SOC’s Center for Environmental Filmmaking
www.environmentalfilm.org

2012 Annual Report

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This report gives an overview of what the Center for Environmental Filmmaking accomplished in 2012. The Center’s activities and programs are made possible by the generosity of the foundations and donors listed at the end of this report on page 8.

I founded the Center eight years ago in the belief that films and new media are essential tools in the struggle to protect the environment and wildlife. Our mission is to train filmmakers to produce films and new media that effectively strengthen the global constituency for conservation.

The world faces immense environmental challenges. We are fouling our own nest to an unprecedented degree. Powerful, emotive, and affecting images and films can play a key role in raising the importance of conservation and bringing about change. We are committed to raising awareness and empowering action through the innovative use of media. More information about our programs can be found on our website www.environmentalfilm.org.

The Center’s work falls into four areas:

1. Forming partnerships with blue chip organizations
2. Bringing world-class filmmakers to the AU campus to teach and mentor students
3. Creating innovative and enriching programs and classes
4. Advocating the ethical treatment of wildlife and the environment

More details on our activities in these four areas follow:

First, we give students the opportunity to work at a professional level with our partner organizations, including Maryland Public Television (MPT), National Oceanic
and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Park Service (NPS), and several other DC-based, nationally recognized organizations that the Center has developed working partnerships with over the last eight years.

A few examples:

- This past April, **Maryland Public Television** aired the fifth yearly installment of a Center-produced documentary series for MPT’s *Chesapeake Bay Week*. Since 2007, students in **Sandy Cannon-Brown's** Environmental and Wildlife Production Class have been writing, producing, shooting and editing this award-winning series, which has aired on public television stations nationwide, won numerous awards and screened at prestigious festivals. (There’s more about the MPT programs and their success in section three below).

- Working with the **National Park Service** (NPS), we have launched an annual **Center for Environmental Filmmaking Fellowship program** with the **NPS Harper's Ferry Center** - the national headquarters for all NPS design, interpretation, and filmmaking. Our first three fellows, **Sarah Gulick**, **Sylvia Johnson**, and **Erin Finicane** have launched and continue to develop "America's Wilderness," an NPS web series that celebrates the beauty and value of designated Wilderness areas while challenging stereotypes about who enjoys these protected places and why. Produced in collaboration with the **NPS Wilderness Stewardship Division** in advance of the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act, the webisode series strives to increase public awareness and political support for additional wilderness designations, the highest level of land protection recognized by the Wilderness Act of 1964. As we gear up for the 2014 anniversary celebration, it becomes all the more important to inform both the public and policymakers about the value of the legal wilderness designation, keeping in mind that some of the most iconic parks—including Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Great Smoky Mountains—still do not have the high level of protection afforded by that legal designation. Wilderness areas are the last truly natural and ecologically diverse landscapes left in this country and we invite you to experience these unique places on the NPS Wilderness YouTube channel at [http://www.youtube.com/NPSWilderness](http://www.youtube.com/NPSWilderness). In addition to the Wilderness videos, the fellows have also been working on a series of other national initiatives. Sylvia produced a film about the little known environmental impact of marijuana cultivation in National Parks, designed to be screened for policy makers and leading environmental organizations. Sarah assisted with a film about NPS sites that also have World Heritage designation ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UySOekRPNfM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UySOekRPNfM)), and is producing a series of videos about the importance of Natural Sound and how to preserve soundscapes, which are critical for the health of humans and wildlife. And finally, Erin has been working on a radio series featuring...
recently discovered archival audio of **Mardy Murie**, known to many as the "Grandmother of the Conservation Movement". The opportunity to work on environmental films with the National Park Service has been an intense, rewarding, and life changing experience for these students, and has become a defining feature in their education at American University. The National Park Service, in turn, is equally thrilled by this partnership with the Center for Environmental Filmmaking and is looking forward to future opportunities with American University students. The NPS has expressed deep enthusiasm for the films that have resulted from this unique collaboration and values the Center Fellows not only for their professionalism and filmmaking skills, but also for their excitement and commitment to environmental topics.

