Letter From the Director

Greetings, friends and alumni! It’s been a very busy semester here at OU. As you’ll see in this newsletter, our faculty and students have been all over the world participating and organizing film festivals. We sent a faculty escort and two students to the International Short Film Festival in Norman’s sister city of Clermont-Ferrand, France. FMS faculty and staff co-hosted the Native Crossroads Film Festival, which brought to OU Indigenous films and filmmakers from as far away as New Zealand and as nearby as Tulsa and Oklahoma City. FMS students accepted internships and learning opportunities at an international consortium of festivals—including Cannes!—and we’re honored to help them realize those dreams. Your donations to the Kaid/Karriker FMS Scholarship and the new Victoria Sturtevant Travel Fund make these opportunities possible, and we’re deeply grateful for your support. If you can, please consider giving to FMS to help support our students. To make a tax-deductible contribution to FMS, visit our website at cas.ou.edu/fms and click “DONATE.”

This April, FMS also organized our annual program trip to Los Angeles where students networked with alumni, toured studios, and learned more about the many graduate programs available in the area. Dr. Misha Nedeljkovich led our students behind stage on Late Night with Conan O’Brien, met with preservationists at the UCLA Film and Television Archives, and toured the Academy’s Pickford Center for Motion Picture Study. After they returned, many FMS students also exhibited films at the OU Student Film Production Club’s Red Bud Film Festival, which took place April 29th at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. Lauren Bumgarner’s choreography piece “You Won’t Drown” picked up Best Short Film and the Audience Choice award—congratulations, Lauren!

This summer, we are happy to welcome Dr. Joshua Nelson as the new Interim Director of Film & Media Studies. He is the author of Progressive Traditions: Identity in Cherokee Literature and Culture, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, and a native Oklahoman. Joshua teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on Native American cinema and directs the Native Crossroads Film Festival. His expertise in Indigenous media has been integral to the growth of OU’s new Native American Studies Department, and we’re excited for the leadership connections he’ll forge between FMS, English and NAS.

It’s been an honor serving as Director of FMS this year. Thank you to all the wonderful students, alumni, faculty, and staff who’ve welcomed me into this amazing program!

Caetlin Benson-Allott
Director of Film and Media Studies

In this Issue:

Native Crossroads Film Festival 2
Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival 5
Keaton Bell, Graduating Senior 8
About five years ago, Victoria Sturtevant, then director of FMS (back when it was still FVS), suggested to Professor Joshua Nelson that OU had some connections to renowned actor Wes Studi and that they might look into bringing him to campus. That visit didn’t work out, but from that moment, the Native Crossroads Film Festival and Symposium was born. Now that we’re in our fourth year, it seemed like a great time to bring out the renowned actor of *Dances with Wolves*, *Last of the Mohicans*, and more recently, Showtime’s *Penny Dreadful*. We were excited to finally welcome Mr. Studi to campus this April for the 2016 Native Crossroads Film Festival. He was joined by a full slate of directors, scholars, and activists working in American Indian cinema.

The product of the sponsorship of FMS and Native American Studies and of the hard work done by an organizing committee drawn from FMS faculty and staff, the departments of NAS, English, Communication, Geography and Environmental Sustainability, and SCMS, Native Crossroads is all about intersections—found among filmmakers, scholars, and community representatives, and found in stories where Indigenous experiences speak to people from any background. It’s also one of the few places where fantastic short and feature-length films that don’t get picked up by mainstream outlets can be seen—and it happens for free, for everyone, every spring at the Sam Noble Museum.

The theme this time around was “Elements,” which got us talking about natural resources, as well as elements that bring communities together or threaten to tear them apart. Water, earth, air, and fire figure in the imaginative, political, and ceremonial worlds of many of the short films we screened. Elements of substance abuse (think of the *Breaking Bad* logo!) connected the three featured evening screenings: *The Seventh Fire*, a documentary about gang culture on an Ojibwe reservation; *The Last Saint*, an action film from New Zealand about a Polynesian teen trying to stay out of his family’s “busi-
“ness” troubles; and *Chasing the Light*, an envelope-pushing drug comedy set in the American Southwest. We welcomed the directors of each of these, as well as Chris Eyre, director of the watershed American Indian film *Smoke Signals*.

