

**the university of oklahoma**

college of arts and sciences film and video studies program

# FVStakes

Spring 2004  
Volume 5 Number 1

The big picture

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# FVS students getting the big picture in program

By Andrew Horton  
JEANNE HOFFMAN SMITH PROFESSOR OF FVS  
FVS DIRECTOR



FVS alumnus Matt Payne sat in our Film and Media Theories class in February only two years after graduation, explaining to our students how he began working on the hit TV show “24” and then with a talent agency handling clients making top films and television series.

When students asked why they should take studies and theory classes to go into filmmaking, he

Iranian Cinema, believe it or not.”

He said that attending the Greek film seminar and working on a film in France on an FVS internship also helped him in his career.

Our students were ready to believe him.

They already had heard Macedonian filmmaker Milcho Manchevski explain how he went from the Balkans to Beverly Hills and then to NYU, where he teaches

American film and television world and how to branch into personal, independent and international projects. All students in the class sent



directing. They also had seen his 1995 Oscar-nominated film, “Before the Rain,” as part of the War and Reconstruction Conference sponsored by the School of International and Area Studies and were eager to discuss with him the process behind making the film.

Manchevski explained how

Robert Redford helped him on his second film, “Dust,” and how, briefly, Miramax had been involved.

He told students that making personal films in Hollywood is difficult.

“Too many compromises are needed,” he said.

Our students do get the big picture as they hear professionals discuss the importance of theory-based learning, how to succeed in the

letters thanking Manchevski for his visit. An edited excerpt from FVS senior Taylor Van Amburgh’s letter illustrates my big-picture theory.

“I thoroughly enjoyed the non-linear narrative structure that your film used,” Amburgh wrote. “I found ‘Before the Rain’ more universal than I would have expected. The sacrifice the young monk must make for the Albanian girl is extremely powerful. The culture in the film is easy and quick to adjust to, which is essential to the storytelling aspect. It relies on human emotions instead of barricading itself in behind complex customs and cultures.

“Do you find yourself using film theory regularly in the production of a film? We talked in class about images and ideas just falling into place or ‘seeming right.’ I suppose having knowledge of film theory helps the director make those subconscious decisions.”

Understanding the importance of a broad-based education and the reality of professional filmmaking prepares our students for success. That’s our goal in the big picture.



FVS alumnus Matt Payne (seated front row left) presented a speech titled “How to Move from OU to Hollywood and Make It” Feb. 26 to FVS students and Horton.

told them knowing how to operate equipment is not enough for success.

“If you can talk to a producer or director or editor about Italian neo-realism or Andre Bazin or Maori culture in ‘Whale Rider,’ you have a much better chance of convincing those in charge that you know something beyond just the technical level,” he said. “All of the classes I had here prepared me for what I am doing in Los Angeles, including

**COVER PHOTOS** (clockwise from upper left): FVS students pose with actor Doug Bradley, second from right; Bradley signs autographs March 2; Former Harvard film professor Vlada Petrides and Misha Nedeljkovich chat before a film noir class in Serbia; Macedonian filmmaker Milcho Manchevski talks to FVS students.



# Screenwriting in spring

By Kevin Mahoney  
GUEST LECTURER, SCREENWRITING

Although I have spent 20 years working as a screenwriter in Los Angeles, guest lecturing on screenwriting for FVS has broadened my world. As a writer, I am not much used to contact with the outside world or even with daylight, for that matter. My world resides, primarily, between the words FADE IN and FADE OUT.

In the classroom, I've discovered the impressive talent of FVS students. Their genuine desire to learn the craft of filmmaking inspires me not only to be a better teacher but also to be a better writer. I have learned that I am able to speak, at length, on the subjects of character development and story structure. I suppose something in those 20 years actually stuck.

