

MDOCS

JOHN B. MOORE DOCUMENTARY STUDIES COLLABORATIVE



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News of Note

Director's Note - November, 2015

Much to be thankful for...

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SSMP Highlight - Jane Kjaer: Lucy Scribner Exhibit

Jane describes the process of curating the "Lucy Scribner's Gift" exhibit.

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Doc on Campus - Jesse Flower-Ambroch: Exploring the power of creativity and sound

An ear-opening experience with sound designer Jesse Flower-Ambroch encourages audiences and documentarians not to overlook the importance of sound effects in films.

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Hands-On Off Campus - Jay Craven: Movies from Marlboro

Emily Rizzo sat down with award-winning director, writer and producer Jay Craven, to talk about his program Movies from Marlboro.

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Documenting Travel - Dorothea Trufelman: A Photographic Journey Through Cuba

From January to May 2015, I traveled to Cuba with NYU Tisch's School of the Arts on a photography intensive semester and studied at the Ludwig Foundation in the heart of Havana.

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Doc on Campus - Filmmaker Chip Duncan

On October 21, filmmaker, writer, and photographer Chip Duncan visited Nicky Tavares' Documentary Film class.

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MDOCS Welcomes: Jesse Wakeman

Brand new to the Skidmore world, Jesse Wakeman has found her home as MDOCS' Program Coordinator.

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Upcoming

Events

[Get details and the whole listing on the MDOCS website.](#)

December 2, (t)error with director David Felix Sutcliffe
7pm, Somers Screening Room in the Tang Museum

Storytellers' Institute Summer 2016 Applications Open

The theme for Summer 2016's MDOCS Storytellers' Institute is "fact and fiction."

- [Fellows applications](#) are due on January 1, 2016
- [Skidmore Student Fellow applications](#) are due on January 25, 2016
- Info Session, 12/8, 5:30 pm, LI 113

MDOCS Spring 2016 Classes

In Spring '16 MDOCS will offer a range of skill-up 1-credit workshops and project courses.



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Director's Note - November, 2015

November 19, 2015

It is a time for giving thanks and MDOCS has much to be grateful for as the end of the semester draws close.

On campus, MDOCS welcomed **Jesse Wakeman**, a graduate of Ithaca College's Roy H. Park School of Communications as Program Coordinator and experienced media expert. She's already bringing a professional touch and friendly support to everything MDOCS -- look for her on campus!



Wakeman documenting the Bil Daniel pop-up exhibit

Space and time are proving no barrier to documentary community. In October, MDOCS hosted a mini-residency with alum **Jesse Flower-Ambroch '06** who connected with documentary students interested in adding sound effects to film and Religious Studies students demonstrating sound meditation. The campus learned about founder Lucy Scribner's silver, now part of Special Collections, from an exhibit researched and presented by **Jane Kjaer**, and **Dorothea Trufleman '16** offered a long-term visitor's view of Cuba in photographs taken during a spring semester spent in a photography program in Havana. Filmmaker **Chip Duncan** stopped in to talk about his upcoming projects. We'll have more on November's newsletter about a busy month with students completing a documentary film and exhibit project for the Adult & Senior Center of Saratoga, our hosting of multi-media artist Bill Daniel, documentarian filmmakers on campus, and more.

Enrollment for **spring semester** courses in documentary arts and skills is strong – look for some additions over the next few weeks. Planning is also underway for spring events with a focus on the business and ethics of documentary work – in collaboration with Media and Film Studies and professionals on and off campus.

From the Director's perch, I'm particularly grateful to have spent a fruitful weekend in North Carolina at the [forum](#) celebrating the [first 25 years](#) of Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies (highlights: [here](#)), a pioneer in developing a program that connects practitioners of the documentary arts, students, and community partners in a common pursuit of telling stories that matter and using

them to foster change locally, nationally, and internationally. As CDS Director Wesley Hogan emphasized in her introductory remarks, documentary relies on fieldwork, attention to ethics, and aesthetics to create compelling stories. That combination was on display in film, photography, audio and multi-media works and remarks offered by a host of rising and established practitioners whose commitment to changing the world, one story at a time, was inspiring. Hearing about the importance of research, archive, persistence and imagination to take a project from idea to public impact drove home the thread binding storytellers working in different media.

