The FMS Newsletter has gone electronic!

You can find our current, past, and future newsletters on the Film and Media Studies Department website: https://film.ku.edu/newsletters
Coming Attractions

Interested in an internship in film or media?

Join the University Career Center and KU Film & Media Studies for a workshop on

Preparing a stellar internship application

Learn to:
★ prepare a resume
★ write a cover letter
★ search for internship opportunities

October 9th (F) ★ 1:00-2:00 pm ★ 100 OLDF

Unable to attend but need internship guidance?
Make an appointment at the UCC by calling 785-864-3624!

Watch for more information via email and flyers.

FMS Internship Fair

Meet employers who are looking for film and media interns!

Date: Friday, October 23
Time: 1:00-4:00 p.m.
Place: Room 100, Oldfather Studios
Recognitions and Accomplishments

Professor Chuck Berg Honored with New Scholarship

KU alum Alex Graves, who is a successful producer and director (Game of Thrones, House of Cards, The West Wing, etc.), has generously endowed a new scholarship for the Department entitled the Chuck Berg Scholarship which is designed to support undergraduate students studying film and media.

On Friday, September 4, a reception was held attended by alumni, faculty, and well-wishers. Alex Graves, who although unable to attend, sent a pre-recorded heartfelt message to honor Chuck and Beth Berg’s contributions to the Department and to commence the scholarship. Mike Robe also provided touching remarks and told entertaining anecdotes.

Chuck Berg in the foreground.

Mike Robe at the podium.

Alex Graves provided a video tribute.
Recognitions and Accomplishments

Members of the **FMS Professional Advisory Board**, KU alums, were in town for the annual meeting, held on September 4 and 5. Their discussions included the state of the inventory of FMS equipment, flipped classroom initiative, and an update of the Summerfield Hall renovation. They also heard from students about the importance of the professionalization boot camp, internships, and the Spring Break Career Week in LA. The visit culminated with a reception and student film screening on September 5.

You can see the entire list of PAB members and learn about what they do here: [http://film.ku.edu/professional-advisory-board](http://film.ku.edu/professional-advisory-board)

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Go to these links for more information:

Out & About

Professor **Cathy Joritz** received a Herk and Pauline Harvey Faculty Summer Research Grant enabling her to travel to Germany in August. Joritz continued her research at the Filmmuseum in Düsseldorf, which has a considerable collection of original silhouette figures created by the German animation pioneer, Lotte Reiniger, as well as many original storyboards, hand-made books and other works by and related to Reiniger.

Joritz also met with Filmmuseum director Matthias Knop and archivist Andreas Thien to discuss potential collaborative work on the Filmmuseum’s 2016 Lotte Reiniger

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**Christina Hodel** (5th year Ph.D. Candidate) had a busy summer. Her summer began as a panelist alongside FMS professors **Matt Jacobson** and **Bob Hurst** for a special event at the Free State Film Festival where she gave a talk about surveillance cinema.

Next Christina headed to the International Association for Media and History annual conference at Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. Christina chaired a panel about representations of leadership in film and presented a paper entitled “Characterizing Presidential Power: The Portrayal of a Female President in 24: Redemption and 24.”

In addition to presenting, Christina, who has a research interest in gender, was fortunate enough to be able to tour the Kinsey Institute. A highlight of the conference was also being able to tour The Indiana University Libraries Moving Image Archive which is one of the world’s largest educational film and video collections. Besides riding a cherry picker to the top of the frigid archives, Christina was able to handle an original draft of Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* script and John Ford’s original Best Picture Oscar for *How Green Was My Valley*.

In July Christina headed to Brisbane, Australia for the XVIIth Film and History Association of Australia and New Zealand annual conference where she presented research on teen motherhood in U.S. reality television. Between panels, keynote speakers and networking sessions, she still found time to cuddle with a koala and show her Jayhawk pride.

The majority of the summer Christina was writing, directing and editing “Connections” an orientation video for incoming freshmen produced by the KU Office of First-Year Experience and in which numerous FMS faculty members acted in. Later this fall, some clips for the video will be posted on the Office of First-Year Experience website.
Growing up in Junction City, filmmaker Kevin Willmott rarely saw black people in film. He didn’t know of any film schools in Kansas or any classes he could take.

