



CENTER FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL FILMMAKING
SCHOOL of COMMUNICATION
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • WASHINGTON, DC

Center for Environmental Filmmaking

www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/

AY2018/19 Report

By Maggie Burnette Stogner, Executive Director

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May 30, 2019

The Center for Environmental Filmmaking (CEF) is one of the leading environmental and wildlife film programs in the world. It provides an outstanding array of courses, experiential learning opportunities, creative media labs, film and speaker series, fellowships, and internships. In addition to our accomplished and award-winning faculty, CEF partners with conservation and advocacy organizations, media companies, and a vast network of experts, scholars, and policymakers. We collaborate with Maryland Public Television and others to offer experiential courses for our students. We are committed to finding new ways to diversify the field, address inequality, and empower action through the innovative use of media. Our campaign mantra is: Changing lives. Fostering creativity. Conserving our environment through the power of media.

In September 2018, CEF's founder Chris Palmer retired and I was honored to become the new executive director of CEF. I am passionately committed to CEF's mission and the significant work that the Center has done over the past thirteen years. And I look forward to leading CEF's programming and activities to encourage meaningful connections with nature, urgent conservation advocacy, public science communication, and high-impact storytelling that inspires and truly makes a difference.

CEF MISSION: Creating award-winning films and innovative media that raise awareness, represent diverse voices, promote solutions, and inspire action.

More information about our programs can be found on our website:

www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/

Please contact me directly at stogner@american.edu, telephone: 202-885-2160, with any further questions and for information on how **you can help support our efforts.**

The following report provides an overview of CEF's activities and events over the Academic Year 2018/19. These are made possible by the generosity of the foundations and donors listed on page 7. Your support is absolutely essential to our success.

Our signature initiatives include:

- Providing opportunities to inspire and prepare students to become the next generation of talented, high-impact conservation media makers.
- Partnering with established organizations to give students the opportunity to work with broadcasters, NGOs, and other organizations to produce professional-level films and digital media.
- Collaborating with American University's key sustainability and environmental strategies and leadership.
- Bringing a diverse range of experts, visionaries, and world-class filmmakers to American University to speak, teach, mentor, and inspire.
- Developing interdisciplinary and experiential classes and programs.
- Awarding student scholarships and fellowships.
- Supporting and mentoring diverse environmental and wildlife filmmakers.
- Promoting the ethical treatment of wildlife and the environment.
- Furthering fact-based conservation and science communication.
- Exploring innovative new ways to engage diverse audiences through immersive media, new forms of storytelling, and emerging technologies.

CEF TEAM

Maggie Burnette Stogner, Executive Director

Larry Engel, Associate Director, Classroom in the Wild

Sarah Menke Fish, Associate Director, Youth Programs

Leena Jayaswal, Diversity & Inclusion Officer and Photography Program Director

Larry Kirkman, Director of Science Communication Lab, SOC Dean Emeritus

More information about each of our team can be found here:

<https://www.american.edu/soc/environmental-film/faculy.cfm>

Research Fellow: Award-winning filmmaker **Leah Mahan** is the recipient of our Research Fellow award of \$5,000 for AY2018/19. She is an independent documentary filmmaker whose work was nominated by the Directors Guild of America for

Outstanding Directorial Achievement. She made *Come Hell or High Water: The Battle for Turkey Creek* (2013), which aired on the PBS World series *America ReFramed*; was a Fellow at Sundance Documentary Editing and Story Lab and Sundance/Skoll Stories of Change, and a Hatchlab Mentor for the Alliance for Media Arts and Culture. She has been instrumental in working with the Center on our diversity and impact initiative.

