

MDOCS

JOHN B. MOORE DOCUMENTARY STUDIES COLLABORATIVE

Spring 2015, 1.11



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A Bi-weekly Newsletter

Summer '15: Storytellers Institute Preview

Participants in 2015's inaugural Storytellers' Institute will engage with documentary and family—a unit integral to the human experience. Whether a family is one we are born into, chose or were chosen for; large or small; gathers weekly, annually or once in a long while; evokes comedy or drama, love or loss... family shapes who we are in past, present and future tenses.

Long before Leo Tolstoy drew back the curtain on the Oblonsky household, observing that "[a]ll happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," stories of family life have offered storytellers of both fact and fiction a lens to interrogate a single case or to demonstrate the workings of an entire society.

Family has been a focus of documentary work from films exploring the "other" (R. Flaherty, *Nanook of the North*, 1922), histories (Y. Welbon, *Missing Relations*, 1994), or crisis (A.

Jarecki, *Capturing the Friedmans*, 2003). The subject is a rich, resonant inspiration for Nicholas Nixon and Sally Mann's photographs, David Sedaris' reflections on childhood, the voices of "This American Life," and *New York Times* multimedia *Mixed Race Family Trees* project (to name a few).

MDOCS is fortunate to host 6 incredible multidisciplinary documentarians—2 Skidmore faculty, and 9 Skidmore students to address this theme in the inaugural institute.

Filmmaker and story collector **Thomas Allen Harris** presents his award-winning film *Through a Lens Darkly* to juxtapose family and media portrayal of African-American families. Pulse of the Planet's **Jim Metzner** brings family stories to life with *The Magic of Sound*.

Producer-in-residence **Yvonne Welbon** joins **Carolyn Macartney**,

Jonna McKone & Evan Roberts in tackling contemporary and historical family drama in word, image and motion. Three affiliate fellows—**Nicky Tavares**, **Adam Tinkle** and summer instructor/filmmaker and scholar **Chris D. Moore**—round out the company.

Documentarian teams **Bernardo Ramírez Ríos** (Anthropology) and **Ele Martínez '18 & Minita Sanghvi** (Management and Business) and **Nathalie Cabrera '17** will tackle stories of Mexican migration and women in politics. Students working in sound, film, & exhibition include: **Matt Barnes '15**, **Jackson Bryant '16**, **Jake De Nicola '15**, **Wilson Espinal '17**, **Brittany Kent '18**, **Evian Pan '17**, & **Natasha Thaler, '17**.

Learn more about the Institute and its storytellers at:

www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/storytellers-institute/

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- **Storytellers' Institute**
- **Chinese Doc**
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Summer 2015 Preview

"Road to Fame" Hao Wu

When 1000 words are not enough

Plus: History Where it Happens! Mapping Saratoga Springs



Putting Saratoga Springs on the Map

Over 200 Saratoga community members of all ages, occupations, and motivations came out for the opening of the “Mapping a City: Saratoga Springs Seen Through 250 years of Maps” exhibition at the Saratoga Springs History Museum on April 14. A major collaboration between MDOCS, Skidmore’s History Department and several Saratoga area community organizations, including the public library, city historian and county historian, the exhibition demonstrates how a project can at once service the needs of our local community, educate Skidmore students, and advance historical research. But, of course, the exhibit also achieved its most important objective: captivate its audience.

Museumgoers are not passive observers strolling through a cold gallery, but active participants in the study of these historic maps. Elongating one’s neck and protruding one’s nose two inches short of



the map is not only common, it is encouraged! Maps can be funny diverse, functioning, and ever changing. As the audience comes to realize how maps change, the exhibit not only tells the story of an evolving Saratoga Springs but how maps themselves help us understand what mattered most to the people or person who made the map in the first place. Ben Polsky, '15



Director’s Note

April has been a busy month, which this final '14-15 issue of the newsletter only touches upon. Storytellers’ Institute planning kicked into high gear, with venues booked and partnerships made for our public events in June. Students wrapped up several exciting projects in exhibition and sound, and found the stories in two ongoing film projects, while MDOCS leaders connected with alumni from NYC to LA.