Writer's Block, the Oklahoma Film Society, the Inner-Circle Film Group and the OU Film Club enable students, faculty and other Oklahoma filmmakers the

## FVS student goes to Sundance, again

By Sterlin Harjo  
FVS SENIOR

My Sundance journey began when I started writing "Four Sheets to The Wind" in summer 2001 in Brooklyn. It's about a young Seminole man trying to find something real in life after tragedy strikes his family. It's a personal story, although it isn't autobiographical. It was easy to write about Oklahoma while I was living in New York because I had begun to miss the open fields and laid-back atmosphere: My longing for home came through in the writing.

I was surprised to learn, however, that my work had been accepted into the Sundance screenwriter's program. It's one thing when you and your friends like your script, but there is another level of satisfaction when people who work in the production of independent film tell you your work is good.

At the workshop I worked with a group of writers, including Chris McQuarrie ("The Usual Suspects"), Walter Moseley ("Devil in a Blue Dress"), Susan Shilladay ("Legends of the Fall"), Walter Bernstein ("The Front"), Howard Rodman ("Joe Gould's Secret") and Jim Taylor ("Election" and "About Schmidt"). This workshop was a writer's utopia. All we did was talk about writing and watch films in the stunning Utah mountains.

This summer, I've been accepted into the Filmmaker's Lab. I had to rewrite my script and send a

opportunity to network. In Los Angeles, everyone seems to be looking over his or her shoulder in fear of the next hot talent. Cultivating one another's talents, as happens here, is a rarity.

Such speakers as Academy Award nominee Miloch Manchevski, Norman native James Garner and FVS graduate Matt Payne have offered insights into making it in Hollywood. Students have learned real lessons here.

I truly have enjoyed my semester in FVS. Teaching, I have discovered, may very well be my niche. I hope that I have helped to encourage, develop and promote the work of my students and the talent of Oklahoma filmmakers. After my time here, I feel invigorated. I send my best wishes to all my students and others with whom I have worked here. As they say in Hollywood, "Have your people call my people. We'll do lunch."

portfolio of directing work. I sent a short film called "They're Playing His Song," with Norman actor Mark Loftis. The shooting went off without a hitch. Jeffrey Johnston camped out at my house to work on the soundtrack.

It's hard to imagine that a story about a 22-year-old Native guy in small-town Oklahoma could ever make it into Sundance, but it did. Now that I've been accepted into the Filmmaker's Lab, I'll have another story to tell.

*Harjo was one of eight admitted into the Summer 2004 Sundance Institute Feature Film program's Filmmaker's Lab, a three-week June workshop. He won one of 12 places from among 3,000 applicants at the Sundance Institute Script Development Program in summer 2003.*

## FEATUREpresentation



### Congratulation to Graduates December 2003

Andrew M. Black	Kalen Rae Kattestad
Matthew Graham Brown	Courtney McVea
Coty Shane Ashley Cos	Yusuke Minami
John Wesley Graf	Jared Wei Ning
Casey W. Hiss	Christopher Ryan Tubbs
Carol Lee Inman	Nathan William Webb
Cheng Bruce Yang	

### May 2004

Cupid Lynn Flowers	Jake Wesley Morrison
Emily Virginia Fultz	Kyle Steven Nicholson
Gabriel John Huffstutler	Jonathan Allen Ray
Laura Leighanne Ivins-Hulley	Kelli Kay Rogers
Donovan Peter Kusters	Tavis Edward Searle
Adam David Littke	Benjamin Phillip Smith
Michael Christopher McCracken	James W. Wallis
Erin Kate McHenry	Ryan Scott Wilmoth

# FVS major attends festival at Clermont-Ferrand

By Deidra Tyree Smith  
FVS GRADUATE

While attending classes in Clermont-Ferrand, France, has its boring moments just like attending classes at OU, from Jan. 31 to Feb. 7, I wasn't bored a minute.

During those two weeks, I attended the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival. Besides the films, the event included parties and festivities. As the only student representing OU, I worked with Misha Nedeljkovich, an FVS faculty member on a Fulbright in Belgrade. Because the short films aren't as commercially significant as longer feature films, the festival is less about potential profit than about talent. France's respect for the arts is visible in its numerous theaters and its media and performing arts schools as well as in the amount of funding for projects like the festival.