OUR MEDIA AND CONSERVATION PARTNERS

We are fortunate to have strong connections with many outstanding organizations that provide fellowship, internship, summer employment, mentoring, and other opportunities for our students and the Center. These include National Geographic, Maryland Public Television, HHMI's Tangled Bank Studios, the National Park Service, NOAA, NASA, The Humane Society, the Nature Conservancy, and many others. Our partners at American University include the Center for Media and Social Impact, AU Arboretum, Airlie Farms, Office of Sustainability, Environmental Sciences, the Center for Environmental Policy, Campus Life, Office of Diversity & Inclusion, and more.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR STUDENTS

1. **CEF SCHOLARSHIPS** : Thanks to the sponsorships of our donors, we were able to offer several Center Scholars awards. The awardees are Crystal Berg, Robert Boyd, Mary Alice McMillan, Jay Strojnowski, Shannon Shikles, and Ashley Luke. These outstanding students are being recognized for their determination to make high-quality films that are relevant, compelling, and that can make a real difference. All have demonstrated diligence, creativity, and passion. Each student receives \$2,000.
 - a. Crystal is working on her thesis film about the Africatown community in Alabama, originally founded by West Africans brought over in an illegal slave trade, who are now fighting for their lives and land in this short **environmental justice documentary**.
 - b. Robert is particularly interested in macro-based videography and has developed an advanced level of skills in this area. His will soon begin work on his thesis film, which is an **“up-close” look at water pollution, waste water, and compost**.
 - c. Mary Alice is working on her thesis film, a personal journey about her mother and aunt who grew up near Love Canal, and the family's ongoing, **multi-generational battle with cancer**.
 - d. Jay has been applying his innovative techniques and experience in the military to a unique film that reveals **our natural world in infra-red**.

- e. Ashley has been working a film on a **toxic bloom crisis in Florida** that is sickening people in the community and killing their pets.
 - f. Shannon is finishing a documentary about the **March for Science** and the importance of supporting strong science communication.
2. Mavis and Sidney John Palmer Scholarship: This scholarship (endowed with \$50,000) honors outstanding graduate students who have demonstrated a commitment to conservation and wildlife filmmaking. The 2018 winners were Mary Alice McMillan, Shannon Shikles, Robert Boyd, and Jay Strojnowski.
 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) plus an additional \$7,000 in support from CEF, Kent Wagner made his thesis film on the deforestation of Indonesia and the plight of Bornean orangutans. **“Borneo’s Vanishing Tribes” won the National Capital Regional Student Emmy award** for long form, nonfiction and was a finalist for a national student Emmy award. The film is screening at festivals around the world, and for private viewing, can be seen here: <http://bit.ly/2JJzeMw>
 4. \$3,000 Challenge Prize: 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: Mary Alice McMillan, Jay Strojnowski, Robert Boyd, and Shannon Shikles each received \$3,000.
 5. Sponsorships to Film Festivals: The Center sponsors students attendance at and participation in a variety of film festivals. In 2018, it paid for ten students to attend the American Conservation Film Festival including their environmental filmmaking workshop. At the ACFF, Edward Scott awarded alum Aditi Desai and current grad student Nicholas Tucker with \$1,000 each for their excellent film pitches. The funds will go toward the making of their films. CEF students and alum attended the prestigious Jackson Hole Film Festival, Montana Film Festival in Missoula, and more.
 6. Discover the World of Communication 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. CEF provided two \$800 scholarships to selected students with academic needs take environmental film and photography courses. audiscover.org
 7. Funding Conservation films: The Center provides funding and filmmaking expertise to students and others making films on conservation. See Center Vimeo page and the CEF YouTube Channel to watch some of the films. Thanks to the Norcross Foundation, many students have taken advantage of the Center for

Environmental Filmmaking's gear, including students in our Classroom in the Wild programs. Equipment includes photography and digital cameras, underwater, 360-degree, and emerging camera technologies.

INTERNSHIPS & FELLOWSHIPS

Our students work with organizations across the country and overseas through semester internships, year-long fellowships, and unique opportunities for emerging filmmakers to gain valuable experience. Here are a several examples.

