

DOSSIER: Film Festival Pedagogy: Using the Film Festival in or as a Film Course

Introduction to the Dossier

Ger Zielinski, Trent University

Film festivals are now virtually ubiquitous. In fact, it is difficult to find a city or town where none exists, while their online presence is beginning to be enthusiastically explored. Along with the proliferation of film and media studies courses and programs in universities around the world, the question addressed by the seven scholars whose texts are included in this dossier, centers on how to make good pedagogical use of film festivals in relation to such courses. The collection itself stems from a very popular workshop titled Film Festival Pedagogy that took place at the 2012 annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) in Boston, a workshop sponsored by the Film and Media Festivals Scholarly Interest Group. The original idea for the workshop came from its wonderful co-chairs Eric Pierson and Roger Pace, who are based at the University of San Diego. **[1]**

As the wide range of texts included in this dossier suggests, there are many ways to relate a film or media course to one or more festivals. A course centered on the study of film festivals may use a particular festival as its site, the theme of the festival and its films may provide the main subject matter of the course, or the constraints of the festival through, say, its programming principles may provide another angle for the study of genre, national or continental-themed film festivals. Different levels of study offer different degrees of sophistication in research methods and theoretical frameworks, while the divide between humanities and social-sciences approaches poses interesting problems that always need to be addressed in the design of any course. Some instructors elect to travel to a special A-list international film festival, while others choose to make use of another type or a local film festival. To be sure, there is certainly room to develop and expand upon the several courses that we each in turn describe and analyze below.

Eric Pierson (epierson@sandiego.edu) and Roger Pace (pace@sandiego.edu) co-teach a special intensive course Teaching Sundance that is held entirely at the Sundance Independent Film Festival itself. Their course is in fact immersive and on site. Students arrive in Park City five days before the festival begins for meetings and a thorough

orientation. The course balances both the formal, aesthetic exploration of what independent films can be and the cultural, economic aspect of the context of the festival and how it serves the filmmakers and their films. As the instructors note, “[t]he course will introduce students to the theory and practices of the independent film. Students will engage the films and filmmakers firsthand through a series of screenings, panels, course lectures, and class assignments.” This course is particularly innovative for how its entire duration is held at the festival during the university intersession between semesters.

Lindiwe Dovey (ld18@soas.ac.uk), based at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, London), directs and is the head programmer at Film Africa, an African film festival in London. In her master’s seminar Curating Africa: African Film and Video in the Age of Festivals, Dovey approaches the study of African films, as a continental cinema, by way of the question: how has African cinema been framed through curation at film festivals, ranging from African film festivals to A-list international film festivals, such as those in Berlin, Cannes or Venice? As she recounts, “I wanted [students] to feel empowered to make their own decisions about what constitutes an ‘African’ film, and I wanted them to take away from the course not only academic knowledge of the subject, but also practical experience.”

Dorota Ostrowska (ubwc156@mail.bbk.ac.uk) (Birkbeck College, University of London) and Skadi Loist (skadi.loist@uni-hamburg.de) (University of Hamburg) bring their respective classes to the Berlin International Film Festival (as known as “the Berlinale”) annually. While quite separate courses, these two scholars collaborate in arranging meetings with festival workers, filmmakers and industry people, among others, in advance of arriving in Berlin. On the one hand, Ostrowska’s master’s seminar takes an interdisciplinary humanities approach to studying many crucial aspects of film-festival culture, and combines archival research and report writing in the course. Loist, on the other hand, addresses film festivals from a media-studies framework in her bachelor’s seminar Film Festivals: Theories, Economy and Cultural Contexts, and makes use of not only the Berlinale but also the local Filmfest Hamburg, which permits interested students to choose one or both to study.

Film courses may be built around a regional film festival. Ger Zielinski (geraldzielinski@trentu.ca) (Trent University) and Logan Walker (lwalker@ucsc.edu) (University of California, Santa Cruz) each make use of a local film festival. Zielinski integrates a local social-justice film festival into a senior undergraduate seminar on film exhibition and festivals, which places the emphasis on the festival as a cultural formation. The course uses the local festival as a site for informal study

and experience of the event of the festival, while discussions of the readings in seminar are informed by those students more actively involved in the festival as volunteers. On his introductory film course *The Art of Film*, Walker notes, “[w]e discuss the ways that regional cultures influence film festivals and the ways that film festivals can affect their regions,” while including such innovative activities as student-directed mock programming, e.g. “a mixed-genre program proposed to be held at midnight in the center of a local cornfield maze.” While the emphasis of such a survey course is clearly not on film festivals, it brings to light how an instructor can creatively integrate sophisticated practices, such as festival programming, into a course with a broader purview.