Everyone I talked to, from the volunteer working at the help desk to the distributors in the film market, was genuinely nice. The lack of competitiveness resulting from the festival's commitment to the art of filmmaking seemed to contribute to this congenial atmosphere.

Thousands of people of all ages attended. Distributors, directors, actors, writers and spectators from around the world crowded into lecture hall-style theaters to view short films of all genres and countries of origin.

Crowds required an early arrival, sometimes 30 minutes ahead of screening time. A late arrival meant attending the next showing. Those who weren't representing a film company or otherwise connected to the film market had paid a small fee for each *scène*, or showing. I didn't have an official badge, but I was able to talk officials into letting me in free every time. Most screenings consisted of five to seven shorts, depending on subject and length. Screenings of *labos* or *clips* might have more or fewer units per screening. *Labos* are experimental films and *clips* are animation or graphics put to music. They most resemble music videos.

One of the most anticipated *labos* was Australian director Daniel Askill's "We Have Decided Not to Die," about three journeys of transcendence. At dinner with him, his girlfriend and his brother, I talked with them about the process of making their film.

The *clips* were presented in two showings. Chris Cunningham, who directed "Come to Daddy" and "Windowlicker," dominated the first. The latter has music by Aphex Twin. The second program included, among many, the popular music video-like projects: "Teardrop" by Walter Stern, music by Massive Attack; "Seven Nation Army" by Alex et Martin, music by The

## STUDENTstories

White Stripes; and "Shoot the Dog" by Giles Pilbrow, Tim Searle and Georgia Pritchett, music by George Michael.

Of course, French films had a significant program of their own, but since I *live* here, I didn't attend these screenings. The judges said they were disappointed at the lack of creativity in the French section and, so, gave no award in it. The festival dedicated programs to filmmaking in Brazil and Africa, to children, and to *la piscine*, or the pool. The program explained that the swimming pool deserved a program of its own because it is a place of awkwardness, memories and competition. It said that the water's blue hues and beauty of movement provides a symbolic place of a "concentration of life."

The most popular and largest program, and the one in which filmmakers hope to be placed, is the multinational, multi-genre International Program. Representatives of the film market look to this program more than any other because of its variety. A short in the International Program has a better chance of being bought and distributed or of becoming a feature.

Most heartening for me, of course, was to realize how many young filmmakers just out of high school or making films through university programs or grants were represented at the festival.

## Thanks to Our Kind Donors

As universities across the country face tough times balancing budgets in a time of budget cuts and tuition increases, FVS wants to thank a small group of individuals for helping to make a difference for FVS faculty and students with their donations.

Donors have asked that we not name them, but I would like to mention what the almost \$17,000 donated so far for this year will help cover. The newsletter is paid for by donor funds, as are nine \$500 scholarships for students to go on the FVS Greek summer seminar.

One specific donation has helped provide new editing equipment that our production class, Guerrilla Filmmaking, is using to good advantage.

To say thank you is not enough to respond to such generosity and thoughtfulness, but it is a beginning. Each donation helps realize dreams that otherwise would remain unfulfilled. We are grateful.

Andrew Horton

# Guerrilla filmmakers gear up for bout with national rivals

By Jeff Van Hanken  
FVS FACULTY

They came — 22 strong — hopeful and enthusiastic, but still uncertain about their own talents. Standing opposite were giants, emboldened by the rich tradition of their tribal identities: USC Bruins. UCLA Trojans. NYU . . . Bobcats?

Can the Sooners match the valiant traditions of the powerhouse East and West coast film programs and prove that an often-overlooked spot in the heartland is fast rising to prominence?

Perhaps with a little planning and luck — always important — this will be a breakthrough year when OU makes a real splash on the festival circuit.

That's our goal in Guerrilla Filmmaking spring 2004, and judging by the creative, well-conceived ideas the class has produced, Sooner filmmakers have a real shot.

In senior Nathan Strange's well-conceived script, a young man struggles to pop the question while his girlfriend struggles to admit an infidelity.