To find out more, ***please join MDOCS to celebrate the work of student, faculty and staff on April 29 at Skidmore’s Academic Festival presentations (3pm and 6:30 pm) and dinner (5pm) (see p 3 for schedule).*** And stop by in June to see and hear how family matters with members of MDOCS inaugural Storytellers’ Institute.

It’s been an amazing first year – we are looking forward to what summer and fall will bring!

J. Dym



Public Events

“Family”

June 8 & 9

Through a Lens Darkly

6/8, 7 pm, Screening + Q & A

+

Digital Diaspora Road Show

6/9, 8pm, Interactive presentation with audience family stories

with filmmaker

Thomas Allen Harris

Payne Room, Tang Museum

June 15

The Magic of Sound

with audio documentarian

Jim Metzner (Pulse of the Planet)

7 pm, Zankel Music Center

Storytellers’ Institute Presents...

Fridays @ 7pm:

June 5, An evening with:

Yvonne Welbon,

Davis Auditorium

June 12, **Carolyn Macartney,**

Wanda the Wonderful

Davis Auditorium

June 19, **Evan Roberts,**

Arvind, Davis Auditorium

June 26, **Jonna McKone,**

exhibit talk, Case Gallery

www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/storytellers-institute/

Celebrating MDOCS' First Year

at the
Academic Festival
celebrating student work
April 29



3:00-4:20 MDOCS Presents
Senior Center 60th
Docu-Trek
Exhibiting Nepal
Mapping A City

5:00-6:00 Reception/Dinner
LI 113

6:30-8:00 Night of Listening
Wilson Chapel



AM/FM:

Make Your Own Radio Show



- ✧ Use your phone/tablet to record sound
- ✧ Edit using free software
- ✧ Combine inter-views, narration, music & more
- ✧ Bring/develop your radio idea
- ✧ Air your work on WSPN 91.1FM

MONDAY, May 4, 5:30pm, Li 113

Documenting "Fame" in China



Politics. Human rights. One-child policy. The images of China in the public media are very broad and politicized, which hinders how western audiences view the lives of normal people from the republic. We need a candid portraiture to learn more about this country.

Fame, an American musical. Broadway.

At first glance—what can this show tell us about China? Not much, until the context is how the senior class of China's top drama academy came to interpret and express these popular elements in American culture. China-born director Hao Wu brought his feature length documentary film *The Road to Fame* to Skidmore campus in early April to tell this story. As he explained, in making the film, he shadowed the class' theater production from the very beginning, and interviewed Chinese students, teachers and parents to narrate the youthful group's "road to fame." What happened on the road? And, why "Fame"?

Wu's lens zoomed in onto China's frequently discussed one-child policy. The film's narrowed focus on a group of students, separating it from large-scale media portrayals. So instead of taking a stand and continuing to criticize, Wu juxtaposes the Chinese younger generation's dreams and their parents' conventional expectations. Audiences get to hear how Chinese feel about the policy and what it brought to them to understand contemporary China through family stories—biological and theatrical.

Guided by Asian Studies director and professor Benjamin Bogin, Wu visited the Asian Studies Senior Seminar, engaging students who spent most of their academic time learning about China or East Asia, and stopped by MDOCS' Principles of Documentary class. Since the class unit was on doc film, the topic of Wu's visit switched from the subject to the process—the more technical aspect of documentary filmmaking. He brought a video clip originally used to inaugurate conversations with potential funders, and had students suggest strengths and weaknesses, followed by a newly edited clip improving the scenes both he and students agreed was the least effective. From the before to the after, Wu explained, he adjusted the visuals and added previously unused footage to create a stronger and clearer argument. For a documentary filmmaker, he revealed, the same footages can tell two distinctive stories. His lesson was clear: where you place the emphasis and how you use available materials create *your* narrative.



Wu and his *The Road to Fame* initiated a lively conversation on campus. Especially for our student documentarians with bilingual/multicultural backgrounds, Wu's visiting indeed encouraged and inspired us to kick off, telling more cross-cultural stories.

- Yiyun "Evian" Pan, '17

Behind the Scenes



Mapping A City: Saratoga Springs through 250 Years of Maps student contributors & exhibition space, April 14.



Matt Barnes interview at the Slate Museum's History Where it Happens event, Barnes & Noble, Wilton, March 28. Adam Tinkle & community member at Make Your Own Radio Show workshop, April 4. Photos J. Dym.

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