But we're not done yet! MDOCS wraps up the semester with a networking night for students and area documentarians and arts community organizations on December 11. And please join us on **December 2** a screening of Sundance breakout first feature of 2014, **(T)error with co-director David Felix Sutcliffe**, at the Tang's Somers Screening Room. While in the Tang Museum, stop in and visit the exhibit "No Place to Hide" to see how artists grapple with surveillance in contemporary American society, as well as a map of surveillance cameras in town as mapped by students in a first year seminar of the same name.

Happy Thanksgiving and see you in December,
J. Dym

Skidmore-Saratoga Memory Project Update

Documenting Lucy Scribner's Silver with Jane Kjaer

November 19, 2015 by Rebecca Stern '16

Tea time traditions on campus? Last spring, Skidmore College's Scribner Library Special Collections received a "cartload" of boxes holding Lucy Scribner's household items, including porcelain and silverware collections. Under the care of Special Collections assistant Jane (Yana) Kjaer, the items were displayed in the Scribner Library this summer. The exhibit "Lucy Scribner's Gift," gave context to each item, which is explained more in this clip from SSMP's extended interview with Jane.



Hear more about the process of creating the exhibit and the items it includes in this audio clip:
<http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/JaneKjaer-LucyScribner-Clip1.mp3>



While researching Lucy Scribner's history for this exhibit, Jane used extensively Helen and David Porter's books. Through these resources she was able to read transcriptions of Lucy's diaries to get a sense of who she was. **Learn more about Lucy Scribner's lifestyle.** Listen to audio clip:
<http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/JaneKjaer-LucyScribner-Clip2.mp3>

To the left: Jane Kjaer and small exhibit (outside Special Collections).

Documentary Mini-Residency: Jesse Flower-Ambroch, creativity, sound and film

November 19, 2015

MDOCS hosted Skidmore alum Jesse Flower-Ambroch '06 October 22-24 for a mini residency on Sound Design for Film. Flower-Ambroch led a sound meditation, offered critiques and advice to students in Adam Tinkle's Intro to Audio Doc class, visited Eliza Kent's Hindu Myth class (Religious Studies), and led a workshop on Foley sound effects for film. Rebecca Stern, '16, introduces Flower-Ambroch's [adventures in sound](#) and Foley workshop participant Emily Rizzo, '18, reports on the workshop as an [ear-opening experience](#).

Adventures in sound...with Jesse Flower-Ambroch, '06 by Rebecca Stern



Sound Meditation set up, Wilson Chapel

When Jesse Flower-Ambroch discusses his work he stresses how important collaboration is. As a sound designer and sound mixer who has his own production studio in New York City, he contributes just one piece to the many layers that make up a motion picture. Jesse knew he always had a connection to sound, and in 2002 came to Skidmore College as a freshman with a guitar. He flirted with various academic departments, but circled back to declaring a music major. Jesse felt unrestricted by his major and integrated his sound knowledge with other mediums at Skidmore such as theatre and art. In the spirit of collaboration, after graduating in 2006, he worked for various music and theatre clubs and wound up working on a film set after meeting a "sound guy." His only previous experience with film was with his thesis where he stripped and redid the sound palette for an archival video.

Since then, Jesse has worked on various projects such as *Jodorowsky's Dune*, *Shut Up and Play the Hits*, and *Knicks Poetry Slam*, for which he received an Emmy-award nomination. Jesse's work has taken him from the ocean on a boat for weeks on end to AA meetings, to the Congo, where he meets "people you'd never get a chance to meet, random people, with different perspectives on life and different stories." For Jesse, sound is a transient medium that can tell and enhance any story or experience.

In his sound travels, Jesse has found himself attracted to the mental and physical benefits of sound meditation. A trained practitioner, Jesse leads sound meditations for anyone from small groups of friends in his New York City apartment to large corporate teams and public gatherings. We were lucky enough to have him guide us on a session in Wilson Chapel.



Jesse working one-on-one with students in Adam Tinkle's *Intro to Audio* class.

The creation of Foley... by Emily Rizzo, '18

Jesse Flower-Ambroch's workshop, "Art of Sound Effect for Film," taught me about the hidden intricacies and challenges of creating the sound effects that provide depth and realism to moving images. In the beginning of the workshop, Jesse showed a clip from a film. It was then our job as participants to add the subtle sound effects that were missing. I had trouble imagining what kind of sounds we could add to this seemingly stagnant moment. The scene was of a man sitting on a living room chair, having a conversation with a woman sitting across from him. But then Jesse pointed out the man's hand. His fingers were moving up and down, softly grazing the top of the armrest of the chair. In reality, this would create a diluted tapping sound.