- The Center continued its partnership with **NOAA** on a major initiative called **Oceans for Life**, and two of our grad students (**Ali Ogden** and **Jenny Stratton**) were paid film mentors in that program. [http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/ofl/](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/ofl/)

- Four years ago with the support of the **Sierra Club** (a tip of the hat to **Adrienne Bramhall**), we launched the annual **Eco-Comedy Video Competition**, which is open to the public. The goal is to encourage the use of humor in solving environmental problems and raising awareness. The winning entry last year (receiving a $1,000 prize) came from AU alum **Alex Lucas** with his short video *Clean Coal by the Bituminous Marketing Agency*. It’s clever and funny.

- We have another important partnership with the **Environmental Film Festival in the Nation’s Capital**. Every March at EFF we organize half a dozen events at AU with prominent leaders and films. We also participate in other prominent festivals, including the **International Wildlife Film Festival** in Missoula, MT, the **BLUE Ocean Festival** in Monterey, CA, and the **Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival** in Jackson Hole, WY.

- Working with **LinkTV** and executive producer **Raisa Scriabine**, grad student **Brian Kelley** edited, produced and shot a number of **Earth Focus** programs for national broadcast in 2012. Brian travelled to Sweden for a feature on environmental innovation as well as Montana and Wyoming for a special on wolves. Brian also worked on a director's cut of the film *Menhaden: The Most Important Fish in the Bay* that featured interviews with Center student filmmakers. All of Brian's work including edits on maritime pollution, Canadian gold mining, and food innovation can be seen at [www.linktv.org/earthfocus](http://www.linktv.org/earthfocus). **Earth Focus** is **Link TV**’s original environmental news magazine and is the longest-running (11 years) program of its kind on US television. Link TV is an independent, non-commercial network available in 33 million US homes on DIRECTV and DISH NETWORK as well as on the web.
• Our work with area middle and high schools in producing environmental films continues to grow. Under the leadership of Professor Sarah Menke-Fish numerous workshops and educational seminars on video and audio production, script writing, editing, and voiceovers were conducted. Professors Menke-Fish, Larry Engel, Kylos Brannon as well as 22 graduate students and 11 undergraduates conducted workshops at the American Film Institute for area high school students and teachers, at Lime Kiln Middle School for the Howard County Gifted and Talented Teachers, at Rockville High School for television and communication teachers and at American University for more than 250 middle and high school students from Montgomery County Public Schools, Howard County Public Schools, DC Public Schools and several private schools. More than 75 environmental documentaries, short animations and PSA’s were produced. Selected environmental films produced by these students were screened at the American Film Institute in Silver Spring in April. The collaboration between area middle and high schools with the American Film Institute and American University is now in its 7th year.

• Three new graduates joined Center Associate Director Sandy Cannon-Brown last summer to create a series of campaign videos for the Queen Anne’s Conservation Association. The 10 spots helped QACA defeat two referenda that would have facilitated irresponsible development in this agrarian county. Recent grads were Helenah Swedberg, Zach Drescher, and Amanda Winkler. In addition, Center Scholars Sarah Gulick and Helenah Swedberg traveled to Florida in January 2012 to work with Sandy Cannon-Brown on a trailer for Guardians of the Everglades, a work-in-progress that will accompany a traveling art exhibition of the same name.

Second, we regularly bring outstanding filmmakers to campus. On Tuesday nights, we hold an event with Filmmakers for Conservation in the Wechsler Theater at which a renowned filmmaker shows clips from his or her films and talks about how and why the films were made. This past year, top executives from National Geographic and Animal Planet, as well as many other influential figures, visited campus, and talked to packed houses. In 2012, topics included Shark Week, our National Parks, dolphins, killer whales in captivity, and water conservation. This coming spring semester, the Center is organizing over a dozen different events, including programs with National Geographic’s David Hamlin, producer of their award-winning film War Elephants, and Animal Planet’s Erin Wanner, producer of Rhino Wars.

Third, we provide innovative and enriching programs like Classroom in the Wild and Environmental and Wildlife Production.

In Sandy Cannon-Brown’s Environmental and Wildlife Production class this year, students produced two half-hour films for Maryland Public Television and other
PBS affiliates, *Potomac: The River Runs Through Us* and *Tomorrow’s Homes Today*. The films will air on MPT during *Chesapeake Bay Week* in April 2013. Our key partner is **Mike English**, MPT’s Emmy Award-winning executive producer. In 2011/2012, one of the class films, *Menhaden: The Most Important Fish in the Bay*, won three local student Emmys, a CINE Golden Eagle and numerous other awards. *Menhaden* helped influence a decision to limit menhaden fishing and is still being featured at festivals nationwide. The class challenges students to work at a professional level to produce a half-hour, broadcast-quality program worthy of PBS.

