****

**AU’s Center for Environmental Filmmaking**

[**www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/) **(New!)**

**2018 Report**

By Chris Palmer, Director

palmer@american.edu

January 15, 2018

The following report provides an overview of the Center for Environmental Filmmaking’s activities and events taking place during the 2017/2018 period. **The Center’s programs are made possible by the generosity of the foundations and donors listed on page 7.**

With Dean Emeritus Larry Kirkman’s support, I founded the Center 13 years ago at the School of Communication **to address the world’s unprecedented environmental challenges**, from climate disruption to species extinction.

Powerful films, images, and stories can play a key role in fostering conservation and bringing about change. We are committed to raising awareness and empowering action through the innovative use of media. **Our campaign mantra is:** **Changing lives. Fostering creativity. Conserving our environment through the power of media.**

**Our mission is to inspire a new generation of filmmakers and media experts** whose commitment to environmental stewardship drives them to produce creative work that is informative, ethically sound, and entertaining—and that makes a positive difference. **Our signature initiatives include:**

* Creating partnerships with established organizations—Maryland Public Television, the National Park Service, The Humane Society of the United States, the Nature Conservancy, and others—that give students the opportunity to produce professional films.
* Bringing world-class filmmakers to American University to speak, teach, and mentor.
* Developing innovative, interdisciplinary, and experiential classes and programs.
* Promoting the ethical treatment of wildlife and the environment.
* Awarding student scholarships and fellowships.
* Supporting and mentoring environmental and wildlife filmmakers in a variety of other ways.

More information about our programs can be found on our website [**www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/)and at [**www.ChrisPalmerOnline.com**](http://www.ChrisPalmerOnline.com).

Here is a list of our current projects and programs. Please click on hyperlinks for more information:

1. [**Center Scholars**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/center-scholarship.cfm) : This year’s eight Center Scholars are **Crystal Berg, Robert Boyd, Sirjaut Kaur Dhariwal, Elizabeth Herzfeldt-Kamprath, Gaby Krevat, Ashley Luke, Amelia Tyson,** and **Kent Wagner**. These eight outstanding students are being recognized for their determination to make films that matter, that make a difference, and that make the world a better place. All have demonstrated diligence, creativity, and passion. **Each student receives $2,000**.
2. [**Mavis and Sidney John Palmer Scholarship**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/palmer-scholarship.cfm): This scholarship **(endowed with $50,000)** honors outstanding graduate students who have demonstrated a commitment to conservation and wildlife filmmaking. The winners this year were **Crystal Berg** and **Sirjaut Kaur Dhariwal.**
3. **Sheila and Bill Wasserman Grant:** Thanks to Sheila and Bill Wasserman, the Center awarded a **$17,000 grant** (which included a $8,500 matching grant from the **Ernst & Young Foundation**)to **graduate** **student** **Kent Wagner** for his film about the deforestation of Indonesia and the plight of Bornean orangutans. Combined with other grants from the Center, Kent Wagner has received over $24,000 to make his film. The film will focus on the exploitation of natural resources and will examine the effects it is having on wildlife habitat, climate change, and on Borneo's indigenous people known as the Dayak. Kent has received the Center for Environmental Filmmaking’s Center Scholars Award three times, as well as the Mavis and Sidney John Palmer Scholarship, and the Center for Environmental Filmmaking’s Challenge Prize. The film is scheduled to be completed by June 2018.
4. [**$3,000 Challenge Prize**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/challenge-prize.cfm): **Thanks to Bill and Laurie Benenson**, the Center has **an annual awards program** for graduate students who have overcome challenges in their lives and plan to use environmental and wildlife films to make the world a better place. The following **SOC graduate students** each won **Challenge Prizes** for combating adversity: **Crystal Berg** and **Sirjaut Kaur Dhariwal**. **Crystal** and **Sirjaut each received $3,000.** Details about the Center’s annual Challenge Prize are [at this link](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/challenge-prize.cfm).
5. [**Senior Scholars**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/senior-center-scholars.cfm): I am pleased to announce that **alum Aditi Desai** is the recipient of the **Senior Scholar award for 2018**. Aditi is the Director of Multimedia and Assistant Director of Communications at **American Bird Conservancy**. **The award is accompanied by a $5,000 stipend.** Our goal with the Senior Scholars program is to recognize and honor **distinguished professionals whose work exemplifies the Center’s mission**. Aditi has helped fulfill the Center’s mission by serving as **a role model** **for** **emerging environmental filmmakers**, facilitating internships with current AU students, and working with students on films for the Center and its partners.
6. [**National Park Service Fellowship**](http://www.youtube.com/NPSwilderness): Through a partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), the fellowship program provides graduate students with the opportunity to produce films for NPS as paid employees. We are currently redesigning this Fellowship program. The fellowship’s flagship project, the web series [*America’s Wilderness*](http://www.youtube.com/NPSwilderness), produced a diverse collection of films to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act.
7. **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. The student-produced films from this program have received numerous awards, including **six Student Emmys** and **several CINE Golden Eagles**. MPT’s Emmy Award-winning executive producer **Mike English** teaches the class. This year his students produced a 30-minute film, ***Healing Baltimore’s Harbor: A Pipe Dream?*** **that will air on MPT and other PBS stations on February 6, 2018, and will air again during Chesapeake Bay Week in April 2018.** It will also be screened at **the Environmental Film Festival** this March. *Healing Baltimore’s Harbor* examines Baltimore’s aged and crumbling sewage and storm water infrastructure that continues to pollute the city’s harbor. The filmmakers were **Crystal Berg,** **Rebecca Castaneda, Danielle Criss, Sirjaut Kaur Dhariwal, Keeli Howard, Mike Kuba, Madison Long, Carlos Macher, Charles Mullen, Nawfel Raghay, Alec Smyth, Dee Starnes, and Jean Vozella**. **Crystal and Sirjaut were the producers and took lead roles.**
8. **The Humane Society of the United States partnership**: Two years ago, the **Center** and **the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)** formed a partnership in which SOC graduate students make short videos to tell great stories and help animals at the same time. The two graduate students selected to pioneer this program were **Ashley Holmes** and **Emma Kouguell**. And last summer, **SOC grad student Crystal Berg** was selected to work for HSUS’s Fund for Animals Wildlife Center in Ramona, CA. **The Center for Environmental Filmmaking awarded Crystal a $500 stipend, and HSUS covered her travel and accommodation expenses.** The program will continue this coming year with **grad student Gaby Krevat** making videos for HSUS at their **South Florida Wildlife Center**.
9. [**Films on Sustainable Farming**](https://www.pecva.org/maps-and-resources/video/farming-film-series): The Center received three grants from the **Prince Charitable Trusts (PCT)** to produce films on sustainable farming. **Center Scholar** **Aditi Desai** produced *Farming for the Future* in 2013. In 2014, **Aditi Desai** and **Center Scholar** **Vanina Harel** produced a second film called *Fifty Years of Farming: For Love & Vegetables*. Their third film, produced in 2015, is called *The Culture of Collards*. All three films were screened **at the Environmental Film Festival**. We have developed viewer guides for these three films and we continue to screen them at film festivals and other events.