Jesse proceeded to roam around the room and tap on all the different hard surfaces. This live reproduction of everyday sounds to create sound effects is called "Foley." We had to find something that would match the sound of an old wooden chair. I listened closely to each tap, shaking my head after each one. None of the surfaces were quite right. For example, a tap on the table in front of me sounded much harsher and shallower than taps on a wooden chair would be. The more and more we failed, the more I realized how creative and spontaneous this job of producing sound effects for film really is. It requires you to separate the visual from the audio, to allow yourself to view an object as one thing but imagine its potential to represent something completely different through sound. When we didn't find anything that fit the sound of the armchair, Jesse dashed out of the room. Moments later he wheeled in a portable bookshelf, knocked on it, and I knew he had found what our ears had been searching for.



Jesse Flower-Ambroch guides Julianna Quiroz in adding sound effects to a scene.

The difference between not having any sound effects and hearing the sound of the man's fingers on the rich wood was drastic. When we recorded and added this soft tapping noise to the scene, the scene felt more real. This realness provided by the sound effects is what I believe all of us, as audience members, underestimate. I felt less like an observer and more like I was actually there. The sound effects are essential in order to feel transported to a different time or place.

Hands-on off-campus: Movies from Marlboro

November 19, 2015 interviewed by Emily Rizzo, '18



Emily Rizzo sat down with award-winning director, writer and producer Jay Craven, to talk about his program *Movies from Marlboro*, a semester-long off-campus study opportunity for college students. The semester includes film classes, workshops, visiting artists, and the production of a professional feature film.

What is Movies from Marlboro?

Craven talks about the details of the Movies from Marlboro study abroad experience, such as the goals and ideals of the program.

Listen to audio clip: <http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/11-19-20-movies-from-marlboro-what.wav>

Student Experiences

Craven tells stories of students' experiences with Movies from Marlboro.

Listen to audio clip: <http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/1-19-20-movies-from-marlboro-student.wav>

How to get involved

Craven explains how to get involved with Movies from Marlboro, including how to apply and what he looks for in a student.

Listen to audio clip: <http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/1-19-20-movies-from-marlboro-get-involved.wav>

Dorothea Trufelman: A Photographic Journey Through Cuba

November 19, 2015 interviewed by Rebecca Stern, '16

"My teacher is a native Cuban, Adrian Fernandez, and he instructed four of us to choose various photo projects based on broad themes. So our first one, I believe it was, "Event." It was tough to be plopped in the middle of a country where you didn't know anything, you didn't know anyone, I hardly spoke the language..."



Untitled - Havana, Cuba (photo by Dorothea Trufelman)

Listen to audio clip about this photo: <http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/DorotheaCuba2-Event.mp3>



Untitled - Havana, Cuba (photo by Dorothea Trufelman)

Listen to audio clip about this photo: <http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/DorotheaCuba3.mp3>



Untitled - Havana, Cuba (photo by Dorothea Trufelman)

Listen to audio clip about this photo: <http://www.skidmore.edu/mdocs/news/2015/audio/DorotheaCuba-Landscape.mp3>

In October, Dorothea presented photographic work produced during her semester in Cuba in Case Gallery, Skidmore College.

Doc on Campus: Filmmaker Chip Duncan

November 1, 2015 by Sara Marsh, '18

On October 21, Chip Duncan moderated a discussion with Senator George Mitchell in the evening. Earlier in the day, he stopped in to Nicky Tavares' Introduction to Documentary Filmmaking class to talk about his company and newest projects.

Chip is the president of the [Duncan Entertainment Group](#), a documentary production company formed in 1984. The group produces non-fiction content for television and other digital media platforms, as well as films for educational use. Projects include the films *The Reagan Presidency*, *Landslide -- A Portrait of President Herbert Hoover*, and *Row Your Boat*, a drama featuring Jon Bon Jovi.

In an hour-long conversation Chip talked about his career as a documentary filmmaker and two of his recent projects, a personal story and a more research-driven film. Currently, Chip is screening a short documentary titled [The Sound Man](#), which features Kenyan audio journalist Abdul Ramadhan. The film covers Abdul's life in Africa's largest slum, Kibera. Chip discussed the difficulties of creating the film and the impact of specific choices he had to make during production of a film based on a bilingual character.