*Classroom in the Wild* is in its eighth successful year, and **Larry Engel** launched *Classroom in the Wild in Alaska* four years ago. *Classroom in the Wild*, an intensive outdoor workshop held in wilderness areas, allows students to camp out and learn how to meet the challenges—sometimes extreme challenges—of expedition and harsh environmental field production. During the 2012 spring break, **Danny Ledonne** and **Lauren Demko** lead a group of 13 students who camped out near the Blackwater National Refuge in the Chesapeake Bay. The students produced films about the ecological issues the region faces, including one on the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel and another on marshland habitat preservation. We thank **REI** and **AU alum Rhonda Krafchin** for supplying the camping gear. In Alaska last summer, under **Larry Engel’s** leadership, Extreme HD Alaska pushed students beyond their boundaries as they experienced the outdoors in a whole new light and learned how to film on rock, ice, and water. They produced several short instructional videos on surviving aircraft crashes and working on glaciers.

The Center has purchased (thanks to the Norcross Foundation) an HD camera package (Panasonic HMC-150) and this camera is used widely by our students.

As director of the Discover the World of Communication Program and associate director at the Center, Professor **Sarah Menke-Fish** coordinates numerous environmental learning experiences for high school students during the summers in two week workshops taught by American University professors and working professionals at American University and **The University of California at Berkeley**. In 2012 these offerings included nature photography, documentary 101, backpack journalism, animation, social media 101, and nonprofit media production each of which students chose to produce work with an environmental message. More than 400 Students from 40 states and 16 countries participated in the 2012 Discover the World of Communication Program, www.american.edu/soc/discover/. An addition for summer 2013 includes **AU Film and Media Arts Professor Larry Engel** and **MFA graduate student Angela Pinaglia** leading a group of high school students on an environmental filmmaking adventure to Yellowstone.

The Center continues to create and manage the **annual Student Short Film Festival** with the DC Environmental Film Festival. Now in its eighth year, we showcase the talents of emerging “green communicators” to promote environmental causes and empower individuals to make a difference. A panel discussion on how to succeed as a filmmaker accompanies the event. This year’s festival is on March 20. **Sandy Cannon-Brown** organizes and leads this program.
Professor Maggie Burnette Stogner mentors graduate students in her documentary production and writing courses, sharing her years of experience at National Geographic TV with students committed to conservation advocacy. In her Advanced Media Portfolio course, she works one-on-one with students who are creating a variety of conservation films, photography, and installation projects. Some of these are independent projects, others are for clients such as the National Park Service and the National Geographic Society. In 2012, she supervised six students who worked with the National Geographic Virtual Studio to create short films on themes such as climate change, human evolution, and cross-cultural understanding. As a thesis advisor, she also works closely with graduate students who are committed to making a positive contribution to our world, advising them on a range of conservation and environmental thesis films, from endangered species to controversial wild horse round ups. These films, many of which are receiving grant monies from the Center for Environmental Filmmaking, are garnering significant awards and effecting meaningful change.

**Fourth** and finally, we advocate the ethical treatment of wildlife and the environment, through films, articles, conferences and festivals—and we give awards, grants and sponsorships to pursue those goals. For example, the Center annually awards a cash prize of $1,000 to the best environmental film in the Visions Festival at AU. Congratulations to Sarah Gulick, Helenah Svedberg and the students in Sandy Cannon-Brown’s Environmental Production class: Alison Ogden, Brian Kelley, Gillian Ray, Jenny Stratton, Jordan Brown, Tony Azios. Their film Menhaden: The Most Important Fish in the Bay not only won the best environmental film at the Visions Festival in 2012, but it has been selected to screen at the 7th Annual Colorado Environmental Film Festival and the Neuse Riverkeeper Film Festival at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