Several contributors have provided links to the online versions of their syllabus to help readers or potential instructors of such a course get a sense for the varied structures, readings and assignments. While we take this to be a pioneering intervention in film-studies pedagogy through the use of film festivals, we are confident that the area will continue to flourish and look forward to receiving your feedback on the development of your own courses. Bonne projection, bon festival!

Teaching Independent Film at Sundance

Eric Pierson and Roger Pace, University of San Diego

Each year, the Communication Studies Department at the University of San Diego offers a film course in independent cinema at the Sundance Film Festival. The course occurs in January, between the fall and spring semesters. An immersive film education experience, the course combines traditional coursework with festival experiences in which students see as many as 20 to 30 films. The course introduces students to the theory and practices of independent film, and engages the films and filmmakers firsthand through a series of screenings, panels, course lectures and class assignments. It was offered for the first time in 2004, and since then over 250 students have participated in the course. In this piece, we will discuss the structure of the course and the expected student learning outcomes.

Having attended a number of film festivals as both fans and scholars, we were aware of ways festivals can remove the barriers between film practitioners and those interested in the art of film – whether that interest is as scholar, an audience member or just a curious observer. The nature of many film festivals is organized chaos: too few tickets, too many attendees, concerns regarding transportation between venues, staffing of

both volunteers and professionals, accommodations for festival attendees, and in the case of Sundance, the potential for weather-related problems. The challenge in creating the course was how to turn the energy and unpredictability of this “organized chaos” into a solid academic course. We began by carefully constructing the following learning objectives and measurable student learning outcomes:

- Students will understand the history and importance of the Sundance Film Festival for independent cinema;
- Students will engage and converse first hand with filmmakers, critics and fans of independent film;
- Students will be able to compare and contrast multiple approaches to independent cinema;
- Students will be able to define and articulate the economics of film and the importance of Sundance as a marketplace for independent cinema;
- Students will be able to recognize and define the distinguishing characteristics of independent film;
- Students will be able to identify alternate film language (i.e. narration, lighting, camera angles and acting) that characterizes independent film;
- Students will be able to describe the history of independent cinema including important films and filmmakers in the genre;
- Students will be able to define and explicate alternate voices in independent film; and
- Students will articulate the role of independent film in political and social change.

After wrestling with learning outcomes and course objectives, we needed to address several logistical hurdles, such as obtaining festival tickets, finding housing and securing classroom space for the ten days of the Sundance Film Festival. Preparation for the course begins almost a year prior to attending the festival. Hotel rooms and other types of housing are very difficult to secure in Park City, so it is wise to secure rooms as far in advance as possible. Accommodations during the festival can be very expensive; however, one can save a considerable amount by booking well in advance. It is also good practice to book classroom space early. Most hotels are willing to provide meeting space as part of the accommodations package.

Students carry a great deal of the responsibility for securing tickets to the festival, so it is imperative that they commit to the course early. We hold informational meetings in April, and the majority of students enroll themselves in the course before the end of the spring term. During the summer and early fall, Sundance releases the ticketing information, and it is crucial that students respond in a timely manner. Students can register

for tickets and festival passes beginning the second week in September. In order to facilitate timely student response, we send out regular emails and have built a Facebook page to keep students informed.

The instructional elements of the course begin in September, when students are presented with a pre-departure screening list. This list is designed to expose students to a number of independent films. Because the course has no prerequisites, the pre-festival screening list helps to ensure that all students will have some exposure to a variety of independent films prior to beginning the course. For many students, this will be the first time they have screened an independent film that has not crossed over and enjoyed success with mainstream audiences. For example, students are usually familiar with films such as *Memento* (2000), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) but they have little awareness of films like *Lone Star* (1996), *Yes* (2004) or *Husbands* (1970). The pre-departure screening list is divided into five categories and attempts to give students an introduction to Sundance. The categories are as follows: *Sundance classics*, *Sundance recent*, *Sundance women*, *Sundance documentaries* and *Sundance underrepresented*. *Sundance classics* highlights films, which were screened during the first fifteen years of the festival, while, *Sundance recent* focuses on films from the last ten years of the festival. *Sundance women* is a crucial category given the shortage of women filmmakers; it also underscores the importance of Sundance as a forum for films focusing on women's stories. The *Sundance documentaries* section allows students to engage documentarians beyond Michael Moore. The *Sundance underrepresented* category allows instructors to highlight a particular type of film or filmmaker, such as Native American filmmakers or a subject like the presentation of mental illness. Students must write a one-page critique of each film prior to their arrival in Park City, Utah, home of the festival. In addition to exposing students to the types of films that find their way into the festival, these critiques also help in lecture design. We are then able to look for trends in the viewing choices and use the films screened as reference point during class lecture and discussions.