To satisfy his interest in film, he and his family went to the movies every weekend. Although the majority of the movie casts were white, he remembers one casting that would change his life.

“The theater showed Gordon Parks making ‘The Learning Tree,’ and he was shooting it in Fort Scott, Kansas. When I saw this black man in this cowboy hat from Kansas, making a movie in Kansas about black people in Kansas, it was like ‘Oh, my God,’” Willmott said. “That’s when it’s like you could see yourself being a filmmaker. It was a reality.”

Today, Willmott, a professor in the department of film and media studies, works with one of the most recognizable black filmmakers in Hollywood — Spike Lee. Their newest film, “Chiraq,” premieres in December.

Willmott wrote the original “Chiraq” script 13 years ago, but the initial idea for the film came about when Willmott was in a production of the ancient Greek comedy “Lysistrata” in college during the 1970s. The women in “Lysistrata” withhold sex to stop the Peloponnesian War; likewise, “Chiraq” is a satirical, modern retelling where women use this same tactic to stop black-on-black violence in Chicago’s inner city.

“The play with its antiwar, antiviolence themes could be adapted into something that could be adopted today,” Willmott said. “Gang violence was a problem when I wrote [“Chiraq”] 13 years ago and now it’s even a bigger problem.”

Lee, a fan of Willmott’s prior work, asked Willmott if he had more scripts shortly after the release of “C.S.A.: Confederate States of America” in 2004. Willmott gave him “Chiraq,” but their original attempt to create the film failed. Over a decade later the two reconnected to try again.

“When he [Lee] called me he said, ‘Let’s set it in Chicago and call it Chiraq,’” Willmott said. “We both rewrote it and it was a real give and take, back and forth. I’d write things, he’d write things. It’s really both of our scripts.”

While making the film, Willmott worked directly with former gang members to gain insight on the problem of black-on-black violence.

“Black-on-black violence is something that comes out of the fact that most of these neighborhoods [in Chicago] are devastated,” Willmott said. “You go to these neighborhoods and there’s no businesses, no stores — it’s like it’s Germany in ‘44.”

After visiting several neighborhoods in Chicago, Willmott said he realized that more development in these neighborhoods would lead to less violence.

“Amerca has a huge problem not investing in black neighborhoods,” he said. “If that [investment] would happen, I think you would see a big turnaround with this kind of stuff.”

After he earned his bachelor’s degree in drama from Marymount College in Salina, he participated in activism work. He was a crucial part to the integration of the Junction City Fire Department in the 1970s, which had never had a black firefighter before Willmott and his colleagues launched a protest.

“Chiraq” is a step toward a different kind of activism. The film’s title is a nickname for Chicago, which is alludes to its high murder rate.

When Lee announced in April that the film would be shot in Chicago, residents and even the Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel thought the film would exploit the problem, but Willmott said that was not the case.

“I think the mayor and people in Chicago thought this as another ‘90s gang movie with a lot of violence, so I think they’ll be pleasantly surprised when they see the film that it’s got a really positive message,” Willmott said.

Wilmott remembers one incident in particular as a catalyst for his future interest in race relations and productions, like “Chiraq,” exploring the issue.

On April 4, 1968, when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, a 10-year-old Willmott sat in front of the television in his family’s living room in Junction City.

The day after the assassination, Willmott eagerly raised his hand in class to discuss it. His teacher replied, “We won’t be talking about that.”

“That’s really when I understood that I was black in a political or social way,” Willmott said. “You knew you were black, but Dr. King’s assassination really taught me that being being black had social and political ramifications.”

With “Chiraq,” Willmott hopes to address these issues and, hopefully, reduce them, but he admits the American society has a long way to go in regards to racism.

“It will always probably be a problem,” he said. “It’s not very optimistic sounding but because of human nature, you always have to be willing to combat it, fight against it. It’s always going to be a problem.”

Kevin Willmott finds comfort in controversy.
The Kansas filmmaker earned that distinction with his faux documentary “CSA: The Confederate States of America,” which depicts a present-day America where slavery still exists. But the cameras had barely started rolling on his latest feature, “Chiraq” (pronounced shy-rack), before issues emerged.

