Center for Documentary Production and Study

881 Narrows Run Road
Moon Township, PA 15108

CONTACT

Documentary Center
412.269.4885
documentary@rmu.edu

Jim Seguin, Ph.D.
412.262.8469
seguin@rmu.edu
Stemming from our recent success with the student documentary, “America Talks,” Robert Morris University is expanding our applied research and outreach programs by opening the Center for Documentary Production and Study. The Center is the third applied research center at Robert Morris.

The Documentary Center is dedicated to the advancement of documentary work completed on video, film, and digital media. The Center will encourage and oversee student-produced documentary productions, provide screenings of well-known documentaries, become a link among professionals, encourage research, and contribute to the understanding of the history and role of documentary production in society. In addition, the Center will draw upon Robert Morris University’s strengths in business and communications by making available to students the expertise in business, graphics, and web design. The Center opened June 1st and is headquartered in the Academic Media Center at Robert Morris University’s Moon Township campus.

Our vision for the future includes assisting the communications department in developing course work and certificate programs in documentary studies, establishing a visiting professor program and links with other colleges and universities.
James Seguin

Biography

James Seguin, Ph.D., is Director of the Center for Documentary Production and Study, Director of the Academic Media Center, and Professor of Communications at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh. Dr. Seguin has written two books: Media Career Guide: Preparing for Jobs in the 21st Century (2001) and Business Communications: the Real World, and Your Career (1999). In 1999, he was awarded a Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters Fellowship for his book. Dr. Seguin's international work includes writing and producing a variety of educational videos for Russian audiences. In addition, he has participated in an international project conducting seminars for Russian television and video producers including a fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Seguin is also President of Creative Videos, Inc. and has produced over twenty awards for his television and video productions. In April 2002, his documentary America Talks was featured on the CBS Early Show and aired on WQED-TV (PBS) in Pittsburgh.
IT ALL STARTED WHEN...

As many Americans were glued to their television sets on September 11, watching the unbelievable and horrific events taking place, one Robert Morris University professor was devising a plan of action.

One day after the fall of the World Trade Center towers, the crash into the Pentagon, and the crash in Shanksville, PA, Dr. James Seguin entered his Television Production II classroom with a new and challenging project of going out, talking to the world, and documenting its reaction. The course syllabus was thrown out, and the classroom direction was changed. Adapting to the new focus, students readily accepted this challenge and began talking to various people in many different communities and high schools.

The students participated in a real-life media crisis when they traveled to the three sites of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in order to produce the 45-minute documentary entitled, “America Talks.”

The documentary captured the sentiments of the country and the feelings of several American residents after the terror attacks on our homeland. Some, using a camera and shooting footage for the first time, quickly learned field production techniques and practices when thrown into the real-life drama unfolding before them.

What first started as a class project for 15 students quickly developed into a genuine learning experience for 25 students. The initial filming occurred at the Blood Bank in Moon Township, PA, and by September 15, two student crews were at the gates of the White House interviewing people from all over America. Back home, students continued their interviews around Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, talking with individuals waiting in line to give blood, stranded passengers at the Pittsburgh International Airport, high school students and teachers at Shaler, retirees playing bingo at the Kennedy Township Firehall, and college students hanging out between classes. By early October, two more student crews traveled the subways and streets of New York City where the anger and bitterness was still apparent after five weeks. Students were even able to get inside of Ground Zero to see the massive destruction.

In all, the production of this documentary included 25 days of field and studio production and more than 40 days of editing. After receiving a myriad of praise from the community, “America Talks” became the initial steppingstone on the path to the Documentary Center.
Sept. 11 documentary spurs launch of film center

By Mary Mackrell
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

A strong spark from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center has ignited plans at Robert Morris University to launch a 14-month certificate program in documentary filmmaking.

The Center for Documentary Production and Study at Robert Morris University plans to launch this week with plans to become a resource for area filmmakers, a teaching tool for students and a base for the community.

With the World Trade Center in ruins, images from the attack need to be preserved for future generations. Robert Morris students are asked to frame their images of the attacks.

“America Talks,” a 10-minute video that features interviews conducted at the attack sites and their impact on the world, was one of the first projects showcased on the film center.

The center is hoping to attract filmmakers to the area.

Robert Morris students visited Shanksville, Somerset County, for this scene from “America Talks.”

9/11 documentary impetus for film center

FILM FROM PAGE C-1

documentary filmmakers to show their work and have screenings. It might also be possible to have them do workshops for students about shooting, producing and editing.

He suggested the center could sponsor a yearly documentary festival open to all filmmakers in the region.