The on-site component of the class begins five days before the festival when students arrive in Park City. A meeting room in the hotel becomes a makeshift classroom during our stay. In an effort to ensure that the course has the proper amount of contact hours, we begin class the evening the students arrive, and over the next four days, we hold three-hour classes twice daily, once in the morning and another in the evening. While the morning class is focused on readings for the course and is lecture- and discussion-driven, we introduce the students to the language of filmmaking and criticism, highlighting concepts specific to independent film. The evening session is an extension of the morning class, as we

screen a film and focus a particular element of film language or a specific filmmaker. In order to give students ownership of the experience, we limit the number of required class meetings after the festival begins. Once the festival begins, the class meetings take place off-site, in the form of meetings during specific films or panels.

During the festival, the students are required to screen a minimum of 20 films and keep a log of their festival activities. Sundance offers several categories for film. Students must select at least one film from each category and attend at least one of the many film or art installations around the festival. Having students select at least one film from each category leads to a fuller film-engagement experience and also keeps students from selecting films based on the likelihood that a celebrity may be present at the screening. From the required 20 films, the students must select eight for a detailed writing assignment. These critiques require the students to integrate course concepts into the ways that they examine film and also ask the students to explore the marketability of a film in detail. They must put themselves in the role of distributor to determine how much they are willing to pay for a film and how and to whom they would market the film. This assignment requires students to think about the multiple levels of the film business. Additionally, through these critiques, students are given the opportunity to explore independent film as a mechanism for social change and activism.

We have intentionally presented our version of the course in a broad framework; the framework is an excellent place to begin structuring a course that can be a unique experience for each group that attends. No two Sundance festivals are the same, so be prepared to be nimble in planning and flexible in expectations.

Curating Africa: Teaching African Film Through the Lens of Film Festivals

Lindiwe Dovey, SOAS, University of London

Over the seven years that I have been teaching African film at the university level, I have found myself descending into a pedagogical crisis of sorts. How is one to teach courses on African cinema, to teach the film cultures of an entire continent? Most contemporary scholarship on African film acknowledges outright that there have been, and continue to be, many cinematic trends and traditions across Africa, and this acknowledgement is self-evident when one considers that there are 54 distinct African countries with significant ethnic, linguistic and cultural

diversity within their national borders. One has only to compare a film by Tunde Kelani (a Nigerian filmmaker who draws to a great extent on Yoruba culture in his films) and Alain Gomis (a filmmaker originally from Senegal, now based in France) to recognize that it is practically impossible to define *an* "African Cinema."

One way to begin to talk about "African Cinema," however, is through reflecting on how Africa has been, and continues to be, "curated" through film, particularly at film festivals (which have largely been responsible for sustaining the idea of "African Cinema"). One sense of "African Cinema" was born at film festivals such as the Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage in Tunisia (the earliest film festival on the continent, founded in 1966), and FESPACO, which takes place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (founded in 1969). These were the fresh, heady days of newfound political independence and freedom for many African countries, and a strong spirit of pan-Africanism flourished across the continent. Filmmakers from different African countries met at festivals and conferences from Algiers to Harare, shared their work with one another, sought confluences and drew up manifestos about what "African Cinema" should and might be. These early attempts by Africans to define "African Cinema" occurred almost simultaneously with the most renowned international film festivals, such as Berlin, Cannes and Venice, "discovering" and screening the work of particular African filmmakers, such as the Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene. As a result, these filmmakers developed international reputations as African auteurs, the representatives of a different version of "African Cinema," externally defined. Several decades later, from the early 1980s onwards, a new kind of canonization of African film began, with the rise of African film festivals outside of the continent, such as the Verona African Film Festival (founded in 1982) and Vues d'Afrique in Montreal (founded in 1985). I joined this tide in 2002, when I co-founded the Cambridge African Film Festival in the UK. Later, I co-founded the London African Film Festival, and then, in 2011, Film Africa – London's current annual festival celebrating African film, which takes place across ten days every November. In the past decade, there has also been an unprecedented growth in film festivals on the continent, although most of these festivals call themselves "international" rather than "African" film festivals.

It should then be clear why any university class on "African Cinema" necessarily invokes a study of film festivals, for it is festivals that have curated the concept into being. However, in addressing my pedagogical crisis around how to teach the now vast body of audiovisual work referred to under this umbrella term, I wanted to go further than develop a class that looked historically at how various film festival programmers have defined "African Cinema." I wanted to draw on my twelve-year experience of curating African film and founding and directing African film

festivals to encourage my students to think not only like students but also like curators. I wanted them to feel empowered to make their own decisions about what constitutes an “African” film, and I wanted them to take away from the class practical experience as well as academic knowledge. The result was the development of *Curating Africa: African Film and Video in the Age of Festivals*, a single semester masters-level class, for which there is a prerequisite masters-level class on the history of film in Africa. The assessment methods for *Curating Africa* are two short essays during the semester, and a long scholarly or curatorial essay as well as the presentation of an original film-festival concept and program at the end of the semester. Beyond the credit students gain for the class, they also gain formal acknowledgement for helping me with my curatorial work, since many of the ideas they bring to the class inspire me.