The title derives from a combination of Chicago and Iraq — a nickname used to equate the Second City’s gun violence to that of a Middle Eastern battleground.

This riled Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who reportedly said he was “not happy” about the title — especially considering the production requested a $3 million tax credit. He’s one of several politicians who criticized the film when it began shooting June 1 in Chicago.

“Like a lot of cities, Chicago is very concerned about its image, specifically with violence,” said Willmott, who co-wrote the picture with renowned director Spike Lee.

“People (in government) work very hard to make the city look a certain way. The problem was, they didn’t know anything about the film. It’s not a gangster film. It’s not an ’80s gang movie. It takes a whole new approach to the situation and a whole new style to filmmaking in general.”

Willmott, an associate professor of film and media studies at the University of Kansas, based the screenplay on Aristophanes’ ancient play “Lysistrata,” a comic account of a woman’s quest to end the Peloponnesian War by persuading the women of Greece to withhold sex from their husbands until they forged a peace treaty.

“Aristophanes wrote that in 411 B.C. Now that’s a long time ago, but it’s interesting these issues have been going on so long,” Willmott said.

“There is a lot of humor and satire in the movie. The dialogue will be spoken in verse like the play ‘Lysistrata.’ It was disappointing that the city of Chicago immediately assumed the negative about the film and what the name would mean.”

This didn’t prevent Lee from recruiting a large cast of notable performers, including Samuel L. Jackson, John Cusack, Angela Bassett, Wesley Snipes, Jennifer Hudson, Nick Cannon and Dave Chappelle.

Principal photography concluded July 16. The film is expected to be released before the end of the year.

Willmott first crafted a version of the screenplay 13 years ago, around the time Lee (“Do the Right Thing,” “Inside Man”) became involved with “CSA” as a credited “presenter” of the film. The original title for “Chiraq” was “Gotta Give It Up!”

“Spike got to read the script at that time and really liked it,” Willmott said. “We went to every major studio. We had two readings with DreamWorks, where at the time Jennifer Lopez was going to play Lysistrata. And it just never happened.”

But last October, Willmott received a call from Lee asking whether the screenplay was still available. Lee proposed setting it in Chicago and calling it “Chiraq.”

In February, Lee hosted a reading in Los Angeles attended by reps from Amazon Studios. “Chiraq” is now slated to be Amazon’s first feature film release.

“The thing Spike and I have in common is, we’re both political junkies,” said Willmott. “We both have strong opinions about things. The subject matter of the film spoke to him — and it’s very much Spike Lee subject matter.”

Willmott says their approach to updating the script became a back-and-forth strategy, with each man alternating rewrites.

“It was a fun, collaborative process,” said Willmott, who first met Lee as a graduate student while attending New York University.

As part of the story’s development, the pair interviewed many of the mothers of victims lost to gang violence.

“It’s mind-blowing how many people have been affected by violence,” Willmott said. “It’s disturbing. It’s mournful. It’s a life-altering experience when you get to meet these people up front and personal.”

Although “Chiraq” attempts to focus greater attention to the crisis of inner-city crime, Willmott hopes the film delves even further.

“The movie is not about the problem. The movie is about the solution,” Willmott said. “That’s the thing I like most about it.”

More than a decade ago, Willmott weathered criticism for how “CSA” took aim at the visible remnants of racism, particularly the Confederate flag. The filmmaker became a vocal opponent of the flag back when the majority of Americans weren’t exactly listening.

What a difference a few years have made.

“I got to see that flag up close when they showed ‘CSA’ in South Carolina years ago, and it was a frightening thing to see as an African-American,” he said. “The state has a black history recognition thing, but it said to me: ‘Even though we acknowledge black history, we still believe in slavery. We still believe in white supremacy.’”

Willmott added, “It’s unbelievable that governors were still trying to justify the flag until that horrible shooting incident (in June in a predominantly black church in Charleston, S.C.) — which we talk about in ‘Chiraq,’ by the way. That incident happened while we were filming, so we immediately wrote a scene connecting to that event.”

Jon Niccum is a filmmaker, freelance writer and author of “The Worst Gig: From Psycho Fans to Stage Riots, Famous Musicians Tell All.”