“We want to expose people to documentary work, its role in society and what it accomplishes,” Seguin said. “It would be a benefit not just for the school but also for the community.

“Another thing I’d like to see — we’re a business school from way back. I want to draw from that and have people understand the business end of filmmaking.”

He hopes the center could turn out one or two student-produced documentaries a year, with innovative and cost-effective equipment — miniature digital video cameras and laptop computers used for editing.

But he knows from the “America Talks” experience that student-produced documentaries require a lot of mentoring in both the editing and the story-telling phase.

Seguin foresees working with other local institutions, including museums, schools, public broadcasting stations and Pittsburgh Filmmakers, which also teaches film and video production from its headquarters in Oakland.

Charlie Humphrey, Filmmakers' president, doesn’t see the new venture as competition for his operation.

“It sounds like a great thing for Pittsburgh,” he said. “Documentary work is really kind of an adjunct to journalism. That’s not an approach we focus on. The way they are organized is different from our sensibility.”

He’d be more than willing to work with Seguin, whom he knows from their days at WQED-TV.

“I’d do anything with Jim Seguin. I have great respect for him. He’s the right guy.”
After the tremendous response Dr. James Seguin and his Television Production class received from their "America Talks" documentary, many asked "What's next?" Three of Seguin's students, Kristin Brown, Ron Norton and Bart McClelland, decided they wanted to do an independent study and expand on "America Talks," but yield different responses. They began to brainstorm. The result was a proposal to go overseas and gain an international perspective on the 9/11 terrorist attacks and U.S. policies. On Feb. 28, 2002, thanks to a grant they received from the University, Seguin and his three students flew to London and Ireland to begin their amazing journey.

The group's first stop was London, where they spent four days filming many different people and events. They conducted street interviews as well as set-up interviews, talking with people such as the Chief Inspector of Police in London. They attended and filmed an anti-war demonstration in Trafalgar Square. Seguin said, "It was a huge event with speakers from all over the world." For reactions, they went to Speaker's Square, a famous place where every Sunday morning people gather and speak about important issues. Most who spoke had a lot to say about religion. Once they realized Americans were present, they began to speak about the events taking place in Afghanistan and about our government.

The group then went to the American Intercontinental University, where they interviewed students and professors regarding their feelings about the terrorist attacks and U.S. policy. Throughout the interviews, the group found a lot of anti-American sentiments expressed and many people in London were not supportive of America.

For the second part of the documentary, Seguin and his group went to Dublin, Ireland. They were met by Professor James Vincent, who acted as their guide and helped them set-up interviews. Vincent took the group to The James Joyce Center, Trinity College, and many other places. With the help of Ms. Patricia Rooney, a member of the RMU Board of Trustees, the group was able to talk with a representative from NFL Europe as well as other contacts.

The response in Ireland was a little different. Perhaps due to the fact that the war is not as widely publicized in the media there as it is in London, there was a mixed reaction from the Irish people. Most seemed to agree with what America was doing and were deeply saddened by the terrorist attacks. "There definitely was a much friendlier atmosphere in Ireland," said Brown. "The people kept referring to the United States as their American friends or American cousins." Roughly half of the people interviewed said they have relatives who live in New York.

Overall, the crew shot 13 hours of tape. Brown, Norton and McClelland are now editing the documentary. Completion for viewing will be in July. This documentary, entitled Beyond Our Shadow, will be roughly 30 minutes in length. The students hope it will make people think about what it means to be an American.

"Hearing what people over there had to say about American democracy was a great educational experience. It was a fabulous, incredible adventure every day." - James Seguin
Robert Morris opens new center to create, study documentaries

Robert Morris University

Everybody has a story to tell, and Robert Morris University students now will have the resources to find and document the stories of Pennsylvanians.

Today marks the dedication and opening of the university's Center for Documentary Production and Study, created solely to produce life documentaries.

James Seguin, head of the Robert Morris communications department, and three media production majors will direct the center, which will be dedicated to the advancement of documentary work on video, film and digital media. The center will be based in the Student Center on the university's Moon Township campus and have a studio catering solely to the filming and editing of student-produced documentaries.

Seguin said the university probably wouldn't be opening such a center if not for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The attacks led to two highly successful student-produced documentaries. The first documentary, called "America Talks," documented American reaction to the attacks and was broadcast on "The Early Show" on CBS and on PBS. For the other, called "Picture of No Return," three students traveled to London and Dublin in February to get overseas reactions to the terrorist attacks.