Junior Soniya Kulkarni spins a *film noir* tale that heaps twist upon twist upon twist.

And seniors Matt Moody and Chris Pickens are posing the familiar rural American question: What do young people do on a Saturday night? Cutting back and forth between three sets of friends, this story recalls both George Lucas' "American Graffiti" and Richard Linklater's "Dazed and Confused."

Of course, writing is by no means a filmmaker's last peak to climb. The students are deep into the details of planning and pre-production, having steeped themselves in the shot-making theories of David Mamet: 1.) Withhold information.

2.) Let the cut tell the story.

3.) Don't just set up the camera and follow the action.

Additionally, we're paying particular attention to composing a clean, concise, creative shot list before ever turning on a camera.

Our goal is to make the audience forget completely about the format used to shoot the movie and concentrate fully on the originality of the story and the smart way in which it is told.

In addition to all the promising narrative films, seniors Jonathon Fowler and Erin McHenry have made great strides on a documentary subject that has tremendous potential: the 1921 Tulsa Race Riots.

While the riot has been documented on film before, Fowler and McHenry came up with their angle through two questions: How can we properly place this event into context

for people today as well as for future generations? How do we begin to figure out what it all means?

Fowler and McHenry have contacted many prominent members of the community, including officials with Tulsa Public Schools; Fai Walker, former director of the Greenwood Cultural Center; Cindi Driver, Greenwood Cultural Center director; Eddie Faye Gates, Tulsa historian and schoolteacher; and, most impressively, Derrick Bell, renowned law professor and historian.

Bell, the first African-American to win tenure at Harvard Law, spoke recently in Tulsa on the Supreme Court's decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Interviewing him is quite a coup for the filmmakers and should raise the film's profile when they send it out for festival consideration.

FEATUREDcourse



Members of Van Hanken's spring 2004 Guerrilla Filmmaking class pause to pose for a team photo before returning to their cameras and editing equipment.

# Balkan journey with Jim Jarmusch

By Misha Nedeljkovich  
FVS FACULTY/FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR

My project, “Six-Days with Jim Jarmusch in Belgrade,” presented in December in cooperation with the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, the Fulbright Association and the American Embassy, led to a touring series of Southern Balkans screenings and discussions of the American filmmaker’s work.

Designed to promote the Fulbright spirit of cultural exchange and mutual understanding, the project screens films that best display Jarmusch’s American reality touched with European sensitivity. Rarely do smaller European towns and cities, those with populations of 100,000 to 300,000, see independent American films; instead they primarily have access to Hollywood blockbusters. This project presents another kind of American moviemaking that is artistic, creative, sensitive and highly intellectual.

The program visited 10 locations and screened “Stranger Than Paradise,” “Mystery Train,” “Night

on Earth,” “Dead Man,” “Down by Law,” “Ghost Dog” and “The Way of the Samurai.”

Local television and radio stations in each city agreed to broadcast commercials and a special talk show about Jarmusch’s movies, so we had publicity and good crowds. I am also making a short

documentary film on the project.

I don’t think that Norman, Oklahoma, or the University of Oklahoma have ever before been as personally represented in the Balkans. My presence always draws questions about my home state and me before we settle in to discuss the magic and message of Jarmusch.



*One of many full houses at Nedeljkovich’s Serbian screenings of Jim Jarmusch films.*

## FVS graduate uses Heidi Karriker Award money to attend rigorous, productive bootcamp for writers

May 2003 graduate Adam Madison, recipient of the Heidi Karriker Award, moved to Los Angeles in late November. He used the \$1,000 award to attend Writers Bootcamp, a six-week workshop focusing on how to overcome scriptwriting obstacles and simplify the steps of writing.

“In addition to the tools I have acquired, the staff at the campus are really dedicated to helping young writers succeed,” Madison said. “I am in constant contact with my counselor and they hold office hours so students can bounce ideas off them and receive feedback.”