Two pedagogical principles thus underline the nature of the class: first, that conventionally there is a certain body of knowledge that the teacher possesses that the students do not possess (hence their interest in the class); second, that each student also contributes to the construction of new knowledge about the subject under consideration. The fact that there is a prerequisite class before students are allowed to take *Curating Africa* addresses the first pedagogical principle. It suggests that without the teacher passing on significant background awareness to the students, such as how the film medium was introduced and first made use of in Africa, the students will not be ethically placed to start to think of themselves as curators of African film. The historical and contemporary controversies around how Africa has been represented by outsiders demand that students reckon with this history before starting to construct their own definitions of African film. The second pedagogical principle insists, however, that the teacher should also recognize that she or he is not omniscient on the subject, and has much to learn from the students, particularly when dealing with a territory as vast as Africa. Knowledge is a difficult, dynamic thing. It can only be defined in community, through dialogism and negotiation.

Curating Africa is thus, in many ways, an advanced class – similar to a graduate seminar in the US context. After the prerequisite class, the students will understand the history of film production, distribution and exhibition in Africa. They will also be familiar with the most important film “movements” across Africa, from the social realism of the 1960s to the growth of video film production from the 1980s onwards. By the end of the prerequisite course, they will have seen how difficult it becomes to define “African Cinema,” and this dilemma then becomes the starting point for the class *Curating Africa*, which asks the student to construct his or her own ideas on the subject rather than depending on the teacher’s knowledge alone. Independent research is encouraged throughout the

class. This might include internet research, interviews and discussions with African filmmakers and curators, attendance at film festivals, and broad viewing of new African films. Curators are also brought in to deliver guest lectures throughout the class, so that the students receive exposure to different curatorial approaches.

The diversity and originality of past students' research and ideas is evident in a selection of some of the film-festival concepts that have been presented in the class: the Deaf Film Festival of Kampala (by Caitlin Pearson); the Bogota African Film Festival (by Nicole Parr); Movimientos: A Spanish-Senegalese Music Film Festival in Seville and Dakar (by Estrella Sendra); Myths of Africa, a suggested strand for the already existent Calgary International Film Festival in Canada (by Robin Steedman); a one-off Chris Ofili Multi-Media Festival in London (by Sophie Harrison); and the Pan-Ghana Film Festival (by Esther Ladders). Some of the students are now attempting to realize these festivals, while others are content to have informed the programming of Film Africa. Either way, they have gained some practical experience since they have learned about the logistics of film programming and festival directing during the class. The class is also designed to give students the confidence to find and define knowledge for themselves. Teaching students to be skeptical thinkers and to feel empowered to engage directly with the world is as important as teaching them a body of knowledge developed through previous research by the teacher.

As will then be evident, I am not as concerned with film festivals as an object of study in *Curating Africa: African Film and Video in the Age of Festivals*. I am more interested in how teaching through the lens of film festivals can be a catalyst for a certain kind of pedagogy, scholarship and means of human interaction. Ultimately, I want to make the students aware of how university classes are themselves curations – curations that should always be open to critique, since they are invariably statements about what counts and what does not. The first time I taught *Curating Africa*, I closed the class with an experiment in which the students had to pretend to be a jury, judging the best of eight short African films. I mostly kept myself in the background, allowing the students to construct and negotiate their own ideas about what constitutes a quality film. The experiment was so successful in helping students to understand in an immediate and active way that taste is subjectively and socially constructed that the students encouraged me to begin the class with the jury experiment in the future. This is a perfect example of how the students themselves have helped to curate the class *Curating Africa*, contributing to its ongoing improvement.

Film Festival Pedagogy

Dorota Ostrowska, Birkbeck College, University of London

Film Festivals is a masters-level elective module open to students enrolled either in the MA Film, Television and Screen Media, MA World Cinema or MA Creative Industries at the School of Arts, Birkbeck College. The module is split into three main areas: firstly, there are weekly seminars, which focus on such key concepts in film festivals studies as space and location, aesthetics and politics of festival films, curating and programming, festival audiences, the role of stars, critics and juries, and the place of the industry and the markets at film festivals; secondly, there is a practical component of the module consisting of a field trip to the Berlinale, which offers students a first-hand experience of a major international film festival; thirdly, there is the students' response to the festival, which is a report from their field trip to the Berlinale, and a 5,000-word research paper on a topic of their choice within the area of film-festival studies.

The development of the module was made possible thanks to the growing research in the area of film-festival studies. As the bulk of the available research is informed by methodologies derived from social sciences, media and communication studies, many of these sources are not easily accessible to the students in film studies with the humanities background. As they learn how to work through this new interdisciplinary approach, there is also a special effort being made during the seminars to ground the study of film festivals within the disciplines of film, cultural studies and history. For this reason, much attention is devoted to the study of festival films as aesthetic phenomena, to their place and impact on film history through canon formation, and to the processes of curating and film criticism.

