SOC’s Center for Environmental Filmmaking

www.environmentalfilm.org

2014 Report

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February 20, 2014

The following report provides an overview of Center for Environmental Filmmaking activities and events scheduled for 2014. The Center’s programs are made possible by the generosity of the foundations and donors listed at the end of this report.

At Dean Emeritus and Professor Larry Kirkman’s invitation, I founded the Center nine years ago at the School of Communication 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 drawing attention to conservation efforts 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 and at www.ChrisPalmerOnline.com.

What follows is a list of our current projects and programs (please see hyperlinks for more information):

1. **Center Scholars program**: The Center provides $2,000 stipends annually to 5-10 top grad students who display academic and creative excellence and who show outstanding leadership qualities. The stipends are used towards developing conservation media projects. Last year’s Center Scholars included Maria Arreguin, Erin Finicane, Brian Kelley, Ana Sotelo, Corin Wilson, Sarah Gulick, Sylvia Johnson, and Jenny Stratton.
2. **Senior Scholars program**: The Center awards an annual $5,000 stipend to honor distinguished professionals whose work exemplifies the Center’s mission. The winner this year was filmmaker **Sandy Cannon-Brown**.

3. **Mavis and Sidney John Palmer Scholarship**: This scholarship (endowed with $50,000) honors outstanding grad students who have demonstrated a commitment to conservation and wildlife filmmaking. The winners this year were **Sarah Gulick** and **Erin Finicane**.

4. **National Park Service Fellowship**: Born through a unique partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), the fellowship program provides grad students with the opportunity to produce films for NPS as paid employees. The fellowship’s flagship project, the web series *America’s Wilderness*, has produced a diverse collection of films to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The series has garnered national acclaim and won numerous accolades, bringing wilderness stories to people everywhere. Recent NPS Fellows include **Sarah Gulick**, **Erin Finicane**, and **Sylvia Johnson**. If you are interested in holding a screening to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act, please contact sarah_gulick@nps.gov to gain access to high-resolution versions of the films.

5. **Maryland Public Television partnership**: Our long-standing partnership with MPT gives students the opportunity to produce professional films for Chesapeake Bay Week on public television stations under the leadership of Emmy Award-winning executive producer **Mike English**. The Chesapeake Bay watershed region is one of the most environmentally sensitive areas in North America. As a result, policies written to restore the bay sometimes are implemented with politically polarizing effects. This makes bay cleanup progress slow and difficult. Insightful filmmaking about the Chesapeake helps the public better understand the complexities surrounding bay cleanup and restoration. Over the last six years, thanks to **Sandy Cannon-Brown’s** leadership, the student-produced films from this program have received numerous awards, including **five Student Emmys** and several CINE Golden Eagles.

6. **NOAA Oceans for Life program**: Oceans for Life gives two or more grad students the opportunity to acquire field experience working with NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation while collaborating with National Geographic or the Jean-Michel Cousteau’s Ocean Futures Society. They serve as filmmaking mentors to high school students from the Middle East and the US. Recent SOC grad students who have participated include **Ali Ogden**, **Jenny Stratton**, **Sarah Gulick**, and **Tony Azios**.

7. **Prince Charitable Trusts’ films on sustainable farming**: The Center works with the Prince Charitable Trusts to produce films on sustainable and profitable farming. **Aditi Desai** produced *Farming for the Future*, and **Aditi Desai** and **Vanina Harel** are currently producing a second film on sustainable farming.
8. **Classroom in the Wild in the Chesapeake Bay**: This outdoor class offers the public and students a one week program in March on the Chesapeake Bay as an introduction to the challenge and excitement of environmental filmmaking. It is led by Center and SOC alumni Danny Ledonne and Lauren Demko. Two staffers from National Geographic were enrolled in this class last March. Recent field study locations have included Blackwater and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuges.

9. **Classroom in the Wild: Extreme HD Alaska**: Under the leadership of Larry Engel and Brian Horner, this class offers students and the public a three week, three credit immersive course in HD filmmaking under challenging environmental and expeditionary conditions in Alaska.

10. **Funding and producing films**: The Center provides funding and filmmaking expertise to students and others making films on conservation.

11. **Events in the new Forman Theater in McKinley** with renowned filmmakers and environmental advocates. The Center creates and hosts 15-20 events a year, attracting large public and student audiences.

12. **Eco-Comedy Video Competition**: The Center created this annual international competition, cosponsored by the Sierra Club, to encourage the use of humor to advance the cause of conservation. We receive about 60 submissions annually from all over the world and the winner is awarded a $1,000 cash prize.

13. **Visions Festival award for Best Environmental Film**: The Center awards an annual $1,000 cash prize for the best environmental film at the Visions Festival. At the Visions Festival last May, the films were so impressive that the Center doubled the prize money to $2,000. Winners included Peggy Fleming, Toby Mues, Sean Furmage, Sarah Gulick, Sylvia Johnson, and Erin Finicane.

14. **“An Evening with Chris Palmer” annual event at the Environmental Film Festival** (Tuesday, March 25, 2014 at AU). This year I’ll discuss how comedy can be used to encourage conservation and will show many funny clips.

15. **Student Short Environmental Film Festival** (Wednesday, March 26, 2014 at AU). This annual event is part of the Environmental Film Festival and is curated by Sandy Cannon-Brown. We exhibit and celebrate the best conservation short films produced by students nationwide.