- AU Arboretum Film Grant: Thanks to funding from the Trowel Garden Club, MFA grad student Elizabeth Herzfeldt-Kamprath made a beautiful film showcasing the flora and fauna of AU's campus over four seasons. The film was a highlight of this year's April event with AU President Sylvia Burwell, members of the Board of Trustees, and supporters of the AU Arboretum and Gardens.
- National Park Service Fellowship: Through a partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), the fellowship program provides graduate students with the opportunity to produce films for NPS on semester and year-long fellowships. The fellowship's flagship project in 2014-15, the web series *America's Wilderness*, produced a diverse collection of films to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. This year, Robert Boyd, a second-year graduate student, worked with the National Park Service Science Communication Division to create two 5-minute science education videos about the Everglades and the Indiana Dunes National Parks that will be used on their websites and Visitor Centers.
- The Humane Society of the United States: SOC graduate students make short videos to tell compelling stories and help animals at the same time. Last summer, SOC grad student Gaby Krevat created videos for HSUS at their South Florida Wildlife Center. This year, grad student Kathleen Gaeta has been selected to film a team of vets providing services at a Native American pueblo. The Center for Environmental Filmmaking awards a \$500 stipend to these students, and HSUS covers travel and accommodation expenses.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

1. 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 Student Emmys and several CINE Golden Eagles. MPT's Emmy Award-winning executive producer Mike English teaches the class. Last year his students produced a 30-minute film, *Healing Baltimore's Harbor: A Pipe Dream?* that aired on MPT and other PBS stations. It was selected to screen in the DC Environmental Film Festival in March 2018. This year, the class produced "*Anacostia Watershed*" that aired in April 2019 and won the best Environmental Film prize at AU School of Communication's VISION Film Festival in May.

2. **NEW – Sustainable Farming and Filmmaking Course** – created by Professor Larry Engel in collaboration with AU’s Environmental Sciences faculty, this interdisciplinary 3-credit course focuses on sustainable farming and how to communicate the story of this important field through compelling filmmaking. The course takes place at the AU Airlie Farms.
3. **Classroom in the Wild/Chesapeake Bay**: This annual outdoor class 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.
4. **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.
5. **NEW – Classroom in the Wild/Puerto Rico-Isla de la Mona**: Organized by alum Jean-Paul Polo, this extraordinary summer class provides students and the public a one-week, noncredit, immersive course on the remote, pristine island of Isla de la Mona, known as the Galapagos of the Caribbean.

ALUMNI CAREERS AND NEWS

In December 2018, we held a special event bringing together our CEF alums with a program highlighting their films and digital media projects. We have created a list of over 400 CEF alum and launched a newsletter and a listserv so everyone can keep in touch and reach out to each other. Their accomplishments are impressive, from top film awards to significant career paths. There is no doubt that our alum are the new face of National Geographic, or at least it seems that way! We now have students and alum working in Nat Geo’s Global Production division, for Nat Geo Wild, NG Digital Studio, Nat Geo Society’s Media and Storytelling Impact group; and more. Our CEF alum are also working at Discovery, Smithsonian Channel, Public Television, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund, NOAA, NASA, the National Park Service, Pew Research Center, the Smithsonian Museums, and other outstanding organizations. We thank our many mentors who open doors and help launch this next generation of talented, passionate and caring filmmakers.

CEF SCREENINGS, EVENTS & PROGRAMS

1. **Events with Filmmakers** – Speakers this year included filmmakers from National Geographic, the World Wildlife Foundation, NOAA, and other top organizations.