My book, *Shooting in the Wild: An Insider’s Account of Making Movies in the Animal Kingdom* (Sierra Club Books), is also part of the Center’s effort to teach people about the ethics and effectiveness of environmental films. It describes an eight-point plan to reform the wildlife film industry. I have launched a campaign to that end and have given over 150 speeches and interviews since the book came out in 2010. Please visit [http://www.american.edu/soc/cef/palmer-book.cfm](http://www.american.edu/soc/cef/palmer-book.cfm) to learn more. Jane Goodall called it “a very important and much-needed book.” Now in its second printing, *Shooting in the Wild* pulls back the curtain on the dark side of wildlife filmmaking, revealing an industry undermined by sensationalism, fabrication, and sometimes even animal abuse. My book is being made into a film for PBS with Alexandra Cousteau thanks to the support of the Shared Earth Foundation and the Park Foundation. The world premiere will be at the Environmental Film Festival on March 19, 2013.

SOC, with support from the Center and other AU sources, has partnered with Catholic University and George Washington University to participate in the 2013 Solar Decathlon. The Solar Decathlon is an award-winning international competition that challenges elite collegiate teams to design, build and operate solar-powered houses that are cost-effective, energy-efficient and attractive. Team Capitol DC will compete in
the decathlon October 3–13, 2013, at Orange County Great Park in Irvine, California. Together, the three universities will design and communicate – via integrated branding, digital and social media platforms, and video assets – about a revolutionary future concept home that will be built in Washington, D.C., and then transported more than 3,000 miles away for the final competition in California. Team Capitol DC will design and showcase a home that educates the public about opportunities presented by clean-energy products and provides student participants with unique professional training in skilled collaborative work across disciplines. Two AU SOC professors – Larry Engel, Associate Professor, Film & Media Arts, and Caty Borum Chattoo, Executive in Residence, Public Communication – are leading the integrated communication effort, working with a group of outstanding students from the Public Communication and Film & Media Arts divisions. Media will include a webisode series, conversations with those who have inspired the students, and conversations with veterans of war.

Four years ago we launched the annual Center Scholars Program to recognize graduate MFA student filmmakers who produce films that matter, that make a difference, and that make the world a better, greener place. Five or more Scholars are selected annually to further the Center’s mission. The 2009/2010 Scholars were Ellen Tripler, Danny Ledonne, and Shanon Sparks. The 2010/2011 Scholars were Aditi Desai, Kai Fang, Jeremy Polk, Irene Magafan, and Sylvia Johnson. The 2011/2012 Scholars were Sarah Gulick, Helenah Svedberg, Jennifer Stratton, Aditi Desai, and Sylvia Johnson. And the 2012/2013 were Maria Arreguin, Erin Finicane, Sarah Gulick, Sylvia Johnson, Brian Kelley, Ana Sotelo, Jenny Stratton, Corin Wilson, and a Solar Decathlon student. You can learn more about their projects here. Each grantee receives a total reimbursement of up to $1,500 of actual expenses for his or her thesis film. Scholars must exhibit outstanding intellect, leadership, and ambition. And Scholars must have demonstrated perseverance, creativity, and passion, as well as diligence, integrity, and focus in past work.

We were proud to see the success of Ellen Tripler’s film Dying Green, which she produced with support from the Center. Ellen is a 2010/2011 Center Scholar and her documentary film Dying Green was honored with both a Student Academy Award and a College Television Award in 2012 and a CINE Golden Eagle Award. Dying Green has also been selected to be part of the upcoming Emmy Award winning PBS series Natural Heroes in Season 6. Ellen was also featured on PBS Newshour and interviewed by online correspondent Hari Sreenivasan. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2012/04/dying-green-explores-conservation-through-natural-burial.html. Dying Green is a documentary film about Dr. Billy Campbell, the town’s only physician and how his efforts have radically changed our understanding of burials in the United States and the revolutionary idea of using our own death to fund land conservation and create wildlife preserves.

Danny Ledonne, 2009 Center Scholar, has shown his film Duck! (a duckumentary) at the Montana CINE Film Festival and the American Conservation Film Festival. Because one of the film’s main stories centers on the annual Federal Duck Stamp competition, the film is also shown in conjunction with the final contest each year. Learn more about this film at: http://aduckumentary.com/
I thank Dean Jeff Rutenbeck and Prof. John Douglass for all their support. And I thank Larry Engel, Sandy Cannon-Brown, Sarah Menke-Fish, and Maggie Burnette Stogner—the four Associate Directors of the Center—for all they have done to contribute to the depth and breadth of the Center’s programs.

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