The overall amount of teaching resources available to deliver such a film-festival module at the graduate level and to offer students the basis to research and write their own essays is still quite limited. The students often remark that the existing studies are quite general in nature and provide a wide overview of film-festival culture, while their essays have to be focused and more narrow in their choice of topics. For this reason, the students taking the module are encouraged to use in their essays the original Berlinale material they researched for their fieldwork reports. In this way their dependency on published research on film festivals is less, as the essays involve a detailed case study based on the empirical material from the Berlinale. Some students decide to work on historical

topics that require research in film archives that often yields very interesting results.

The trip to the Berlinale is a mandatory practical element of an otherwise academic course. The students' experience of the festival is that of an accredited and therefore a privileged spectator when it comes to the access to films, industry debates and events. But the fact that the students' experience is primary that of spectators inevitably makes their status ambiguous in comparison to other individuals who are accredited to the festival for professional reasons. The students are not involved in any curating practice, participating in the jury or awards debates, working as critics, or trying to network at the festival in order to advance their project. The fieldwork reports not only help students navigate the festival but also give them a sense of purpose and direction. As a result, they feel more actively involved with the festival and have a strong reason to seek contacts with film-festival and industry professionals, as well as to explore various aspects of the festivals, not just the film screenings.

The daily meetings and discussions with a carefully selected group of industry speakers perform a very important role in the students' learning experience and are an opportunity for them to exchange their experience of the festival as well as to maintain a sense of community in the hectic festival environment. The encounters not only expand the students' horizons and their knowledge of the festival and make the experience more intense; they also make the theoretical and historical study of film festivals come alive for the students in a very different way. The meetings offer the students a real taste of what it means to participate at an international film festival as an industry professional, and deepen their understanding of the role film festivals play for the film industry in Europe.

Given the central role played by the Berlinale field trip in the overall design of the module, the most productive ways of developing it was to further enhance the practical element. Giving the students an opportunity to curate their own film festival was definitely a step in the right direction as it corresponds to the students' expectations of this module. Starting in the new academic year 2013-2014, the interested students will be able to expand their knowledge of film festivals by taking the module Exhibiting the Moving Image, which explores the practices of curating in much greater depth than the Film Festivals module. Both modules will thus complement each other by integrating various strands in the Birkbeck provision to enhance further the students' understanding and engagement with the area of film-festival studies – both theoretically and practically.

Teaching Film Festivals: Between Theory and Practice

Skadi Loist, University of Hamburg

Since 2008, I have had the opportunity to develop and regularly teach the undergraduate course Film Festivals: Theories, Economy and Cultural Contexts in the BA program Media and Communication Studies at the University of Hamburg. The idea for the course came out of my research on film festivals and work with the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) [2], which Marijke de Valck and I founded in 2008. It became clear early on that simply adding a unit to a course on film history would not suffice to cover the complex levels of festival operations and connected discourses. Thus, the course is designed as a full fourteen-week seminar with a theoretical and analytical focus on film-festival studies. It includes practical elements, such as bringing festival organizers into the classroom, and is flanked by the option to attend two international festivals before and following the semester (Filmfest Hamburg and the Berlin International Film Festival, in short “the Berlinale”).

Due to the module structure of the three-year BA program in Media and Communication Studies, the course was offered as an elective within the second-year module Media History and Contemporary Media, but on request was also open as an elective to third-year BA students and students in the MA program Media Studies. As a university program, the BA has a theoretical and analytical emphasis, covering broader theories and topics across media (history, theory and aesthetics of film, television, radio, internet, gaming etc.). The film-festival course broadens the scope of the program by highlighting a media-industries angle, which is not otherwise part of the curriculum. The course is not designed to train students as curators or festival managers; case studies are based on research and analysis, not practical festival organization.

Since the course is an elective within a required module, there are a number of diverging motivations for taking it. Over the years, a number of students took it because they were involved with festivals themselves. Some were drawn by the opportunity to attend Filmfest Hamburg and the Berlinale on student accreditations offered in conjunction with the course. Others just wanted to earn credit in the required module. At times, these diverging interests and expectations made it hard to navigate the course and led to an expansion of the practical elements.

Requirements include: 1) regular attendance; 2) to prepare reading for all sessions, where some students serve as respondents to selected texts

and prepare questions to aid the discussion; 3) to either give brief oral presentations which provide definitions on a set of concepts, such as legal organization forms (for profit/non-profit), sales agents, film licensing, agenda setting, community/audience, counter/public spheres and trans/national film; 4) to answer small research questions as homework to prompt thinking about how to obtain research information on festivals (e.g. figures on funding etc.); 5) to either write a final 12-15-page paper or hand in three short essays (4 pages each) at chosen sessions throughout the semester.

