Classroom in the Wild: Chesapeake Bay
Center for Environmental Filmmaking, School of Communication

March 5-12, 2016

One-Week Course in Environmental Filmmaking at Wye Island NRMA with Filmmakers Jamey Warner & Vanina Harel

For more information, contact Prof. Chris Palmer palmer@american.edu or 202-885-3408 or cell 202-716-6160

On Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/ciwcb

SOC’s Center for Environmental Filmmaking is excited to offer students a one-week program during American University’s spring break on the Chesapeake Bay to introduce them to the challenges and fun of environmental filmmaking. The program will take place March 5-12, 2016. This course will be limited to 14 students.

This week-long, non-credit class is for both first-time and experienced filmmakers and photographers who have an interest in the environment, natural history and the outdoors. Led by award-winning filmmakers Jamey Warner and Vanina Harel, students will learn how to prepare for and organize a shoot, how to shoot the footage necessary to tell a compelling story, how to manage media in the field, how to edit quickly for a rough cut with a strong environmental theme, and how to use HD cameras, DSLR’s and supporting sound gear in outdoor environments.

Students will rotate between positions of producer, director, cinematographer, sound recordist, writer and editor in order to collaborate on a group project. The instruction will be punctuated by fireside chats featuring guest speakers on a variety of topics pertaining to wildlife and environmental filmmaking. This program will serve as an enjoyable educational experience for aspiring filmmakers, photographers, and anyone interested in communicating environmental issues through digital media.

On-location issues we will cover: Approaching animals safely and how one should approach an animal in a non-threatening way. We will also discuss how to get good clean location sound. What camera do you choose, and which
equipment suits the situations you anticipate encountering? What additional equipment can I use to create unique and compelling shots, and how do I pack it in and out? More generally, students will learn how to prepare themselves AND their equipment for wilderness conditions in order to make the most of their filmmaking opportunities, and keep them shooting SAFELY and EFFECTIVELY in the wild.

**Filming issues we will cover:** How do the cameraperson and field producer stay creative when they are uncomfortable, hot/cold and exhausted? What does it take to go the extra mile to get that better camera angle? What happens when you are following the storyline but then something unexpected happens that you would like to include? Can you quickly think of shots you will need that lead into that new situation and shots that bring you out again? Students will take their footage into the editing suite and discover how well their material cuts together into a compelling piece, and how to improve from there. We will talk about continuity, story and pacing.

**FIELD STUDY LOCATION: Wye Island Natural Resources Management Area**

Wye Island NRMA is located in the tidal recesses of the Chesapeake Bay between the Wye River and the Wye East River. Of Wye Island’s 2,800 acres, 2,450 are managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Maryland Park Service for resource management, recreation and agriculture. A major emphasis at Wye Island is to provide suitable habitat for wintering waterfowl populations and other native wildlife. A primary resource management objective at Wye Island is the stabilization of the 30 miles of ever-eroding shoreline. These efforts are accomplished through a partnership between Maryland DNR and numerous environmental advocacy groups, such as the Chesapeake Bay Trust, schools and scout groups. Wye is also in close proximity to many other natural habitats such as Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge which make it an ideal location to base from for day trips along Maryland’s Eastern Shore.

**POST PRODUCTION LOCATION: American University**

Upon completion of field production, students will return to the American University main campus for a hands-on approach to importing footage, managing media, editing together sequences, titles, basic color correction, sound mixing, and exporting the final projects for web and DVD.

**PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR: Jamey Warner**

Jamey Warner is a filmmaker and currently pursuing his MFA in Film and Electronic Media at American University. He currently works as a producer, editor and cinematographer for Earth Focus, a nationally syndicated prime-time show featuring investigative reports and in-depth stories about our changing environment. He’s recently produced and edited stories on the illicit ivory trade and connections to organized crime and terrorism in Africa that
premiered at the L.A. Zoo, the decline of oysters in the Chesapeake Bay, combat veterans turning to sustainable farming, and impacts of the melting Arctic on geopolitical relationships. Jamey has shot in the middle of honeybee swarms for a story about a third generation beekeeper who lost his hives due to harmful insecticide use on neighboring farms, and has shot interviews with leading scientists on the impacts of climate change on our economy. He is an award-winning photographer, and was recently featured in a juried, international photo exhibition as a part of Fotoweek DC. Jamey is a Marine Corps combat veteran and former reconnaissance platoon commander.

**PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR: Vanina Harel**

Vanina Harel is an environmental filmmaker and multimedia producer who is currently pursuing an MFA in Film and Electronic Media at American University. With a background in biology, she has traveled to South Africa and Botswana to produce a short film about rhino conservation, swum with piranhas and caimans in the Brazilian Pantanal, filmed aboard the historic skipjack vessel in the Chesapeake Bay, and gone octopus fishing in Rodrigues Island. She co-produced Chesapeake Villages, a 30-minute documentary that aired on Maryland Public Television and was awarded a Student Emmy from NATAS National Chesapeake Bay Chapter. She recently received a National Geographic Young Explorers grant to fund her current project, a 30-minute documentary called Vey nou Lagon (Living the Ocean). The film features a Mauritian fisherman who decides to lead a movement to protect the lagoons of Mauritius, her home country.

**CLASS INFORMATION**

**Credit:** This is a non-credit class.

**Costs:** $900 program fee. All basic costs during field production will be covered - including food, lodging, and fuel costs for transportation. **Students are expected to provide their own food, lodging, and transportation during pre-production and post-production sessions at American University.** Production and editing equipment will be provided for students.

**Equipment:** Students will be provided with four tapeless HD camera packages and Adobe Premiere Pro editing stations. **Students may wish to purchase an external hard drive to store media for personal use after the course is completed, however media storage will be provided for the purposes of the course.**

**Course listing:** COMM-080-001 **Prerequisites:** None.
**Information sessions:** Professor Palmer will hold information sessions about *Classroom in the Wild: Chesapeake Bay* for all interested students in the fall and early spring.

**How to apply if you are an AU student:** Please register by going through an SOC Academic Advisor. For undergrads with last names starting A - F, contact Melanie Glover at (202-885-2079 or mglover@american.edu). For undergrads with last name beginning G - M, contact Tara Flakker (flakker@american.edu or 202-885-2088). For undergrads with last names beginning N - Z, please contact Christine Frezek (202-885-2090 or frezek@american.edu). For all graduate students, please contact Jean McGee (202-885-2078, jmcgee@american.edu).

**How to apply if you not an AU student:** Please contact Professor Palmer directly.

*Classroom in the Wild: Chesapeake Bay* is open to all interested persons; you do not have to be a student at, or have any affiliation with, American University. First come, first served.

**Liability release:** Students must sign a release and have proof of hospitalization insurance.

**Recommended reading:**

- *Shooting in the Wild* (Sierra Club Books, 2010) by Chris Palmer

**CLASSROOM IN THE WILD: CHESAPEAKE BAY 2015 COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Saturday, March 5 - Arrive in DC**

- Arrive on AU campus (Washington D.C.) no later than 6:00pm
  - Students/faculty meet at AU for introductions, refreshments will be served

**Sunday, March 6 - Travel and Setup (Field Study location)**

- Morning: meet at AU, load equipment, REI visit, travel
- Afternoon: setup camp, safety discussion, equipment overview/basics
- Evening: Production planning (discussion/prac-app), shot list development, story development, Shooting in the Wild (group discussion), media management (discussion), camp overnight
Monday, March 7 - Training (Field study location)
- Morning: Gear prep, interview basics/setup (outdoors & indoors)
- Afternoon: field production - location shooting
- Evening: *Fireside Chat*, review dailies, camp overnight

Tuesday, March 8 - Production (Field study location)
- All day: field production - interview subjects, location shooting
- Evening: *Fireside Chat*, timelapse and night photography, review dailies, camp overnight

Wednesday, March 9 - Production (Field study location)
- All day: field production - interview subjects, locations shooting
- Evening: *Fireside Chat*, review dailies, camp overnight

Thursday, March 10 - Production (Field study location)
- Morning: wrap up field production
- Afternoon: camp breakdown/clean up, travel from field study location to AU Campus
- Evening: Principles of Editing in Adobe Premiere Pro CC (Dependent upon class experience, will be tailored appropriately)

Friday, March 11 - Post-Production (AU Campus)
- Morning: Ingesting footage, timeline creation, log footage, assembly edits
- Afternoon: Assembly edits
- Evening: Assembly edits/Early rough cuts

Saturday, March 12 - Post-Production (AU Campus)
- Morning: Refine rough cuts, basic color correction, begin fine edits
- Afternoon: Fine cuts, audio, wrap post-production
- Evening: Students/faculty meet at AU for dinner, farewells, course feedback

Sunday, March 13 - Depart DC
- Students are free to depart at their own discretion

* Documentary filmmaking almost always involves elements beyond the control of the production (subject matter availability, weather, etc.). This schedule is a guide that is necessarily flexible based on the specific needs of the production. Only to/from travel dates are absolute.