Alumni in the News

Allen Sanders, 2014 BGS, chronicled former University chancellor E. Laurence Chalmers and the protests in a 56-minute documentary “The Forgotten Bow Tie,” available on YouTube. Sanders started this project in 2013 when he was still a University student.

As the Vietnam War dragged into the 1970s and antiwar sentiment swept through the country, University students’ protests became increasingly violent.

Campus protests culminated in an arson attack on the Union, the trashing of the Military Science building and the deaths of students Rick Dowdell and Nick Rice by police, all in the spring and summer of 1970.

Chancellor E. Laurence Chalmers led the University for three years from 1969 to 1972, a relatively short reign compared to others who have held the position. During the height of the protests, Chalmers kept the University open in the face of threats of a student strike and pressure from the Board of Regents.

University graduate Allen Sanders has chronicled Chalmers and the protests in his 56-minute documentary “The Forgotten Bow Tie,” available on YouTube.

Sanders graduated from the University in 2014 with a degree in Film and Media Studies. He started work on “Bow Tie” in 2013 as a film student. Before and after graduation, Sanders assisted on small projects, including production work for the History Channel and for film professor Kevin Willmott on his 2013 film “Jayhawks.”

Despite the political subject, Sanders, a self-described history buff, said he approached the project “with no agenda in mind,” only to show a piece of KU history.

“This happened — this is history, this is real life,” he said. Chalmers himself opposed the war in Vietnam, and he sympathized with his students, but he still had to assuage the Regents and restless members of the Lawrence community.

When the threat of a student strike was imminent, Chalmers compromised by allowing students to finish the semester early with the grades they had. His decision was heavily criticized by members of the Regents and the governor at the time, Robert Docking.

Sanders said he appreciates the integrity Chalmers maintained through the school year.

“Standing up for what is right is big for me, not standing up for what’s popular or politically correct,” Sanders said. “[Chalmers] was a mediator between the older generation and the younger generation, and he got the younger generation.”

Sanders said that while he didn’t get much help from his classmates, the University faculty and Lawrence community were more than willing to help with the project. The images and archival footage in the film are courtesy of the Spencer Research Library and the Kansas Historical Society, and all of the film’s interviewees are alumni or otherwise affiliated with Lawrence or the University.

Willmott and Sanders’s former journalism professor Pam Fine played a role in the making of the documentary. Willmott offered Sanders advice in the early stages of the film, and Fine recommended that Sanders talk to Wayne Propst, who participated in the student protests.

Propst’s interviews are featured throughout the film, juxtaposing his perspective as a protester with accounts from 1970 student body president Bill Ebert and archival footage of Docking speaking out against the antiwar movement and criticizing Chalmers for being too lenient. Propst spoke highly of Chalmers, praising his ability to compromise under immense pressure.

Sanders said that the last half of 1970 is not a period that can be remembered fondly, and thus is not remembered much at all.

Before watching the documentary, Fine said she was largely unaware of what had gone on at the University in 1970.

“I knew about some of the events that he chronicled, but I really didn’t understand how widespread and involved the students were,” Fine said. “I really liked seeing the level of activism that occurred.”

By letting the students to voice their opposition to the war, Fine said she thought Chalmers “warranted a deep respect.”

Until this year, Chalmers was the only University chancellor who didn’t have a building named in his honor. The Art and Design building was dedicated to him on August 23.

“He did what he thought was right for students,” Sanders said. “He believed in academic freedom. He was there for students, and for me that’s what college is about.”

Copied from:
http://www.kansan.com/arts_and_culture/graduate-s-film-features-former-chancellor-chalmers-as-a-mediator/article_457b7f70-502c-11e5-ad54-53a60e927a7d.html
Alumni in the News

Benjamin Waller, 2015 BGS, was highlighted in The University Daily Kansan: “It’s a classic story: Boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, boy loses girl. But Benjamin Waller, a recent graduate from Alton, Ill., wanted to portray something different with his final film as a University student.

“It’s a relationship movie at the core,” Waller said. “It’s guy meets girl, strike up relationship, and things pretty much go bad. Both these characters are very flawed; their relationship never really connects because of miscommunication. That’s one of the core themes of the film.”