One of the challenges in creating the syllabus for a theory-driven course was finding accessible literature. As a course taught in Germany to German undergraduates, the reading had to reflect the language and background. Some books (Reichel-Heldt, 2007; Jungen, 2009) and translations of key texts (Elsaesser, 2010; Peranson, 2010) are available in German. These were supplemented by texts in English (De Valck, 2007; Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009; Wong, 2011). As the field is quickly developing, more books and articles become available. Yet, a dedicated textbook with chapters accessible to undergraduate students is still outstanding.

The course covers several angles of the complex structure of film festivals. It starts with an opening section introducing the field of film-festival studies, setting out with a discussion of what constitutes a film festival (considering differences in size, context and specializations) and covering the history of the circuit. The second segment covers organizational structures, funding and stakeholder theory. The third segment sets a framework by categorizing specialized festivals and their characteristics (genre, identity and community-based festivals). The fourth segment covers programming, selection processes and value addition through awards. A fifth segment approaches larger contexts beyond single case studies, looking at the film-festival circuit, calendar and transnational film circulation. The last segment discusses the current trends and problems of the circuit and devotes one session to the Berlinale in preparation for an excursion to the festival. (For a detailed breakdown of the course, see the syllabus online at: <http://tinyurl.com/7ju3lee>)

Thanks to the collaboration with the local international film festival, Filmfest Hamburg, which takes place a few weeks *before* the semester starts in mid-October, students had the opportunity to visit the festival on a free accreditation. In addition, the festival offered a unique guided tour for the students, which took them through the offices and festival departments, providing a first-hand, behind-the-scenes view into operations while the festival was in full swing. Students met and talked to the festival director, programmer, press department, side bar

coordinator, and those responsible for marketing, fundraising and sponsorship, film traffic, guest services and more. Here, students get a first view into the complex structure of an expanding workplace with 70 employees during the festival run, of which only six permanent staff remain after the festival is over (Loist, 2011).

As the Filmfest Hamburg tour takes place outside of official semester dates, it is a voluntary offer and not a requirement. However, experience shows that the practical elements are key to teaching film-festival studies – especially at the undergraduate level. In order to provide festival insight also for those who cannot attend the pre-semester tour, several in-class meetings with festival organizers have been integrated. The experience of attending a festival and speaking with organizers is essential for students in order to relate to and understand the operations of such an event and to be able to study this complex entity in an abstract, theoretical manner.

In the last edition of the course, three sessions with practitioners were included throughout the semester:

- 1) The director of Filmfest Hamburg gives a break-up of the festival budget. This session adds detailed information to the tour and opens the view to festivals as organizations, and their economic as well as political relationship to various stakeholders. These issues are taken up in the following sessions on an abstract level using stakeholder theory, organizational studies and analyses of cultural politics and funding structures.
- 2) The director of the Hamburg International Short Film Festival, the head of Short Film Distribution (KurzFilmAgentur) and the Children's Short Film Festival (Mo & Friese) present their work under one common umbrella organization. Aside from introducing another local festival and case study of festival specialization, this session provides insight into the business side of film distribution connected to film festivals.
- 3) The programming director of Filmfest Hamburg talks about the organic formation of a festival line-up. Her account of the everyday work as a programmer provides insight into the pragmatics and challenges of curating and supplements discussions of critical writing on dynamics of power, inclusion and exclusion in programming.

After the end of the semester, students have the opportunity to join an excursion to the Berlinale. University affiliation makes discounted student accreditations available. Thus, students have the chance to experience the workings of an international A-list festival at home in Germany. The trip was solely a voluntary event as these activities fall outside the

semester and arising costs for travel and accommodation had to be covered privately.

A connection to colleague Dorota Ostrowska, established through the FFRN, evolved into a collaboration between the course at the University of Hamburg and the course she teaches in the MA program at Birkbeck College, University of London (the syllabus can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/c69xjob>) in that we join efforts for the Berlinale excursion in setting up meetings with film festival professionals for our students. Among them were talks with the head of the World Cinema Fund, the director of the Panorama section of the Berlinale, with critics from trade and international presses, industry insiders giving an introduction to the European Film Market and the Berlinale Talent Campus, and more. This meant for my BA students from Hamburg that they could directly translate and expand their gained knowledge to Berlin.

The course is quite organization-intensive, due to the amount of meetings with guest speakers in Hamburg and Berlin. However, the efforts seem worth it: the course enjoyed steady popularity over the years and proved relevant and successful long-term as students later chose festivals as the topic for their oral exams or BA or MA theses. Others reported that they got involved in the organization of a festival themselves or found paid jobs at or through the connections made at festivals. The collaboration with local festivals also yields mutual benefits. While festivals share information and insights to educate students, they often recruit interns or seasonal workers there. Most recently, a festival commissioned an audience survey, which will be conducted as part of a BA thesis project.