10. [**Film on the Vanquishing of a Disney Park**](http://whenmickeycametotown.com)**:** The Center received a $65,000 grant from the **Prince Charitable Trusts** to produce a film about the victorious citizen-led campaign against a theme park and development project Disney planned to build next to hallowed Civil War battlefields in the Virginia Piedmont region. The producer was **Center Scholar** **Sam Sheline**, the director of photography was **Tony Azios**, and the editor was **Adam Lee**—all SOC alumni. [***When Mickey Came to Town***](https://vimeo.com/170164833) **premiered at the Environmental Film Festival**. The film was broadcast nationally on **Link TV**. [Here is the companion website](http://whenmickeycametotown.com).
11. [**MFA Concentration in Environmental and Wildlife Filmmaking**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/cef-course-listing.cfm): The MFA program now has three concentrations, including **Environmental and Wildlife Filmmaking, led by the Center**.
12. [**Classroom in the Wild/Chesapeake Bay**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/classroom-in-the-wild.cfm): This annual outdoor class, now ongoing for 12 years, offers students and the public a one-week program in March on the Chesapeake Bay as an introduction to the challenge and excitement of environmental filmmaking. **Graduate students, filmmakers, and Center Scholars, Elizabeth Herzfeldt-Kamprath and Kent Wagner** will lead the program this coming March. **Alums Vanina Harel and Nick Zachar** taught the class last March and did an outstanding job.
13. **Classroom in the Wild/Extreme HD Alaska**: Under the leadership of **Center Associate Director Larry Engel** and **Brian Horner**, this summer class offers students and the public a one-week, noncredit, immersive course in filmmaking in Alaska under challenging environmental and expeditionary conditions.
14. [**Funding Conservation films**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/about-the-center.cfm): The Center provides funding and filmmaking expertise and equipment to students and others making films on conservation. See [**Center Vimeo page**](http://vimeo.com/cef) and [**Center YouTube page**](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLB1DC06988BE824B5).
15. [**Film Series with Filmmakers:**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/events.cfm) Many Tuesday evenings at 7 pm throughout the school year, the Center hosts events in the Doyle/Forman Theater with **renowned filmmakers and environmental advocates**. The Center creates and hosts about 15 events every year, attracting large public and student audiences. Recent speakers have come from the top ranks of **Animal Planet, Discovery, Smithsonian, National Geographic**, **and PBS.** This “SOC Signature Series” is now in its 14th year.
16. [**Eco-Comedy Video Competition**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/eco-comedy-film-competition.cfm): Ten years ago, the Center created this annual international competition, sponsored by **The Nature Conservancy’s Maryland/DC chapter**, to encourage **the use of humor to promote conservation**. We receive about 100 submissions annually from all over the world and the winner wins a **$2,000 cash prize.**
17. **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. Last May, alum **Nick Zachar** won for his film *Saba: The Unspoiled Queen*.
18. [**An Evening with Chris Palmer:**](http://american.edu/soc/faculty/palmer.cfm) **(7 pm Tuesday, March 20, 2018 at AU)** At this annual event during the **Environmental Film Festival in the Nation’s Capital**, I discuss environmental films and show numerous clips. **This year I will be showcasing the best Hollywood narrative films on the environment.**
19. **Student Short Environmental Film Festival** (**7 pm Wednesday, March 21, 2018 at AU**): This annual event during the Environmental Film Festival (EFF) exhibits and celebrates the best conservation short films produced by students nationwide.
20. **OK, I’ve Watched the Film—Now What?** (**7 pm Thursday, March 22, 2018 at AU**): The Center creates and hosts this EFF 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**. Our panelists are Oscar and Emmy-nominated filmmakers and environmental advocates.
21. **Sponsorships of Many Film Festivals:** The Center sponsors many film festivals, including the **Environmental Film Festival in the Nation’s Capital**, the **BLUE Ocean Film Festival and Conference**, and the **Blue Vision Summit**. In addition to sponsorships, the Center also helps students attend these festivals. For example, the Center paid for the expenses of ten students to attend **the American Conservation Film Festival** last November, and the Center helped **Sirjaut Kaur, Dhariwal** attend the **Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival** last October.
22. **Environmental Film Festival in the Nation’s Capital**: Every March, the Center hosts about six EFF events at AU and is deeply involved in creating and planning them. **The Center also hosts an annual networking lunch at AU for about 40 filmmakers attending EFF**. This year, it is at noon on **Monday, March 19, 2018**.
23. [***Shooting in the Wild* Campaign (book and film)**](http://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/faculy.cfm): This ongoing campaign to reform wildlife filmmaking practices is inspired by my book *Shooting in the Wild*, now in its second printing. In 2014, SOC produced a companion film (of the same name) hosted by **Alexandra Cousteau**, 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 book, [***Confessions of a Wildlife Filmmaker***](http://www.chrispalmeronline.com/confessions-of-a-wildlife-filmmaker), which is highly critical of some major television networks, was published in March 2015 to further this campaign.
