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Building an Interdisciplinary Production Program

Ruth D. Johnston
Dyson College of Arts & Science, Pace University

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PROJECT TITLE: BUILDING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PRODUCTION PROGRAM

CORNERSTONE III

SUBMITTED BY RUTH D. JOHNSTON, Director of Film & Screen Studies, Dyson College

DATE: December 15, 2011

Final Project Report

A) **Original Goals**

Though the long term plan is to build an interdisciplinary program focusing on disparate modes of production, the immediate goal for this Thinkfinity proposal was to get funding to purchase equipment necessary to develop courses in Sync Sound Motion Picture Production and Advanced Sound Production for Film.

B) Progress on Original Goals to date

We are keeping up with the timetable in the proposal.

C) Activities that have been completed to meeting goals

Spring 2011: 1) We eliminated the ART 289 pre-requisite for FSS 296E (16 mm Film Production) and converted it to a 4 credit course, thereby allowing students to learn the use of Final Cut Pro Software as well as to focus on contemporary filmmaking production practices rather than video.

2) We ordered and arranged for delivery of all the sync sound equipment purchased with the Thinkfinity funds by the end of the Fall 2010 semester, so we were able to offer a 3-credit Independent Study (FSS 395) for four advanced FSS students who met the requirements for enrolling in an independent study and who had successfully completed FSS 296E (16 mm Film Production). This independent study functioned as a "dress rehearsal" for the 4 credit sync sound class to be offered as a regular course (FSS 296F) in fall 2011.

Fall 2011: 1) The 4-credit 16 mm Film Production course has been approved by Deans' Council as a permanent FSS course and has been assigned the number FSS 204. However, students had already registered for the fall course under its old number, FSS 296E, so the new number will go into effect in Spring 2012. Based on last semester's experience, we decided to restrict the class to sophomores and higher classes and to require both the approval of the Director of FSS and ENG 120 as pre-requisite, thereby insuring greater maturity of the students who enroll. (The equipment is very expensive and requires careful handling, especially since students are allowed to borrow it to shoot assignments.)

2) FSS 296F (Filmmaking: Image and Sound), 4 credits, was launched. The pre-requisite is FSS 296E and the approval of the Director of FSS.

D) Activities not completed and reasons for incompletion

Fall 2011: FSS 296F (Filmmaking: Image and Sound) was insufficiently enrolled for the following reasons:

1) Four of the students eligible to take it had already taken it as an Independent Study in Spring 2011.

2) We discovered that students resisted registering for it because the process was too cumbersome: they needed the signature of the Director of FSS and were not able to web register.

E) Outcomes received as a result

We ran the class as a tutorial with 8 students and were able to do so thanks to the generosity of the adjunct professor who was teaching it; he accepted reduced remuneration and still taught it as a 4 credit course.

F) Creation of a Class? Is it running?

Spring 2012: We are running both FSS 204 and FSS 296F next semester and both classes are filled to capacity. We achieved this by:

1) Opening the courses to non FSS Majors and Minors
2) Removing the necessity of getting the approval of the Director of FSS to register

G) Impact on students? How many?

1) The most immediate impact is on the students enrolled in the courses described above, who learn, through direct performance, the duties of director, director of photography, sound recordist, gaffer (lighting technician), and boom operator. FSS 296E students completed 3 short films, developed proficiency with 16 mm cameras and professional equipment, writing technique, non-linear digital editing. In the sync sound class students co-produced 2 projects, developed proficiency with both an Arri BL 16 mm sync sound camera and a Panasonic HD/DV camcorder, Sennheizer shotgun and lav mics and field sound package, Marantz Digital Field Recorder, Arri professional lighting package, Sekonic light meter. All the students learned that filmmaking is a collaborative art and that multiple forms of expertise are part of film art. These students also learned from one another via critique of one another's work.

2) But the impact is much broader in fact because Professor Frank Martinelli, who teaches our production courses, arranges a screening of students' films at the end of each semester, which inspires other FSS majors as well as students in other majors; it fosters relations with faculty from other departments as well as Pace staff, e.g., Ed Media, the computer center, Birnbaum Library; it builds relations with FSS alumni; and it involves parents in Dyson events. **On December 17 the screening was held in Lecture Hall West, and the audience numbered approximately 80 people (every seat in the house was filled, and some guests had to sit on the steps), including other faculty from FSS and ENG, librarians, some parents, some alumni who had taken the 16 mm course, FSS students (all of whom were invited), Theatre students (many of whom acted in the films).**

The screening on May 16 was also well attended, but the audience was smaller because many students went home at the end of finals. There were approximately 35 people in the audience, again FSS students, some parents, professors from FSS and Sociology, Nickie Foster from Admissions, Theatre Students.

