

# SOC's Center for Environmental Filmmaking

## 2006 Annual Report

By Chris Palmer, Director

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This report gives an overview of what SOC's Center for Environmental Filmmaking accomplished in 2006.

CEF is driven by the belief that environmental and wildlife films are vitally important educational and political tools in the struggle to protect the environment. CEF's mission is to train environmental filmmakers to produce films which are entertaining, ethically sound and educationally powerful.

CEF has three signature initiatives: creating partnerships with blue chip organizations that will give students the opportunity to produce professional films; bringing to the AU campus world-class filmmakers to teach and mentor students; and providing innovative educational programs and classes.

To that end, in 2006 we:

1. **Produced films:** CEF produced numerous films in 2006 in which students and faculty (including Sandy Cannon-Brown, Larry Engel, Brigid Maher, Maggie Burnette Stogner and I) played pivotal roles. Here is a selection:
  - *Scarred Lands and Wounded Lives: The Environmental Footprint of War:* This one-hour film is about the devastating impact of war on people, land and communities. It began as a class assignment in my class, *Producing Environmental and Wildlife Films*, for two SOC graduate students, Katie Geringer and Dan Gallagher. Their treatment for filmmakers Alice and Lincoln Day evolved into a full-length documentary. Dan is now the associate producer and chief writer for the film and all collateral materials. He works closely with the Days and with Adjunct Professor Sandy Cannon-Brown, the producer/project manager for the film.
  - *Outside the Classroom: Science Education in the Environment:* This 15-minute film shows how young people's lives in the inner cities are transformed by an inspiring program. It premiered at the Smithsonian on March 17, 2006 as part of the Environmental Film Festival in DC. We also produced a companion music video. Several SOC students joined the professional team, led by Adjunct Professor Sandy Cannon-Brown, during production.

- *EcoViews: The Chesapeake Bay*: SOC students (in all about 30 of them) are producing a half-hour documentary for PBS. It is called *EcoViews: The Chesapeake Bay*. The program is being produced for Maryland Public Television (MPT) by two classes: *Environmental and Wildlife Production* taught by Professor Sandy Cannon-Brown and *Motion Graphics and Effects* taught by Professor Brigid Maher. I will host the program, which will air next spring during MPT's annual *Chesapeake Bay Week* on at least 12 PBS stations on the east coast. We are thrilled to be launching this partnership between SOC and MPT. The students have done an outstanding job. They were challenged to work at a professional level to produce a broadcast-quality program worthy of PBS and they succeeded. *EcoViews: The Chesapeake Bay* is being featured in the New Media Literacy Project that Prof. Maggie Burnette Stogner is executive producing for the Center for Social Media in partnership with MIT's Media Lab.
- *It's Your Water: Use It Wisely*: SOC students are producing a video, *It's Your Water: Use It Wisely*, for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the Washington Area Sewer Authority. Graduate students Joe Grimme, Mindy Hirsch, Andy Kuester, Michelle Williams and Dan Gallagher are working with CEF faculty to create an informational DVD about water conservation. I'm the Executive Producer, Adjunct Professor Sandy Cannon-Brown is the Faculty Producer and Assistant Professor Larry Engel is the Faculty Director and Director of Photography. This is a CEF project, managed through the Office of Sponsored Programs, which offers paid positions to SOC students who can deliver professional work to AU clients.
- *Save Rainforests Save Lives*: CEF and VideoTakes, Inc., in partnership with the Wallace Genetic Foundation, produced a new high-def PSA. *Save Rainforests Save Lives* ties the health of the rainforests to our own health. CEF associate director and adjunct professor Sandy Cannon-Brown produced and directed the spot. Professor Larry Engel was the director of photography. Olivia Yeo, an SOC MFA grad, edited the PSA. The spot was shot on location in Ecuador and Washington, DC. The PSA is now airing on stations across the country. You can watch it on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-GUv4zRHrc>
- *The American Prairie Reserve*: SOC faculty worked together to produce a high-def film for the American Prairie Foundation narrated by Tom Brokaw. The film encourages support for the growing American Prairie Reserve in northeastern Montana. When it is complete, the Reserve will be the largest wildlife reserve in the lower 48 states. The DVD was produced by CEF in partnership with VideoTakes, Inc. Adjunct Professor Sandy Cannon-Brown was the writer/producer/director and Assistant Professor Larry Engel was the director of photography. Olivia Yeo, an AU MFA

graduate, edited the fine cut. MFA student Michelle Williams helped with post-production. The video was shot in HD on location in Montana.