On How to Make the Most of the Local Film Festival, Inside and Outside of the Classroom

Ger Zielinski, Trent University

Below I recount the process by which I came to integrate a well-chosen local film festival into my seminar on film exhibition and festivals, particularly how students were able to not simply attend but also learn through participating in the festival as it prepared to open and through its duration. I took the opportunity to make use of the local film festival as a possible productive learning experience for interested students. The emphasis in the course is more on the culture and institution of film festivals than on the films as texts to be interpreted. The point is to work to understand better how film festivals take place as a cultural formation

from several theoretical positions, with attention given to the methods employed in the research.

Let us consider first the rationale and development of the course. The current version of the course stems from the experience of having created a course on both film exhibition and film festivals, into which I aimed to integrate not only historical and conceptual elements, but also practical and experiential aspects. My motivation was in part informed by my own experience of a variety of types of film festivals over the years, both as a member of the audience and as a member of awards juries or boards of directors of different festivals, but also informed pedagogically by how much more engaging film and media courses can be for interested students when combining theory and practice.

The nearest A-list international film festival would have been TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival), which was a great temptation, but it runs in the first half of September, more or less beginning with the start of university classes, and the festival emphasis of the course was set for the winter. All things considered, it made no sense to attempt any connection between the course and that festival, except for a possible volunteership for students the following year. Perhaps some future edition of the course might find a way to make use of TIFF outside of its September period. Its timing was too awkward for the course, and with respect to the running of a course timing and proximity are crucial.

As I prepared the course further, I learned about the local ReFrame – Peterborough International Film Festival (<http://reframefilmfestival.ca>), founded in 2006, which takes place annually at the end of January. The unique combination of university and town has kept the festival remarkably popular since its start, while its social-justice theme secures a loyal public that spans several age groups. I decided it would be an excellent fit, even if a little earlier in the term than I would have preferred. The festival's social justice theme would likely appeal to many of the students, and they would have an opportunity to become more involved in its behind-the-scenes activities and organization as volunteers.

The course itself is a two-term senior seminar, On the Politics and Culture of Exhibition & Festival Practices, which combines film exhibition in the first half with film festivals in the second. It is a required seminar for all majors in cultural studies, so student investment in the topic varies. Remarkably, only one student had been to a festival of any sort, the rest had never attended one and did not know of the local ReFrame festival at all. In seminar discussion earlier in the year, a few students stated their ambition to start up their own exhibition venue, and another imagined creating a festival.

The next step considers how to integrate the festival into the course. There are many ways to make use of a cultural institution, whether it be an archive, collection or cinémathèque, or a festival, as in this case. In the end, I chose to include an experiential aspect in the required course, but offer it as an option, since not all students would have the same level of commitment to the material and assignments.

In the fall, I made contact with the executive director over a possible session with the class. Krista English, co-founder and current executive director of the festival, agreed to give a talk to the class on the history and operation of the festival, after which she pitched the idea of volunteering and the various roles possible. The session was highly informative and created a lot of interest for students in volunteering. After a few weeks following the session in class, interested students attended the orientation meetings for volunteers and chose roles according to their particular expertise – e.g. managing the sound and microphone during introductions to the films or question-and-answer sessions following the screening, serving as ushers, selling tickets or working on publicity, among other tasks. Moreover, the student volunteers were also given passes to the festival and encouraged to see the films (and witness their reception). The festival provides a wide variety of types and genres of films, from narrative features to television to engaged documentaries, all related to the festival's overriding theme of social justice in some respect. Needless to say, to the average undergraduate student, the vast majority of the films would be quite fresh.

While the volunteering option only required that students write a short report on what they learned through the festival, their practical involvement in the festival was discussed in the weekly seminar meetings in relation to the readings. The experience gave the students deeper insight into a wide variety of such issues as festival programming, choice of venue, funding, range of reactions from members of the public, press packages, behind-the-scenes technical problems, personnel, hospitality and so forth. While the volunteerships were not intended as formal research methods experiences, they provided informal practical experience to students who had never even attended a festival previously. This gave them points of entry into understanding the stakes and questions considered in the seminar's readings and guided their essay topics. The final essay was centered on the readings at a more theoretical level. In the end, the seminar, the students and the local festival mutually benefited from the volunteering.