With a host of films from all across the globe, including the Sámi from Norway, Aboriginal peoples from Australia, Maori and Tongan-Samoan peoples from New Zealand, the Ainu from Japan, and several Native tribes from Canada, Central and South America, we were able to show the richness of Indigenous cultures, and to illustrate how the issues the films take up, such as access to clean water, the protection of sacred sites, and maintaining cultural traditions, are geographically international and thematically universal in scope.

We don’t want to brag, but we think of Native Crossroads as an event where important things can and do happen. One of the most inspiring moments we’ve seen was last year when Kyle Bell, a young Creek filmmaker, sent us a submission about Carol Tiger and her traditional Muscogee cooking. He said he was inspired to make the film after seeing others made by local directors at the festival the year before, so he made one of his own. This is just what we envisioned for the festival: encouraging American Indian filmmakers, especially those from Oklahoma, to tell their stories and offering them venues to do it. With the production classes and visiting filmmaker workshops now linked to the festival, students across campus, Native and non-Native, are making films and connecting with American Indian communities. We hope to see this trend continue!
My level of excitement could only be matched by my exhaustion upon finally landing in the beautiful city of Clermont-Ferrand, France. This was my first time ever travelling abroad and I was incredibly nervous about what I would be facing. After spending some time settling in we found the Maison de la culture which served as the main hub of the festival. Tons of film posters plastered nearly every surface inside of the building. As I tried to view them all, I suddenly felt aware of just how many people from around the world were gathered in this area to present their work. It felt great to be a part of such a huge assembly of filmmakers. At registration, we were given a thick book filled with all of the events of the festival, a listing of films that are included in the market place, lots of neat swag, and a badge on a bright yellow lanyard. It's hard to think of anything that feels more official than that thin badge with my name and my short film's name on it that got me into every screening and into the market place.

"Many of the things I've learned here were tied up neatly into a bow by this trip." Jessica Hunt

I was inspired by so many of the short films I saw. There was such a variety of pieces ranging not just in genre but in form. I felt excited and grateful that my work and the work of many of my friends were being screened at the same festival. Most of the shorts we viewed were not in English nor did many of them have English subtitles, which took some getting used to. However, it became easier and easier to still grasp the narratives and I was able to truly focus on the craftsmanship put into these pieces.

As someone who enjoys making comedic shorts, I was pleased to see my genre on the big screen, especially David Sandberg's hilarious short Kung Fury. And let me just take a moment to say that Sweden produces some quality content. Watching all of this fantastic work was nerve-wracking, though, when audience members began to stroll into our screening. Even so, it was a proud experience that I will never forget.

Overall, my time spent in Clermont-Ferrand and the festival was a fantastic experience. My time as an OU Film and Media Studies student is coming to a close in May, but many of the things I've learned here were tied up neatly into a bow by this trip. Not only was I able to see my work screened in France, but I gained insight into how a film market functions and what comes with attempting to sell one's work. I feel like this experience will especially be important for my future. I am truly thankful for this experience granted to me.

Lauren Bumgarner, FMS Senior

My trip to the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival was incredibly revealing. It has taught me about the life cycle of an independent film in both general and foreign markets and the international film community. And I was inspired by the city of Clermont-Ferrand and the films and filmmakers that I had the opportunity to meet.

As a student filmmaker whose creative process is fueled by fine art and contemporary dance, the trip to France accurately and beautifully addressed both passions. Going to France provided me with a greater understanding of how the film world operates and how to best showcase one's work in a foreign market.
understanding of film as a medium and its history and of the history of dance and fine art. I loved seeing how Clément-Ferrand addressed film, art, and dance as one being, feeding off of each other and inspiring each other. I could see it and feel it just walking down the street. I hope to achieve such an effortless and lovely relationship in my own personal films, and experiencing that first hand was beneficial and inspiring. Getting to experience this culture with Jessica and Professor Tippeconnie also let us learn from each others’ experiences. Discussing the trip with like-minded individuals amplified my learning and travel experience.

Going to film festivals has allowed me to get an inside look and a somewhat better understanding of how a film travels from idea to theater, but I have found it difficult to get a solid, inside look at this business without having a film of my own involved in the process. Last year as sophomore, I got to experience half of this process as two of my films went to France for Clément-Ferrand. I have been ready for more ever since.

All my festival experiences so far have felt like a platform from which I am able to research and work toward jumping off on my career. Attending film festivals in places like Austin, Los Angeles, and New York has given me an idea of the contrasting norms and practices involved with the film industry in each location. However, nothing compares to traveling with my films to the largest short film festival in the world. There is currently no better way for me to learn about promotion techniques, distribution factors and practices, or networking than being part of Clément-Ferrand Film Festival. I gained so much from joining the professionals and noting their practices in that global setting.