2. **DC Environmental Film Festival:** Every March, the Center creates programs and events that take place in partnership with this growing festival. This year, we created seven programs, with screenings in AU's School of Communication Doyle/Forman theater, now outfitted with a 4K projection system thanks to Sony.
 - a. The world premiere of Professor Larry Engel's "**Who Speaks for Nature**" and Bernardo Ruiz' award-winning feature documentary "**Harvest Season**" about Hispanic workers' contribution to and legacy in Napa Valley wineries. The screenings, filmmakers Q&A and the reception were sponsored by AU Airlie Farms and the AU Office of Sustainability.
 - b. **"The Woman Who Loves Giraffes"** with pioneering biologist Dr. Anne Dagg and her daughter attending, as well as the film's director and producer. A public reception, VIP reception and sold-out screening were sponsored by Howard Hughes Medical Institute Tangled Bank Studio. HHMI/TBS Managing Director Anne Tarrant moderated the panel.
 - c. **Diversity & Impact Workshop; Evening Panel Event** – CEF hosted a two-hour workshop that included eight filmmakers who shared their films and facilitated discussions with local organizations on how to create high-impact films and outreach campaigns in their communities. The evening event included award-winning filmmakers Kalyanee Mam, *A River Changes Course* (winner of the 2013 Sundance World Cinema award); Byron Hurt, *Soul Food Junkie*; Dr. Mireya Mayor, primatologist and National Geographic film presenter; and Vanina Harel, *Vey Nou Lagon*. This thoughtful and provocative evening was moderated by CEF Research Fellow Leah Mahan.
 - d. **Virtual Reality and the Future of Immersive Media** As one of the premiere events of the DC Environmental Film Festival, this event was held at National Geographic's Grosvenor Auditorium that is now outfitted with 450 VR headsets. Panelists include the world-renowned VR producers Max Solomon and Malvina Martin who have produced over 40 VR experiences for National Geographic; the Nat Geo Live VR theater creator and AU/SOC alum Wesley Della Volla; Vanina Harel, a recent alum of CEF who created a VR program on sustainable oceans for middle-schoolers; and Dr. Krzysztof Pietroszek, a professor of Virtual and Augmented Reality at AU's Game Lab. The panel was organized and moderated by CEF by Maggie Burnette Stogner. Over 265 people attended and a lively Q&A session followed.

3. **Eco-Comedy Video Competition:** Six 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. This year, we expanded the competition using the festival hub Film Freeway (www.filmfreeway.com) and received over 250 submissions in four categories

(K-8, High School, College/University, and Non-student). The theme was “climate change”. Awards were announced at the evening event during the DC Environmental Film Festival, with remarks by Caty Chattoo, director of the Center for Media and Social Impact, and CSMI’s comedian-in-residence Bethany Hall as the emcee. Winners in each category received \$500 each and special plaques. To watch the winners and finalists, click [here](#).

The 2020 Eco-Comedy Video Competition theme is Clean Air/Clean Water.

4. **Visions Festival award for Best Environmental Film:** The Center awards an annual cash prize for the best environmental film at the Visions Festival. This year, the Maryland Public TV class film “Anacostia Revealed” won and received an award of \$250.
5. **Environmental Film Youth 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 at AU, and on location at select middle and high schools. Our Environmental Film and Media Arts grad students worked with these young students to guide them and support them with their filmmaking efforts. The Center will continue to support this program.

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION LAB

CEF has launched a new initiative, the SciComm Lab, under the leadership of AU/School of Communication Dean Emeritus Larry Kirkman. (See his bio [here: https://www.american.edu/soc/faculty/larry-kirkman-emeritus-profile.cfm](https://www.american.edu/soc/faculty/larry-kirkman-emeritus-profile.cfm)) Its goal is to produce innovative media for public education and policy advocacy related to critical environmental problems, including climate, water and extinction, where there is conclusive evidence that the consequences of inaction will be profound and irreversible. The Lab will develop, produce and test creative media productions for scientists and citizen-scientists, educators and advocates. We will promote the most effective communication techniques, tools and strategies, tapping into current science communication research to shape our work. The Lab will help build the capacity of individuals and organizations to influence government and corporate policies that should be informed by scientific consensus.

Director Larry Kirkman and grad student Shannon Shikles are co-producing a 15-minute video, *SciComm: Raising our voices for science in public policy*. The project is based on CEF’s coverage of the March for Science movement. The video features dynamic leaders who are behind new efforts to train scientists to more effectively communicate scientific knowledge and to inject that knowledge into politics and policymaking.