The film, “The Hardest Thing to Earn,” was created for Waller’s honors project. The 80-minute feature film is one of the longest to be produced by a student within the Department of Film and Media Studies. Waller, who wrote the script, produced, directed and edited the film, chose the title from one of his favorite quotes: “Love is the most beautiful thing to have, the hardest thing to earn, and most painful thing to lose.”

“It’s a drama with some awkwardly comic moments; it’s a bit of a genre blend,” Waller said. “I refer to the film as a dark romantic dramedy.”

The film involved a cast largely of students within the film and media studies department. All cast and crew members volunteered their time to work on the film, which began shooting last October.

Waller started writing the script in July 2014.

“I wanted to make something that I could make, first of all,” he said. “For this, I needed to write something that logically [I could] actually make the film on a low budget.”

Although the film deals with issues of sexual assault, Waller said the prevalence of sexual assault on high school and college campuses — especially assaults involving alcohol — didn’t cross his mind when he first wrote the script. As the story developed, he said he realized how important the film could be.

“[Sexual assault] is such a huge issue globally, especially overseas, and it’s not only accepted, but condoned,” he said. “It’s just an issue that’s very personal to me. I’ve always been attracted to social issues when writing. It’s just impossible to take on such a huge subject in such a short period of time. I just wanted to approach it on a personal level with a character-driven film.”

Jordyn Cox, a recent graduate from Wichita, plays the lead role of the girlfriend. “The Hardest Thing to Earn” is her first feature film appearance.

“It was a challenge at times,” Cox said. “I’ve always really enjoyed roles that have a lot of depth to them, where you can explore not only the character’s past but the character’s emotions, their dreams, their fears. It was really great to have a character who is incredibly complex.”

Casting Cox, who carries the film’s message, in the lead role was a key moment for Waller.

“What attracted me to Jordan was that she looked the part and nailed the audition, but she has a very vulnerable quality about her,” he said.

Waller and Cox both said the cast and crew bonded over the nine-month production process; they said those were their favorite memories.

“Making a feature film is hard,” Waller said. “It’s the camaraderie that really kept us going. There were lots of long days and long nights. None of us were getting paid; I’ve sunk thousands of dollars of my own money into it.”

For Cox, the message of the film stands out more than anything else.

“It’s really been an amazing opportunity that we’ve been able to work as a team and make this movie about an issue that is so important,” Cox said. “The hope with the film is to bring light to this issue and to have people realize this is a problem — something does need to be done about this. We really hope this film will be a way to spark that conversation.”

The crew shot the film in locations around and outside the city, including the abandoned high school in Lecompton. The assistance from the Lawrence community was instrumental in the success of the film, Waller said.

“I really learned that you need the help of the community to get a film made on a low budget,” he said. “Without them, it couldn’t have been possible; the community was awesome. We got all these cool locations.”

The film premieres at 7:30 p.m. on Aug. 19 at Liberty Hall. After that, Waller hopes his work will make the film festival circuit.

“Hopefully we can get it into some respected film festivals and get it seen and get our name out there. That’s really the goal,” Waller said. “We’re taking on a controversial issue that a lot of people want to turn a blind eye to. I kind of lay it all out there and show you exactly what these victims go through. It’s not easy to watch at times, but hopefully it can change people’s hearts and minds.”

Alumni News

Check out FMS “Student Stories” featuring Shalinn Starkey, 2015 BGS, here: https://vimeopro.com/kufms/student-stories

Academic Calendar

- Saturday, October 10 — First Day of fall break
- Tuesday, October 13 — Last day of Fall Break

http://www.registrar.ku.edu/calendar/

Equipment Check-in: 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

Equipment Check-out: 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

Sign-up to check-out equipment in the binder on the table near the equipment room.

Sign-up for editing rooms by signing the edit room schedule posted on the editing room doors.

The computer lab is available for use during the following times: Monday from 11:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., Tuesday from 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., and Friday: 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Check with your instructor or John McCluskey, Assistant Technical Director, for more information.

Film Festivals, Contests, Local Film Jobs, Call-for-Papers
Announcements of film festivals, contests, local jobs, call-for-papers, etc. are kept in a binder in the reception area at Oldfather Studios (room 204). Check it out!

Sydney Stone
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