One of the biggest obstacles Chip had to overcome while creating *The Sound Man* was the language barrier between Abdul and himself. In interviews, Abdul's full story did not emerge when conversation was in English, and he was unable to connect emotionally to the issues he was discussing. Ultimately, Chip described making the choice to conduct an interview in Swahili instead, which completely transformed Abdul as a subject – he was able to speak freely and fully express the horrors he witnessed during his life in Kibera. However, getting the emotion by working in Swahili had consequences. By changing the language of the interviews, Chip described how he may have lost the possibility of an American market – as he noted, "Americans hate subtitles." This story revealed how a crucial creative choice potentially sacrificed both publicity and finances for the sake of the integrity of his film.



Chip Duncan, Producer/Director/Writer/Editor on *The Sound Man*, screening clips for Nicky Tavares' class.

Chip showed a trailer from a current project being filmed at Mayo Medical School in Minnesota that will examine Mayo's medical students' journeys as they complete their first dissection of the human body. Though the film is still in its early stages, Chip described how the footage and interviews have directed him towards a possible storytelling focus on the lives of a few students' experiences with their "first patients." He noted how this film had different challenges. Before beginning this project, Chip had to get permission from the school, the students, and the donor families, a process which took a long time. Despite this tedious procedure, Chip stressed the importance of covering one's bases before making a film. Had Chip not asked the donor families for permission to film their deceased family members, for example, he may not have been able to use any footage of the cadavers. The documentary story building process was also an important point; with much but not all filming complete, Chip described how he is not sure how he will weave the different components of his film together, yet he hopes to feature it on either Showtime or Netflix.

Chip is a great example of a filmmaker who combines both business and creativity into his practice. He is both prolific and successful, and showed students just how many different choices go into creating a film. For more information on Chip, [visit his website](#).

MDOCS Welcomes: Jesse Wakeman

November 19, 2015

Brand new to Skidmore, Jesse Wakeman has found her home as MDOCS' Program Coordinator. No stranger to the world of documentary film, Jesse is also a social media wizard who's here to help students bridge the gap between their storytelling goals and their means to achieve them.

Jesse sat down with MDOCS Student Rep. Sam Grant ('18) to discuss her transition to Skidmore, her hopes for the program, and her passion for well-dressed elderly women.



I'm sure I speak for the whole MDOCS program when I say 'We're really happy to have you here.' Transitioning into Skidmore life can definitely be overwhelming, how are you adjusting?

Weirdly enough, I actually feel really calm. I came at a really good time, because their Storytellers' Institute is in June, and I have plenty of time to prepare. I feel like there are already a plenty of events on the table, I'm just sort of filling in the blanks right now. I'm helping out wherever is needed, and timing-wise, I've been brought on at a really great point. Because we're still developing plans for Storytellers', I feel I can still be a really integral part of what that's going to look like, what guests we're going to bring, and other things like that. It's all really exciting to me.

Storytellers' Institute 2016 is still in the works, as are the Media and Film Studies minor . How are you hoping to contribute to their growth?

Media & Film Studies is an independent minor. As Program Coordinator for MDOCS, I'm collaborating with both the Minor and Visual Literacy Forum through the [Project Vis](#) Mellon-funded initiative, as we are all contributing to greater media literacy on campus. There's definitely *some* cross promotion already happening, and it's great that we can find ways for even *more* collaboration there. In terms of Storytellers', I'll be sitting in one some marketing meetings. We'll be doing some advertising, hopefully working on some TV commercials, some spots with local programming, things like that. More community outreach, definitely. And then just in terms of students, I think that for the next month or so, our social media push is going to be boosted a lot. I'm a big Facebook user, and I know Jordana really likes Twitter, so we kind of work well in that sense, that we can tackle both of those platforms. For me, I think our Facebook page is missing more information about our programs *while they're* here. We're good at promoting ahead of time, but in terms of what's going on right now, it's helpful to see something in your feed that says like "oh, this is happening in Davis soon, I have 5 minutes to get there, I'll go check it out."

That definitely sounds like it would streamline our event planning! Social Media is one of your strong suits. Do you have any advice for students who may be trying to apply their knowledge of social media to their professional lives?

I think what's tricky is communicating your own authentic voice. I think that's the most powerful way to spread a message, though, using your own unique, authentic story. Applying that to social media is key; I think it's ok to take a more personal approach with your posts. You don't always have to sound perfect and professional. That's what people connect to, otherwise they feel like they're being preached to, or that it's an advertisement, or something like that. Social media is a space where you can have a bit more fun. There's definitely a balance to keep in mind, though. We don't want TMI.

When it comes to the students, have you noticed any trends with Skid students that may be different from students you've encountered in the past?