This has been incredibly important to me as I prepare to graduate college in December 2016. I returned to OU with lessons, advice, and inspiration— all of which I am implementing in my own work. I plan to do so for the remainder of my time as a student and onward into my career.
Visiting Lecturer takes students on adventure to Clérmont-Ferrand Film Festival

On Monday, February 8th, Film and Media Students students Lauren Bumgarner and Jessica Hunt sat among film industry professionals and film festival enthusiasts in the George-Conchon Theater as they viewed the fourteen short films that were selected to screen at Film Market at the 38th Clérmont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival.

Through the financial and material support of Blaise Pascal University, the College of Arts and Sciences, and generous donations, Film and Media Studies has continued to support the travel and participation of two students in the presentation of a program of works that represent the Film and Media Studies program at the world’s largest international short film festival and market each spring in Clér mont-Ferrand, France.

Bumgarner traveled with two works that intertwine film with dance, You Won’t Drown and We Are Not The Same, and Hunt with her absurdist comedy Revenge From Rio. These three films were supported by eleven other diverse works created by students Kirby Gladstein, Andrew Craig, Ryan Floyd, Zach Delaune, Allison Bigbie, Lindy Wolfley, Brandon Downey, Yukun Qiu, Austin and Colton Warren, Rob Loveless, and students participating in the OU in Puebla Study Abroad program in Puebla, Mexico.

Upon their arrival, both Lauren and Jessica immediately expanded their interpersonal skills as they handed out and posted the pre-designed postcards, stickers and posters that advertised the screening. They successfully recruited a diverse professional audience that included international directors and producers from the U.K., Italian and Greek festival programmers, and distribution representatives from the U.S. and France.

In preparation for the screening, the students were able to meet one-on-one with a television distribution buyer, which allowed them a privileged opportunity to speak with an acquisitions professional. This opportunity was invaluable, because it clarified the differences between social impact and business structure in the distribution and exhibition of film.

Lauren, Jessica, and I also took time to visit the local Cathedral Notre-Dame-de’l’Assomption, which is constructed entirely out of lava-rock, and learn about local food, cultural customs, and politics. We caught up with Blaise-Pascale University student Lucie Trimolet, a previous FMS exchange student at OU.

Overall, the trip to Clérmont-Ferrand proved quite essential in expanding the student’s understanding of how cinema works on an international level and within a business context, as well as a point for cultural dialog and comprehension.
During my time at the University of Oklahoma, I’ve been awarded some incredible opportunities and experiences. But without a doubt, the greatest aid in helping me achieve my goals has been the Film & Media Studies department. 

Coming into college, I was unsure what major to pursue and how to acclimate to the campus environment. But after I attended my first class, Introduction to Film & Media Studies, I knew FMS was the only major for me. Nothing has ever spoken to me the way that film has, and once I become more involved with the program I was able to meet some extraordinary students and professors I was able to build close relationships with.

The further I got in the program, the more opportunities I was presented with. But perhaps my greatest experience to arise from my time as a film student was the opportunity to take part in the Student Film Program at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival this February. I had seen the application posted around the department and decided to apply on a whim, only to be one of fifteen students accepted into the prestigious program.

I was in Santa Barbara, CA for five days where I got a behind-the-scenes look at the festival and attended screenings, workshops, and other networking events. These covered the gamut from a panel featuring producers from films such as The Revenant and The Big Short to presentations where actors such as Rachel McAdams and Michael Keaton were awarded for their work on Spotlight.

But even more exciting than getting to mingle with A-listers was a panel I attended that featured every single one of this year’s Oscar-nominated screenwriters, including Charlie Kaufman and Emma Donoghue. I never thought in a million years that I’d have the chance to meet some of my writing heroes, but there I was sitting in the first row watching these individuals talk about their craft. I even had the chance to talk to them backstage about their writing process and how much their work has meant to me over the years.

This trip afforded me the opportunity to see how my studies with FMS can develop into a future career. By talking with everyone from documentary filmmakers and producers to screenwriters and editors, this trip made me more grateful than ever to have such a wonderful film program at the University of Oklahoma that encourages such a well-rounded course-load of both film production and studies. I’m more dedicated to the FMS program than ever before, and I am looking forward to pursuing my studies and attaining more experience and knowledge.