16. **Panel at Environmental Film Festival: “OK, I’ve Watched the Film—Now What?”** (Thursday, March 27, 2014 at AU). The Center and EFF sponsor this event annually to draw attention to the need for conservation films to be far more than distracting entertainment. Multifaceted and multilayered campaigns are essential to produce real results and have a measurable impact.
17. **Shooting in the Wild campaign (book and film)** to reform wildlife filmmaking practices. This ongoing campaign is inspired by my book *Shooting in the Wild*, now in its second printing. SOC recently produced a companion film (of the same name) hosted by Alexandra Cousteau, directed and produced by Ed Beimfohr, and produced and edited by Frank Fitzmaurice, which aired on public television stations nationwide. The film was made possible by generous grants from the Park Foundation, the Shared Earth Foundation, and the Norcross Foundation. My new book, *Confessions of a Wildlife Filmmaker*, which is highly critical of some of the television networks, will be out next year.

18. **Sponsorships of many film festivals**, including the Environmental Film Festival in DC, the BLUE Ocean Film Festival and Conference, the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival, the International Wildlife Film Festival, and the Blue Vision Summit.

19. **LinkTV and our work with Earth Focus**: SOC grad student Brian Kelley has done excellent work with Earth Focus executive producer Raisa Scriabin producing films on conservation and reaching millions of households through LinkTV.

20. **Three HD cameras for student use, thanks to the Norcross Foundation**. Many students have taken advantage of this equipment, including Anedra Edwards, Ashlee Banks, Marilyn Stone, Tim Allan, and Sacha Ghalili. These cameras are also used by students in the Classroom in the Wild program.

21. **SOC’s Water Project led by Larry Kirkman**: The Center, and in particular Sandy Cannon-Brown, is supporting this SOC-wide two-year initiative that has more than 25 faculty incorporating into their courses a focus on effective communications about water problems and solutions. Larry Engel’s Film and Video Production 1 class (first-semester graduate students) produced documentaries, PSA campaigns, and profiles that focused on water. Professor Sarah Menke-Fish’s students produced an original series for NBC4 Washington, “Operation Water” which examined water issues in the D.C. Metropolitan Area. Six films produced by AU students as class assignments to support the water project were selected for the Student Short Environmental Film Festival in this year’s DC Environmental Film Festival.

22. **Discover the World of Communication summer program for high school students under Sarah Menke-Fish’s leadership**: The Center gave a $775 Scholarship to high school student Sydney Felder, an Environmental Film Festival winner, last year so she could attend. The Center will continue to support Discover the World of Communication in the same way in 2014.

23. **The Center supported the 2013 DOE Solar Decathlon**, a biannual international competition to build solar and sustainable homes. A partnership of the Catholic University of America, the George Washington University and American
University created Harvest Home, a house specially designed to provide a sustainable and nurturing sanctuary for wounded warriors. The team placed 7th overall, with the communications component led by Prof. Caty Chattoo and Larry Engel and a dozen students coming in 5th place. Harvest Home has been donated to Wounded Warriors Homes of San Diego, Calif., and a Navy Corpsman will become its first occupant as he transitions back to society. Howard University’s PBS affiliate is the sponsoring station for an hour-long documentary being directed by Larry Engel and produced by the School of Communication.

24. **Be the Change Public Service Announcement:** Grad student Sarah Gulick is producing a PSA highlighting the relationship between environmental conservation and our own individual diet, and the opportunity to make a positive impact three times a day. The PSA is being funded by a donation to the Center from Sheila and Bill Wasserman.

25. **Associate Director Maggie Burnette Stogner was a panelist for the Environmental Film segment of the 2013 Annapolis Film Festival.** Her short documentary, *Hawks in the Wild* and Robert Redford’s *Watershed* were the two films selected for screening. *Hawks in the City* was produced by the Center’s award-winning filmmaker Aditi Desai and with the help of many other undergraduate and graduate film students in Maggie Stogner’s classes.

26. **Professor Stogner continues to serve as a thesis advisor for many of the Center’s award-winning students,** including Sarah Gulick, Erin Finicane, Brian Kelley, and Ana Sotelo. With the assistance of the Center and the support of faculty, students are able to launch their careers in wildlife and environmental filmmaking. Many recent graduates are receiving awards at significant festivals, such as Sylvia Johnson whose film *Roaming Wild* garnered recognition at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

27. **Under Sarah Menke-Fish’s leadership,** more than 200 students from Montgomery County Public Schools, Howard County Public Schools and DC Public Schools students participated in several hands-on environmental film workshops held in October, January and February 2013 at AU and AFI. More than 40 AU faculty, MFA and MA candidates and Film and Media Arts students worked with the students to guide them and support them with their filmmaking efforts.

28. [Center Vimeo website](#)

29. [Center YouTube website](#)
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.

The Center for Environmental Filmmaking’s activities and programs are made possible by the generosity of the following individuals, foundations, corporations, and other organizations. I am honored to recognize them and to thank them for their support:


Special thanks to Joan Murray, Bill Benenson, Caroline Gabel, Gil Ordway, Caroline Ramsay Merriam, Elysabeth Kleinhans, Elizabeth Ruml, Lucy Waletzky, Wool Henry, Angel Braestrup, Lacey Hoover, Colton Hoover Chase, Mark Butterworth, Betsy Mead, Diana Mead, Christelle Siohan, Sheila and Bill Wasserman, Amy Panek, Lisa Peterfreund, Todd Robinson, Matt Stout, Dan Basta, Jason Patlis, Kristin Pauly, Leonard Berman, John McMurray, Joanne Flanders, Brian Keane, Ernest Robinson, the late Sally Brown, and other generous supporters.