Our next screening is Friday, December 16, 2011, and we anticipate a large attendance, similar to that of last December. Besides films produced by the students in FSS 296E and 296F, a film made by an Honor's student as part of her senior thesis will be screened (more about this below).

H) Impact on other faculty? (See C.2 above.)

1) Please note that this project takes interdisciplinarity to higher level insofar as the scholarly community is extended beyond faculty and students to include Pace staff, e.g., library, Ed Media, Seidenberg , IT

2) Nor is the impact of the project limited to current students. I screen these films at Pace's Open House and Preview Weekends. At the beginning of the screening session, I describe the interdisciplinary nature of Pace's Film and Screen Studies Major and I explain that in terms of production, interdisciplinarity translates into multimedia: in addition to our 16 mm film production courses, FSS currently counts as electives production and studio courses in other departments, e.g., ART and MCA. **In short, these film production courses also contribute to the recruitment of students to Pace, not only to the FSS Major but to other departments and schools as well. A number of prospective students report that they are attracted to Pace because of this interdisciplinary approach.**

I) Unintended outcomes?

We were forced to rethink the restrictions we initially placed on who could register for these production courses.

J) Did outcomes reflect benefits we were hoping to receive?

"Hoping" is not the right word. We are surprised (and pleased) at the outcomes. Though we were very disappointed not to get sufficient enrollment for the sync sound film class in Fall 2011, we learned a very important lesson about opening these production courses to non-FSS students as well, especially students in related disciplines, e.g., Communications, Performing Arts, Art.

K) This made it possible to achieve our goal of building an interdisciplinary production program more quickly than we anticipated in our grant proposal and has thus furthered the Thinkfinity Cornerstone III.

L) Next Steps?

1) We want to extend the use of film production for use in Independent Studies. As mentioned above, Ruth Johnston supervised an Independent Study (FSS 395) in Fall 2011 for an FSS student who is also in the Honors college. Her project involved making a short film incorporating film techniques and film theories she had studied in the FSS required courses. The student set up an ePortfolio to which she uploaded different drafts of the script, the storyboard, the theoretical essay accompanying the film, the

film itself—in short all the stages of the project. Since she is a graduating senior, the ePortfolio will enhance her chances of getting into graduate school or securing a job.

2) Students who have taken the film production courses will be encouraged to use their skills in other courses. For example, we have discussed with the Performing Arts and Modern Languages departments having an FSS student participate in travel courses by documenting the trip and places of interest visited on film.

3) FSS students already operate the film equipment in the Theatre Department's courses on Acting for Film and Television (THR 357 & 358) for which they receive credit for THR 225 (Practicum).

4) We wish to create an FSS practicum course modeled on that of the Performing Arts. Students will serve as assistants to the instructor in the film production courses. Since the best way to learn something is to teach it, these students will consolidate their training in filmmaking and may eventually be able to consider teaching filmmaking among their professional options after graduation.

5) We want to encourage students to enter their films in competitions within Pace as well as film festivals outside of Pace. This is already occurring:

a) An FSS student, Geoff Kappenberg, had his film screened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art last April as part of the Sprout Film Festival.

b) Another FSS student , James Corujo, submitted his 16 mm film to the international Cannes student competition, "Creative Minds in Cannes" and had it accepted. While there, he made a film with two other students, and it placed second.

3) A third student, Emily Cahill, was accepted in a program (Actuality Media) that sends film student crews to make films for non-profit organizations in Latin America. Emily served as the producer and created a film, "Casa Soto" with three others.

6) We will carefully monitor the two film production courses in Spring 2012 and Fall 2012 to see the impact of lifting the restrictions of these courses to FSS Majors and Minors on enrollment. We will postpone the introduction of a more advanced sync sound film course until we can better assess the situation with the existing courses.

7) Unfortunately, we are hampered because of lack of FSS faculty to teach not only production but other FSS courses as well; we also lack staff to super vise the use and loan of equipment. Dyson did not give us funding for a full time lectureship for our Production Instructor, or any other kind of support.