

Hillary Abe
Internship Report

This Fall I had the unique opportunity to invest my time working on a documentary project with a production company called Brave Boat Productions located in Quechee, Vermont. I lived in Lebanon and was able to stay rooted in the Upper Valley while working on the film. In order to fulfill my time with Brave Boat Productions I applied for funding from both the Dean of Faculty Research Grant Program and the Rockefeller Center's Internship Grant Program. With the help of these two sponsors I was able to defray the major costs of living, which made this amazing experience possible.

The documentary project focused on historical and contemporary content. The first part of the film examines a period in a Native American tribe's history when the Garrison Dam was built at the edge of their homelands on the upper-Missouri River, thereby flooding eighty percent of the land owned by the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara's tribes. The second part of the film draws a line from the past into the present. Since the displacement caused by the Garrison Dam, the tribe has faced a number of problems in the path to recovery. What once was a self-sustaining agricultural community with a hospital, high school and community center is now the remaining shards of the old community. The ultimate diaspora of people, and the plummet in terms of general mental health, physical health and economical health still inhibits the tribes on Fort Berthold Indian Reservation today.

My main interest in participating in this film project was to expand my knowledge of these events in a context of Native American history and policy actions on the part of the

U.S. government. I also felt the need to explore this matter personally and come to grips with what ultimately drove my family away from the community on the reservation.

As a part of a three-man team, my role in the film process was surprisingly large. First, as a member of the tribe, I was already familiar with the situations that our tribes are facing today. Also with amateur experience in film and sound production, I was well acquainted with a lot of the technologies that went into making this film. After becoming more comfortable in the internship, I was able to speak freely about what type of images, voices and words should go where. My biggest contribution was in providing a critical analysis of the plot and the technological means of making the production happen.

As any good story requires a gripping plot and structure, a marketable documentary has to deliver a tangible story line and information, at a quality that requires the skill of professional videographer. The storyline was typically the hardest part of this process. Our task was to whittle down approximately sixty hours of footage, hundred's of photographs and the creation of voice over pieces to make a concise and seamless statement about events that encompassed about fifty years of history. This endeavor required a marriage with the footage; the ability to mentally recall hundred's of the most important bits and pieces of footage and attempt to use these to piece together a recreation of what has happened to a tribe and ultimately living individuals who were effected by the afore-mentioned events. We were all invested in this aspect of the project and research.

The technical process was much less daunting and far more tangible. Daily, I would clip out pieces of footage and put them in categories, relating to the different plot

points we were trying to address in our film. I would also edit together pieces of material to be revised and revised again, to be potentially used in the film. I achieved a working knowledge of a program that most professional editors in the film-making industry use to construct their films. I also researched and tried to find relevant pieces of history that could be incorporated. Many aspects of the technical part of the project gave me a real insight as to what goes into making a piece of marketable programming.

As far as what I learned personally from this internship, all I can say is that I was given an invaluable experience in a very personal sense. In doing this project, I was able to research the history of my own family and that of many of my relatives. I now have a clearer picture of where I stand in the world and the problems that still face many of my relatives on the reservation. This experience will continue to be invaluable to my thinking process as a young individual in search of my identity and my place in the world.

In practical terms, I got a chance to creatively participate in the film-making process. With the skills I acquired from this internship, if I were to look for another internship in film-making or a job as a part of a film-making staff, I have no doubt that this would give me an extra leg up. The material also has a very applicable relationship with my major in Native American Studies, and my prospective modified major of Film Studies. In studying the history of my tribe, I was able to put it in the larger context of Native American history in general.

In retrospect, this internship couldn't have been a better fit for me, and I look forward to working on a new project, outside of my completed internship, that would be a continuation of what I learned at Brave Boat Productions. I hope to make a radio piece that compares our displaced community from my reservation, to other displaced

communities on the Gulf-Coast after Hurricane Katrina. I will maintain the relationships that I was blessed with this fall and continue to investigate my possible plans for a career in either film-making or journalism. I would also like to thank the Rockefeller Center, Mr. Peter McSpadden and the Dean of Faculty Research grant program for allowing this amazing opportunity to happen.