the ability to become active participants

in the creation of science stories that contain STEM content and research, and in doing so, is changing their relationship to science and their science identities.

This list of partnerships with distinguished faculty at the University is already extensive:

School of Environmental & Biological Sciences

Benjamin Horton, Marine and Coastal Sciences
Olaf Jensen, Marine and Coastal Sciences
Anthony Broccoli, Rutgers Climate Institute
Mark Miller, Environmental Science
Scott Glenn, Marine and Coastal Sciences
Josh Kohut, Marine and Coastal Sciences
Cesar Rodriguez-Saona, Entomology
James E. Simon, Plant Biology and Pathology
Pamela McElwee, Human Ecology
Oscar Schofield, Chair, Marine Sciences
Anne Marie Carlton, Environmental Sciences
Alan Robock, Environmental Sciences
Naa Oyo Kwate, Human Ecology

School of Arts and Sciences

Erin Vogel, Anthropology
Robin Leichenko Co-Director, Rutgers Climate Institute
Robert Scott, Anthropology
Abena Busia, Chair, Women and Gender Studies
David Hughes, Anthropology
Asa Rennermalm, Geography
Yair Rosenthal, Marine and Coastal Sciences/ Earth and Planetary Sciences

Edward J. Bloustein School

Hal Salzman, Planning and Public Policy

In light of the success of the Film Bureau and its ability to combine undergraduate study with professional filmmaking experience, the Mason Gross School has initiated the establishment of a BFA degree in Digital Filmmaking. The degree program is a logical extension of the highly successful Certificate Program, which boasts an enrollment of more than 120 students after just two years. The BFA degree program will satisfy a great need at Rutgers for training in digital filmmaking, and it will generate income that will sustain the Film Bureau in future years.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH THE UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN, ADDITIONAL THEMES, AND PRIORITIES

The Film Bureau's project-based pedagogy has already proven effective in addressing a number of elements of the University's strategic plan by:

- Transforming the undergraduate experience
- Integrating the creative arts into the social and intellectual life of the academic community
- Preparing our students to be thoughtful and engaged citizens through exposure to real-world issues
- Giving agency to students from diverse background thus educating effective leaders for a technology-based future.

The Film Bureau is well positioned to provide undergraduate students with training in narrative science filmmaking in particular. The present proposal requests support for students to regularly engage in professional training that includes the opportunity to earn professional credits on films--credits such as director, cinematographer, producer, associate producer, editor, and assistant editor. Thus far, students who worked in the Film Bureau and obtained professional training and film credits have consistently secured jobs in the film industry.

See the video of Rutgers Film Bureau students traveling the world to document important Rutgers research stories: <http://www.masongross.rutgers.edu/filmmaking>.

See the videotaped interviews with film students describing what they learned working on research documentaries: <http://destinationunknown.rutgers.edu/meet-the-film-students/>

Presented below are several notable Film Bureau documentary films stemming from partnerships with Rutgers faculty and research institutes:

1. *Atlantic Crossing: A Robot's Daring Mission* (2010), in partnership with SEBS and the SAS English Department, involving 7 undergraduates. [Aired 474 times nationally on PBS to a potential audience of 180 million and won 10 film festival awards; it is now streaming on PBS] <http://www.njtvonline.org/programs/njdocs/njdocs-atlantic-crossing--a-robots-daring-mission/>
2. *Thailand Untapped: The Global Reach of Engineers without Borders* (2011), in partnership with the School of Engineering, filmed by 2 undergraduates. [Aired on NY/NJ PBS and nominated for a Mid-Atlantic EMMY award for Best Documentary.] <http://www.njtvonline.org/programs/njdocs/njdocs-thailand-untapped/>
3. *Antarctica: Beyond the Ice* (2014) included 12 students in the making. Trailer for Antarctica feature film intended for national audience: <http://beyondtheice.rutgers.edu/>
4. *The War After: From Combat to Campus* in partnership with Office of Veterans Affairs and Student Affairs featuring 10 Rutgers veteran students. Trailer for our feature film *The War After*: <http://thewarafter.rutgers.edu>



Left: Film students on location at Fort Dix for the making of *The War After* feature film

Right: Film student in Brazil with SEBS Nutrition Prof. Dan Hoffman for *Generation at Risk* documentary

5. Additional student-led professional short documentaries for distribution:
 - a. SAS CLASSICS professor T. Corey Brennan traveled with two Film Bureau students to Rome in the summer of 2013 to document Prince and Princess Boncompagni-Ludovici.
 - b. SEBS professor James Simon of Plant Biology and Pathology traveled with Film Bureau student Jeanpaul Isaacs to Zambia to make a documentary about innovative Rutgers agricultural practices that are transforming the lives of local farmers.



Left: Film student on location in Zambia with SEBS Plant Biologist James Simon

Right: Film students on location in Rome, Italy with SAS Classics Prof. Corey Brennan

C. PARTICIPATING GROUPS

The present proposal has the support of Dean George B. Stauffer. Dena Seidel, Director of Rutgers Center for Digital Filmmaking and the Film Bureau, will oversee the proposed project. Participating partners are numerous and include the School for Environmental and Biological Sciences, the School of Arts and Sciences, Edward J. Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy, the Rutgers Institute for Food Nutrition and Health, the Rutgers Climate Institute, Liberty Science Center, and Office for Promotion of Women and Science. In addition, within Mason Gross the composition program of the Music Department has expressed interest in creating music scores for future films and the graphic design program of the Visual Arts Department has expressed interest in creating title graphics for future broadcasts.

D. DESIRED OUTCOMES

Students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds often feel alienated from science learning. When they participate in the creation of research narratives, however, they come to see themselves as active agents in the creation of scientific research. The Film Bureau's documentary projects thus serve to:

1. Broaden diverse students' image of who scientists are and what science can be
2. Increase students' interest in STEM fields and change in their science identities
3. Increase students' 21st-century media and communication skills
4. Enhance students' understanding of the role humanities plays in helping to interpret complex, scholarly ideas

Success will be measured by the professional and artistic quality of the student co-authored films, the number and reputation of acquired film awards, the number of students involved in making of professional films, the number of cross-university partnerships, the audience reach of films, and formal and informal student assessment (pre- and post-interviews with art/film students to evaluate change in attitude toward science and research topics).

E. RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE

The Rutgers Center for Digital Filmmaking currently has a successful 22-credit Film Certificate Program with more than 120 enrolled students. As mentioned above, Mason Gross is planning to launch a BFA in Digital Filmmaking. However, it will take several years before the BFA revenues are sufficient to sustain all facets of the Film Bureau.

In the interim, funding is requested to help sustain the Bureau's important work. The estimated cost of the resources required:

- Leasing of production space -- \$50,000 per year for 3 years
- Advanced Film Student Research and Travel Support. -- \$10,000 year for 3 years
- Two Film Bureau Staff Positions. Duties include overseeing the production and editing of the Bureau's feature-length films, classroom instruction, and equipment oversight -- \$55,000 per staff member, per year, for 3 years
- Equipment and software replacement and upgrades -- \$30,000/year for 3 years

TOTAL REQUEST: \$200,000 per year, for three years

F. ENHANCING THE UNIVERSITY'S PUBLIC PROMINENCE:

By design, the Film Bureau program enhances the university's public image. The Director of the Filmmaking Center has established professional partnerships with local and national PBS broadcasters, PBS Learning Media (online library), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and National Science Foundation (NSF) media outlets. A number of internal and external agencies have expressed interest in distributing the Bureau's films through their media networks: Rutgers Climate Institute, Rutgers 4H, Rutgers Office for Promotion of Women and Science, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Liberty Science Center.