This is my first time working in an educational institution, so mostly I've been applying my own personal college experience. I like to say I'm a recent graduate, but I'm now looking at 6 years because I graduated (from Ithaca) in '09. I also went to a liberal arts college that prioritized a well-rounded education in different fields. Skidmore sort of reminded me of that. It's also a very community-driven campus here, which helped reinforce the idea that this is your living space. It's your bubble. I'm still getting to know the students, and that'll be a big part of the next few months, you know, both working with the students who are already collaborating with us (in MDOCS) as well as new students who want to get involved. It would also be great to get in touch with students who are attached to certain clubs, because some really great connections could potentially happen there. We need to make sure that everyone knows not just MDOCS exists, but how they can get involved. Once students start finishing some of these projects they're working on, those are going to serve as examples for people to start seeing what MDOCS is about, and what they can bring to the table.



As far as projects go, have you worked on any independent pieces in recent years? Is there anything doc-related you'd like to accomplish on your own this year?

The last five years, I've been working under a director. So, at the end of the day, it's her ideas that get chosen. As the editor and production manager, my role is to support that idea, and to make it better and stronger in any way I can. So because I've been functioning in that position for so long, I'm definitely starting to shift my focus a bit more. In terms of outside projects, there's so much inspiration I can take from here on campus that I hope will find its way into my own ideas and projects. I do some volunteer work with animal shelters, and that's an area that I'm personally really interested in. I worked with one in Berkley where I would basically take special case animals that were in need of really specific adoption circumstances, and I would make a film for them to help promote their adoption. That's something I do on a personal level, for me. In college I mostly worked on social issue documentaries, so I'd love to tap back into that. I miss those a lot. And I actually pulled a few out of my closet as I was getting packed up and ready to move, and I realized that sadly the DVDs are starting to become pixelated and distorted, so I've got to find the raw files again, so I can watch them. Just thinking about that footage reminds me how much I love those films. It's really sad that the technology I was using six years ago is degrading.

It sounds like you tend to lean towards film documentary, would it be safe to say that's your favorite medium of doc?

Yeah, I would say so. I'd say it's what I'm most comfortable in. It's what I've worked with the most, so I understand that industry, and I went to college to study it, so I'm trained on the equipment, and that kind of stuff. But at the same time, I am looking to really explore podcasts and audio doc too. I find that in my personal time, that's what I'm doing more of at the moment. I am really into documentary film, and in the past, I would watch typically one a week if not more. But now I find that because I'm driving a lot, I'm actually listening to audio docs more. I'm excited to tap into that and see what comes of it. I'm a very visual person, so I'm not sure if it would work for me, but I do think that audio is just as powerful, and I'd love to take on that challenge.

With all that time in the car, is there anything in particular you're listening to right now?

A lot of the typical audio choices, like *This American Life*, *Radio Lab*, *Invisibilia*...lots of NPR usually.

How about film, what was the last documentary you saw?

I tried to watch 30 (documentary) films in 30 days over the summer, so I think the one I left off on was this one (called *Advanced Style*) about these older women, mostly in their 70s or older, who are fashion icons living in New York City. So the film follows I think four or five of them, and they're all retired, and they each have a certain really interesting fashion item they're known for. The characters in this film are just hysterical, and the lasting message is basically just to live it up until the end. I love films that prove that documentaries don't have to be sad and depressing. It can be difficult to find examples that are positive and uplifting, but storytelling doesn't always have to be that way. Of course those types of stories have their place too, but I think being able to talk about happiness is a great thing to be able to put out into the media.

Absolutely! From the little time we've spent together, I'd say you're definitely very easy to talk to. You're a great resource for students to connect with the MDOCS program, how do you feel being the one to bridge that gap?

I love that idea; I would love to be kind of like the MDOCS Ambassador. I feel like I can definitely reach out to students. At my last job, I was in charge of talking to our interns, so they were sort of my little team. We did a lot of projects together and worked really closely, so I've gotten used to working with people that are college-aged. I like to think I can be someone you guys can come to, and be a resource for. I think that's the part of the job that excites me the most: being able to be there for you guys to help tell your stories.

Looking for new docs to check out? In addition to the ones she mentioned in the interview, Jesse also recommends *This is Life with Lisa Ling*. [Watch it here](#).

Want to find out more? Have an idea to share or project to grow? You can reach Jesse at [jwakeman\(@\)skidmore.edu](mailto:jwakeman(@)skidmore.edu).