Writers Boot Camp came into being when founder and president Jeffrey Gordon invited seven screenwriters

in 1992 to join him nightly in his living room, guaranteeing each a completed script in the first session of what was to develop into the six-week intensive course in all elements of scripwriting. On its Web site, [www.writersbootcamp.com](http://www.writersbootcamp.com), the Santa Monica-based organization says it now trains hundreds of writers each year, with sessions in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and San Francisco.

Madison is an on-call production assistant on “Cracking Up” with Molly Shannon and a commercial company called Storyville. He is an extra on “Gilmore Girls” and “American Dreams.” He just has wrapped a three-day extra stint on Jessica Simpson’s ABC pilot.

## Faculty shine in a variety of national and international scholarly and creative activities

**Assistant professor Hester Baer** published “Negotiating the Popular and the Avant Garde: The Failure of Herbert Vesely’s ‘The Bread of Those Early Years’ (1962)” in Wayne State University Press’ anthology *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective*. She will lecture at Miami University in Ohio on Wolfgang Becker’s 2003 German film, “Goodbye, Lenin!” as part of a symposium titled Out of the Shadows: Berlin in German Cinema After the Wall.

**Andrew Horton, Jeanne H Smith Professor and FVS director,** published *Screenwriting for A Global Market* in March 2004 with the University of California Press. His interview with the screenwriters of “Eurotrip” appeared in the March/April 2004 issue of *ScreenTalk*; his article “The Ninth Sarajevo Film Festival” appeared in *Cineaste*, Winter 2003. At the March SCMS Conference he spoke on “Oh, Homer, Where Art Thou? The Coen Brothers and Creative Adaptation.” He was the keynote speaker at the California State University at Long Beach Comparative Literature and Cinema Conference in March, speaking on “Cinemas of History, Horror and Healing Humor in the Balkans.” In April he led an FVS student group to Los Angeles for the fourth FVS alumni gathering at the home of Mark and Victoria Eaton. This year, 28 students visited studios and film and television offices to network and explore internship possibilities. In May, he will be a keynote speaker at the International Conference on the Cinema of Theo Angelopoulos in Jyväskylä, Finland, speaking on “The Greek and Balkan Spirit of Comedy During the Journeys With the Films of Theo Angelopoulos.” He will take 12 FVS students on the fifth FVS summer study seminar in Greece among a total 24 participants from the United States, France, the Czech

Republic, Greece and England.

**Associate professor Randolph Lewis** gave a colloquium titled “Rethinking Navajo Talking Pictures” in December at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, where he is a research associate working on a book devoted to Native American filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin and another on Navajo cinema. He finished editing a 50-minute documentary titled, “Muleskinner Blues,” which blends contemporary interviews, old 8mm footage and archival photos to explore the violence that scarred the lives of the rural poor of East Texas in the 1930s. The film focuses on Lewis’s grandfather, a backwoods muleskinner named Robert Lee Sullivan. The film has been accepted into Muskogee’s Bare Bones International Film Festival and the Independent Movie Channel’s “Fest-Eye-Ful” in Texarkana, Texas.

**Professor Joanna Rapf** edited *On the Waterfront: A Cambridge University Press Film Handbook* and has published “Sidney Lumet and the Politics of the Left: The Centrality of Daniel” in the April 2003 *Literature/Film Quarterly* and “Comic Theory From a Feminist Perspective: A Look at Jerry Lewis” in Routledge’s 2003 *Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader*. She delivered a paper at the March SCMS Conference titled, “That’s Why the Lady Is a Vamp: Women in the Films of Harry Langdon.” She will teach Introduction to Film at Dartmouth College during summer 2004.