The use of the local film festival enabled a felicitous reciprocal relationship between the course and the festival, which is to say that keen students

learned much about festivals through their practical involvement, while at the same time the festival itself also attained its goal of completing another successful edition and contributing positively to the town's cultural life. While trying to imagine a few possible future versions of this course, I posit: had it not been a required course, it could be more demanding and required student involvement in the festival. If it were a masters-level seminar, more methodological work could be done. More ambitious uses of the festival could be imagined in a different curricular context, e.g. in a film school or in a master's program. In another town or city with multiple festivals, more elaborate projects could certainly be integrated into such a course. Whether the course is entirely or tangentially focused on the study of festivals, festivals are increasingly proving themselves as a useful pedagogical resource to film and media studies more generally.

A Unit on Film Festivals Within an Introductory Film Class

Logan Walker, University of California, Santa Cruz

I teach a unit on film festivals within an introductory film-studies class called The Art of Film at California's San Jose State University. The class is a prerequisite for entering the undergraduate Radio-TV-Film program, which trains students to produce work for the fields in the program's title. The film-festival unit has been a fruitful way for students intending to be majors as well as students taking the class as a general university requirement to engage with exhibition and film programming matters, as well as a way of introducing the students to the region's cinema culture.

The film-festival unit is brief, involving a week of discussion about festivals and a mock, in-class festival at the end of the semester that showcases short films that the students make during the later half of the class. Toward the beginning of the semester, the students read Gideon Bachmann's "Confessions of a Festival Goer" (1976), which outlines differences in the cultures of the Venice Film Festival, the first major international film festival, and more urban festivals such as the London Film Festival. We discuss the ways that regional cultures influence film festivals and the ways that film festivals can affect their regions. The students also do an in-class film programming exercise that requires them to think about the ways that films relate to one another and the ways that exhibition spaces shape the film viewing experience. They watch a series of short films that have played in festivals and, in groups, construct a hypothetical program with a title, time, location and program notes using

at least three of the shorts. Students have seemed to enjoy this exercise and have come up with surprising, creative programming ideas, among them, *Choosing Your Path*, a mixed-genre program proposed to be held at midnight in the center of a local cornfield maze.

In addition, students have the option of extending their study of film festivals by undertaking an extra-credit assignment to read additional material, visit a film festival at some time during the semester, and write about their experience and what they discover about the festival's relationship to its region. Although the experience of visiting a film festival would be an essential component of a class focused on film festivals, I do not require students in this introductory class to purchase tickets to a festival. I offer this assignment as an option rather than a requirement out of consideration for the students' financial as well as time constraints, as many of them are working while attending school or commuting from another city to attend class. However, the last time I taught the class, about one-fifth of my students choose to attend a festival screening and write a short paper about it. My class is fortunate in that San Jose is located near the many film festivals of the San Francisco Bay and California Central Coast areas. A local San Jose festival, *Cinequest*, has ties to the university and holds some of its screenings at San Jose State, making it convenient for students to attend.

Other than the film-festival unit, most of the students' time during the class is spent analyzing individual films in terms of their form, and if the students are successful in the class, I expect them to exit able to craft arguments about films based upon such analysis. An additional benefit to the students who attend festival screenings is they have the opportunity to analyze the festival films they see during in-class discussions of film form. The festival screenings become a means for students to exercise in a non-academic environment the critical-viewing practices they learn in the class. For students who do not continue studying film during their academic careers, my aim for this exercise is to help them continue to make connections between ideas they learn about during the class and the films they watch after graduating.

I frame the final day of the semester as a film festival for the students' work. In the same groups that they formed to create hypothetical festival programs, the students make short films that the class watches together in this festival. While it is not possible to reproduce many aspects of a film-festival experience for a classroom screening, this activity offers a glimpse at some of the ways that film-festival screenings differ from other kinds of exhibitions and brings some of those aspects of the festival to the students who have not attended a festival screening before. For example, the students participate in question-and-answer sessions after they play their films, giving them the opportunity to practice speaking about their

work in front of an audience. The students also developed award categories and titles, suitable to the region, and voted on which films won those awards, providing a lesson in the sometimes competitive aspects of filmmaking.

While brief, this unit on film festivals seems to be inspiring for some students. Former students of mine have become volunteers at local film festivals. Such student investment in local film festivals benefits the festivals and the local cinema community as well. While San Jose State's student body has a continuous presence within the city, it is constantly changing as students graduate and leave San Jose for new jobs or less expensive housing. As a programming associate for the Santa Cruz Film Festival, which also has connections with the nearby University of California, Santa Cruz, it can be difficult to make long-term connections between a festival and college students, as they graduate and are frequently busy with their studies. Introducing students and regional film festivals to one another has the potential to enrich the work of each.

Notes

[1] For sample syllabi related to the essays in this dossier, follow the link to the website of the Film Festival Research Network at <http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/additional-resources/syllabi-on-classes-teaching-film-festival-studies/>.

[2] The Film Festival Research Network provides an extensive bibliography on the topic on its website (www.filmfestivalresearch.org) as well as additional resources, such as syllabi of courses taught. It also operates a mailing list, to which anyone can subscribe via the website.

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