In documenting the March for Science in 2017 and 2018, we found an intensity, an urgency, and a desire to communicate the fundamental importance of science to all aspects of our lives. AAAS CEO Rush Holt framed the communication challenge: “clear

and simple is not enough. It has to be meaningful. It has to communicate the science in a way that people feel they can take it in, not just understand it but embrace it and care about it, in other words believe that it is relevant.”

CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP

We continue to grow our leadership and collaborations with a wide range of organizations working on conservation, sustainability, environmental science, policy, and health. These include participating in panels, summits, and professional film and media projects with outreach strategies. We are focusing particularly on opportunities around the upcoming **50-year anniversaries of the EPA, the Clean Air Act and Earth Day**. Together, we are building **ongoing impact and engagement campaigns** to inspire and encourage greater conservation efforts.

1. In April, AU’s Center for Environmental Policy and Environmental Law Center hosted the “Future of Environmental Protection and the EPA” Conference. Over 300 top-level policy-makers, heads of conservation NGOs, experts and leaders attended, including three former EPA directors. Maggie organized and moderated the **“Telling the Story” panel** that included Mustafa Ali, National Wildlife Federation VP of Environmental Justice; Edward Maibach, Director of GMU’s Climate Change Communication Center; Eliza Barclay, Science/Environment/Health Editor at Vox.com; Justine Calma, Grist.Org environmental justice reporter; and, Vann Newkirk, staff writer on environmental racism and justice for The Atlantic. It was a thoughtful, informative and provocative panel that generated a lively Q&A session and discussion afterwards.
2. CEF is working with the American Lung Association and the Center for Environmental Policy to create a **30-minute documentary for the 50-year anniversary of the Clean Air Act**. The film will be shown at a symposium in 2020 and in an ALA outreach campaign across the country.
3. It will be the **50-year anniversary of EARTHDAY in 2020!** Earth Day was originally launched at Airlie Farms, which is now part of American University. CEF is working on **campus-wide initiative** to celebrate and reinforce the goals of Earth Day and to create a series of films, social media, and emerging media for a high-impact “Earth Decade”.

CREATIVE AND SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

We are continuing to research and explore innovative ways to engage today’s increasingly fragmented audiences through new forms of storytelling and technologies.

1. **Social media video campaigns.** In partnerships with the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center, students created concepts for very short videos that work in unison across social media campaigns. The goal is to engage

users of the Shenandoah Wilderness in activities, safety, wildlife and other aspects of this highly-used park.

2. In conjunction with AU/School of Communication's new professor of **Virtual and Augmented Reality**, Professors Maggie Stogner and Larry Engel received a \$25,000 grant to create a volumetric immersive media project. The end product will be development of an immersive experience in nature that allows users to move around as they explore. This is at the forefront of a new wave of immersive technologies that enable people to experience the natural world, archeological sites, and other environments that to which they may not have access.
3. We continue to explore and create, examine and innovate ways to **increase impact and meaning** through our films and digital video. There is a lot of content available today and many different ways to reach different audiences. CEF supports work that is creative and intentional in its ability to have impact, particular media **that is authentic, well-produced, and embodies the values and humanity that will help conserve our planet.**

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Many thanks to School of Communication Dean Jeff Rutenbeck, Film and Media Arts Division Director Prof. Brigid Maher, SOC Staff and the wonderful CEF team for all of their support and contributions.

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, The Nature Conservancy, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Tangled Bank Studio, and National Geographic.

Special thanks to all of you who have supported the Center in so many ways, individually, through mentoring, gifts and other funding. Your contributions are vital to the inspiring and empowering the next generation of environmental filmmakers and supporting environmental and wildlife filmmaking.

To support the Center for Environmental Filmmaking,
contact Maggie Burnette Stogner at stogner@american.edu
or by telephone, 202-885-2160.

www.environmentalfilm.org