24. [***Now What, Grad? Your Path To Success After College***](http://www.american.edu/soc/resources/now-what-grad-palmer.cfm)**: Rowman & Littlefield** published this book in December 2015. It is designed to help not only environmental filmmakers, but also other up-and-coming professionals, too. Here is a [short video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXt-9R-mH3M&index=6&list=PLZGmcfRNf0MgFbK11JrVLDAx5XIumceWG) by filmmaker and graduate student **Elizabeth Herzfeldt-Kamprath** about “elevator speeches.” Elizabeth also made [this 1-minute video on what students are most stressed and worried about](https://youtu.be/UGONtDm_joU). I wrote ***Now What, Grad?*** to help students facing those challenges. *All proceeds from the sale of this book go to fund student scholarships*. [**Here is the link to the book on Amazon.com**](http://www.amazon.com/Now-What-Grad-Success-College/dp/1475823665/ref%3Dmt_paperback?_encoding=UTF8&me=)**.** R&L plans to publish a 2nd Edition this coming year. I’ve added 30 percent new material. Two years ago, I launched a new class called *Design Your Life for Success: Find Out What Really Matters To You And How To Live Wisely And With Passion*. It is sponsored by SPExS and offered every semester. Last semester, we had more than 90 students apply for the 50 available slots.
25. **Seven camera kits and other equipment: Thanks to the** **Norcross Foundation**, many students have taken advantage of all this Center for Environmental Filmmaking gear, including students in our Classroom in the Wild programs. Thanks to **Larry Engel**, the Center has also acquired **a 360º camera; the Nikon Keymission shoots video and stills for VR and AR productions (virtual and augmented reality respectively)**.
26. [**Discover the World of Communication**](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__audiscover.org_&d=DwMFaQ&c=U0G0XJAMhEk_X0GAGzCL7Q&r=XwbgRjsz15R5zbe8SQF0gZgeFpW9QyIPuTAY4MYK_50&m=TZeFqRIDTJpe0oMW8QzXBFxwnIyH-hOPa6apNy3A-no&s=tnxuOvAShRFm_9jj3nU9-Y4qbn9wzG_qWKGFYilEKXs&e=)[**audiscover.org**](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__audiscover.org&d=DwMFaQ&c=U0G0XJAMhEk_X0GAGzCL7Q&r=XwbgRjsz15R5zbe8SQF0gZgeFpW9QyIPuTAY4MYK_50&m=hZncp4JtAaouXJKqUrG4T18GAZoCEXuAAfBleMaEjwM&s=jPdtnMJTfwlGxF5cxBCOiKx4Mq6eBqaIU7tfCubC_xU&e=) **is AU’s summer program for high school students under Professor and Associate Center Director Sarah Menke-Fish’s leadership**: More than 625 students from 40 states and 27 countries participated in the program. The Center gave a $775 Scholarship to a selected student with academic need to participate in the Discover the World of Communication Program. **The Center will continue this support in 2018.**
27. **Environmental Film Workshops: Under Sarah Menke-Fish’s leadership, 415 students** from Howard County Public Schools, DC Public Schools and Montgomery County Public Schools, participated in several hands-on environmental film workshops held in February 2017 at AU, and on location at select middle and high schools. More than 50 AU faculty, AU Alums, MFA and MA candidates, and Film and Media Arts students worked with the students to guide them and support them with their filmmaking efforts. The films are screened in the spring at AFI. **The Center will continue to support this program in 2018 and 2019.**
28. **Professor and Associate Center Director Maggie Burnette Stogner:** In the classroom and beyond, Maggie Burnette Stogner works with students to develop ideas and productionsfor nonprofit environmental groups and for film competitions such as **the Center’s Eco-Comedy Video Competition**. She continues to nurture and support the Center’s award-winning students.She advises thesis and capstone projects, many of which have received support from CEF and gone on to win impressive recognition in festivals. **Professor Stogner** is a selected judge for finalists in the **Emmy's “Best Documentary” and “Best Natural History”** categories and a Distinguished Judge for the **CINE Golden Awards.**
29. **Professor and Associate Center Director Larry Engel:** Larry Engel is producing *Harvest Home: A Refuge for Wounded Warriors (WT)****.*** The film follows Team Capitol DC’s Harvest Home, which was part of the 2013 DOE **Solar Decathlon competition** in which American University, Catholic University, and George Washington University partnered to build a solar and sustainable home. He continues to serve on the steering committee of the new AU Environmental Collaborative (ECOllaborative). He also was appointed by the provost as a faculty coordinator for **Airlie Center** to help facilitate faculty and students who want to pursue research or class projects at Airlie and its 20-acre farm. This past summer he traveled with **Professors Todd Eisenstadt (SPA) and Karleen West (SUNY)** to the Ecuadorian Amazon to film indigenous people’s efforts to defend their lives and lands from the federal government and big oil and mining. (The short film will accompany the book that they co-authored to be published by Oxford.) Larry also serves as a judge for the **Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival** and the **AAAS-Kavli science journalism awards**.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thanks to Dean **Jeff Rutenbeck,** Prof. **John Douglass,** and Prof. **Brigid Maher** for all their support. And thanks to Prof. **Larry Engel**, Prof. **Sarah Menke-Fish**, and Prof. **Maggie Burnette Stogner**—the three Associate Directors of the Center—for all they have done to contribute to the Center’s programs.

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

**Wallace Genetic Foundation**, **Frances & Benjamin Benenson Foundation**, **Shared Earth Foundation**, **Park Foundation**, **Saint Paul Foundation**, **Turner Foundation**, **Prince Charitable Trusts**, **Herbert W. Hoover Foundation**, **Ramsay Merriam Fund,** **Henry Foundation**, **Mead Family Foundation**, **Norcross Wildlife Foundation**, **Ernst & Young Foundation**, **Merrill G. & Emita E. Hastings Foundation**, **T. Rowe Price Associates Foundation**, and **The Nature Conservancy**.

Special thanks to **Joan Murray**, **Bill and Laurie 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**, **Lisa Peterfreund**, **Carolynn Brunette,** **Kristin Pauly**, **Leonard Berman**, **John McMurray**, **Severn Smith** and other generous supporters.

Center Report 2018