- *Buyer Be Fair*: Produced by John DeGraaf and CEF in 2005, *Buyer Be Fair* has been shown at numerous film festivals and is being distributed to all public television stations by satellite. Bullfrog Films is distributing *Buyer Be Fair* to the non-broadcast market.

I'm delighted to report that the faculty (such as Larry Engel) who teach Film and Video Production 1 and 2 are now bringing more environmental issues into those courses to better prepare students who wish to concentrate on environmental filmmaking.

2. **Developed partnerships**: In order to create opportunities for students to make professional films, CEF developed partnerships with the Council of Governments, Maryland Public Television, the National Park Service, REI and several other top organizations. For example, with REI, we are creating a major Earth Day event for April 22, 2007, and REI gives (thanks to John Douglass) regular presentations in our classes. The REI presenter is SOC alum Rhonda Krafchin.
3. **Organized and hosted biweekly events in the Wechsler Theater**: CEF, working with Filmmakers For Conservation, organized and hosted biweekly events in the Wechsler Theater which drew large audiences. Topics included Chesapeake Bay, Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, hydroelectric power, best of the Ocean Channel Film Festival, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and sea turtles. We have regular meetings planned throughout 2007 and will shortly be announcing the Second Annual Spring Environmental Film Series. The first event on February 13 will feature, thanks to Maggie Stogner, television star Brady Barr from National Geographic. Other upcoming events include Kevin Mohs from the Discovery Channel, our own Larry Engel, our latest IMAX film *Hurricane on the Bayou*, and David Hamlin from NatGeo (again, thanks to Maggie).
4. **Created new programs**: CEF created *Classroom in the Wild*. This is a one-week spring break filmmaking class in wilderness areas in Florida with filmmaker Wolfgang Obst to learn the basics of natural history filmmaking. CEF, working with John Douglass and Sarah Menke-Fish will also be launching *Classroom in the Wild in Australia* this summer. CEF has also created two other new classes: *Producing Environmental and Wildlife Films*, taught by me, which teaches students the keys to being a successful film producer, and *Environmental and Wildlife Production*, taught by Prof. Sandy Cannon-Brown, which gives students the opportunity to produce professional films for networks like PBS.
5. **Created events at film festivals and conferences**: CEF created dozens of events and programs in 2006 at festivals and conferences, including RealScreen, the Environmental Film Festival, Wildscreen, the International Wildlife Film Festival, and the Giant Screen Cinema Association (IMAX) conference. CEF and

the Center for Social Media created six significant events last March for the Environmental Film Festival and will be doing the same again this coming March.

6. **Gave many keynote speeches and workshops**: Attached is a list of some of the keynote speeches I gave this year at various film festivals and conferences around the country. I gave three presentations at RealScreen in January, four presentations at IWFF in May, and three presentations at *Wildscreen* in October. I gave several keynote speeches at other film conferences. I spoke on television (Channel 9) about our latest IMAX film, *Hurricane on the Bayou*, which is about Katrina hitting New Orleans and the need to restore the coastal wetlands. The film will be shown in DC at the Smithsonian on March 19 as part of the Environmental Film Festival. I published articles on working with nonprofits and on the death of “crocodile hunter” Steve Irwin (the latter as an op-ed in the *Baltimore Sun*).
7. **Funded awards**: CEF funded awards, gave funding grants for thesis films, and funded film festival events. CEF has also established a “CEF Film Fund” to help students present films and papers at film conferences and festivals, and will award a \$500 prize to the winner of the environmental film category at SOC’s Visions Festival, as well as \$500 prizes to the winners of the Student Short Film Festival.
8. **Created the Student Short Film Festival**: This annual event, created by CEF and Philippe Cousteau’s EarthEcho International, showcases the talents of emerging “green communicators” to promote environmental causes and empower individuals to make a difference. CEF and EarthEcho award prize money for the winners. It was a big success last March and we will be holding it again in the Wechsler Theater this coming March 21 at 7 pm. as part of the Environmental Film Festival.
9. **Raised Money**: I am working closely with Dean Kirkman, Kristi Plahn-Gjersvold and Development to raise money for CEF and SOC. We had good success in 2006, but are raising the bar in 2007.

We plan to grow all these initiatives in the coming year. What unites them—besides a commitment to environmental protection—is the desire to transform students’ lives. We show students that by hard work, perseverance and creativity, they can find focus, passion and meaning. We value the exuberance that comes from being creative, the courage to stand up for what you believe in, and the compassion to care for those who can’t speak for themselves. These are fundamentally important values that will benefit students all their lives, regardless of what particular profession they pursue.