"Since 9-11, a window has opened up," Seguin said. "People are more interested in serious subjects and are asking serious questions they want answers to. I don't think that before 9-11 I would have ever invested myself in this, because I didn't think there was a great interest.

"What you see college students coming in today, they come in drenched in the MTV-style, standard type of media. Doing documentaries widens their horizons. There is so much learning in doing documentaries. They can change someone's life," he said.

Scott Hand, 21, of Imperial in Findlay Township, said the center is exactly what the university needed.

"We needed a center that solely focused on seeing the conclusion of documentary production," said Hand, who is majoring both in communications education and English education.

Hand, who will graduate in December, said documentaries allow people another side of themselves.

"Documentaries tell the human side of stories, rather than just the usual news. They bring people closer to their emotions. They will see real life as it exists through other people's eyes," Hand said.

Robert Morris has 380 communication majors, including about 150 majoring in media production — the major from which the center is pulling, Seguin said. Soon classes could be offered in creating documentaries, he said.

Seguin said there is "no real job market" for doing documentaries, other than filmmaking — but he hopes the center will help change that.

Within two years, Seguin plans to hold documentary festivals to display local and national films.
WHAT’S ON TAP @ THE DOC. CENTER

As the student involvement, sponsorship, and interest in the Documentary Center grows, production ideas continue to develop. Our next project will take us in a completely different direction. This project will explore “The Quest For The Slam Dunk.” With an ambitious attitude and outstanding on-court talent, Sylvia Crawley of the WNBA’s Portland Fire will guide this new production on the journey of the modern American woman pursuing an athletic career. This production will look at the fascination and allure Americans attribute to the slam dunk. The slam dunk is an icon in basketball and a staple of the game. The magical dunk has never been accomplished in the WNBA; Sylvia Crawley stands out as the one who could break the slam dunk barrier.

Shooting on this production began with a trip to Portland on June 20th. On this trip, the crew recorded interviews with Sylvia and also taped the game where the Portland Fire played the Houston Comets. This game held high stakes. At the important game, Crawley met the Comet’s Michelle Snow on the court. Snow is the other contender for the first slam dunk. The two titans of the WNBA had their showdown and competed face-to-face -- both seeking that first dunk.

This will be the story of a woman athlete, a woman who embodies athletic talent coupled with dedication and sophistication. The Sylvia Crawley story will encapsulate the contemporary woman achieving her dreams and striving to meet her goals. Viewers of the documentary will be able to relate to her life experiences because of her dedication and the pursuit of her goals which are profoundly inspirational.

About Sylvia Crawley:
(courtesy: www.sylviacrawley.com)

Sylvia's accomplishments paint a vivid picture of determination. Each time she steps on the court excitement permeates the air. This on-court aura extends off court, where Sylvia excelled in her studies during college. Acquiring a double degree from the University of North Carolina, where she majored in communications and Radio and Television, has enabled Sylvia to become an effective leader and communicator.

As a coach, Sylvia has learned very quickly that leadership and communication are more than just screaming at your players. Scouting reports, video clips of other teams, as well as grading sheets and updating teammates on their progress are all part of the job. It takes hours to put these things together, but Sylvia understands that it helps players become better students of the game. Pushing her players to the limit has also helped her isolate her own weaknesses and improve her on court abilities.

As a player, pushing herself to the limit makes her game flourish. Her jumping ability, weight-lifting regime, and intent focus have enabled her to rise to the next level in her athletic abilities. Getting psyched up before a game is just the beginning! Setting routines before every game grounds Sylvia and focus her performance on making clutch plays. Crawley, 28, is a six foot five center who averaged 11.5 points and 6.0 rebounds for the Fire last season.

Having a strong work ethic on and off court sets examples for young women who desire to be the best.

Sylvia’s Stats

Center, Portland Fire.
Averages for 2000: 30 minutes, 11.5 points, and 6 rebounds per game, with a field-goal percentage of .480 and a free-throw of .696.

- Height: 6’5”
- Weight: 160
- DOB: Sep 27, 1972
- Sign: Libra
- Shoe Size: 12
- Favorite types of music: R&B, Gospel, Jazz
- Favorite Musicians: Li’l Mo
- Favorite Foods: sweet potato pie, peach cobbler, turkey, ham, greens
- Favorite Movie: Color Purple
- Favorite flavor ice cream: pralines and cream
- Most memorable experience: blindfolded slam dunk/graduating from college
- How many brothers and sisters?: Brother Rex(36) and Helen(38)
Screen Captures
from the Portland Shoot

Center for Documentary Production and Study

ROBERT MORRIS UNIVERSITY