**Assistant professor Gary Rhodes’** documentary film, “Banned in Oklahoma,” shot over five years and covering the confiscation of “The Tin Drum” in Oklahoma County, has been licensed by the Criterion Collection for release on DVD. He is in the final stages of shooting his feature-length comedy “Wit’s End,”

## FACULTYfocus

starring Darryl Cox, Rue McClanahan, Udo Kier and William Sanderson. His documentary, “Hour Glass Sand,” which illustrates a first-hand case study of Alzheimer’s, is in final stages of completion. In February 2004, he won a Rondo Award for the best horror film essay/magazine article of 2003 for an essay titled, “The Horror Film Crisis of 1932.” Recent publications include a cover story for the October 2003 *Video Watchdog* on 1927’s “London After Midnight,” co-written with FVS undergraduate Ryan Baker; an essay on the 1932 film “Almost Married,” published in *Monsters from the Vault* in October 2003; and an entry on the film “Freaks” for the two-volume *Encyclopedia of the Great Depression*, February 2004.

**Assistant professor Victoria Sturtevant** obtained an Instructional Technology grant to expand the FVS Media Lab. She attended the Obermann Humanities Symposium at the University of Iowa and presented a paper titled “Gentlemen Prefer Ingenues, or, How Depression America Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Baby Talk” at the March SCMS conference. Her article, “Getting Hysterical: Thelma and Louise and Laughter” will appear in Cambridge University Press’ anthology *Thelma & Louise*. She will attend the Women and the Silent Screen Congress in Montreal to deliver a paper titled, “‘Harness My Zebras’: Outrageous Femininity and the Origins of the American Biblical Epic.” She has been awarded a Junior Faculty Research Program summer grant to work on her book, *Domestic Disorder*, which presents an analysis of Depression-era American film comedies.

# Library and Media Lab update

By Donovan Kusters  
FVS LIBRARIAN

The FVS Library and Media Lab has moved again, this time to Room 308 of Old Science Hall. The library now has the space and pleasant surroundings necessary to provide students a functional environment in which to screen and edit films.

We continue to expand in film holdings and in the number of viewing areas and variety of equipment available for students.

We soon will open a third viewing area and install a Macintosh G5 editing station to join two Macintosh G4s currently in use.

Tulsa FVS supporter L. Virginia Davis donated funds for the G5. Assistant professor Victoria Sturtevant presented a grant proposal in fall 2003 that has allowed the media lab to purchase a Canon XL-1S camera, a professional sound mixer, a new microphone system and other production equipment.



FVSnews

## We Want to Hear From You

Please send suggestions and recommendations to FVSTakes at [fvs@ou.edu](mailto:fvs@ou.edu). We'd like to hear from you so we can better direct FVS programs and newsletter content to meet your needs and interests.

We're interested in hearing your thoughts on article ideas, speaker/program suggestions, special screenings, reactions to specific articles in the newsletter and ways in which you would like to contribute to the program.

## Summer 2004 Classes

FVS 1013 Introduction to Film and Video Studies/Gary Rhodes

FVS 1013 Introduction to Film and Video Studies/Michael Lee

FVS 2033 Film History to 1945/Michael Lee

FVS 2023 Film History 1945 - Present/Gary Rhodes

FVS 3843 Japanese Cinema/Eric Kramer

## Fall 2004 Classes

FVS 1013 Introduction to Film and Video Studies/Michael Lee

FVS 1013 Introduction to Film and Video Studies/Misha Nedeljkovich

FVS 2013 Film History to 1945/Victoria Sturtevant

FVS 2123 Acting for the Camera/Daryl Cox

FVS 3213 Media Theories/Gary Rhodes

FVS 3223 Documentary Film-Narrative Non-Fiction/Kathryn Jenson White

FVS 3243 Hispanic Cinema/Robert Lauer

FVS 3810 Gender/Theory/Cinema/Betty Robbins

FVS 3810 Writing Film Criticism/Dino Lalli

FVS 3843 American Cinema of the 70s/Jeff Van Hanken

FVS 3843 Irish Cinema/Gary Rhodes

FVS 3853 Screenwriting/Lou Berney

FVS 3853 Screenwriting/Kevin Mahoney

FVS 4013 Senior Seminar/Victoria Sturtevant

**Editor Kathryn Jenson White**

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**Sterlin Harjo — Andrew Horton — Donovan Kusters — Kevin Mahoney**

**Misha Nedeljkovich — Deidra Tyree Smith — Jeff Van Hanken**

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