

MSU INVESTMENT PROPOSAL FOR INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

Title	Sustainable Funding Plan for the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking	Request Date	12/21/2011
Department	School of Film and Photography	Email	rfarnold@montana.edu
Requestor	Dennis Aig/Robert Arnold	Phone	406-994-7588

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Core Themes and Objectives (check all that apply)

Educate Students

- Our graduates will have achieved mastery in their major disciplines
- Our graduates will become active citizens and leaders
- Our graduates will have a multicultural and global perspective
- Our graduates will understand the ways that knowledge & art are created and applied in a variety of disciplines
- Our graduates are prepared for careers in their field
- We will provide increased access to our educational programs
- Communities and external stake holders benefit from broadly defined education partnerships with MSU

Create Knowledge and Art

- Students, faculty, and staff will create knowledge and art that is communicated widely

Serve Communities

- We help meet a fundamental need of the citizens of Montana by providing degree programs for our students
- We help meet the educational needs of the citizens of Montana by providing a wide range of educational opportunities to a variety of students
- Our students, faculty, staff, and administrators reach out to engage and serve communities
- Our students, faculty, staff, and administrator reach in to build the university community

Integrate Learning, Discovery, and Engagement

- Each graduate will have had experiences that integrate learning, discovery and engagement
- Outreach activities will educate students and address the needs of the communities we serve
- Students, faculty, and staff will create knowledge and art that addresses societal needs
- MSU is a community that will be characterized by synergy within and across disciplines, roles and functions.

Stewardship

- The public trusts the institution to operate openly and use resources wisely
- The faculty and staff are well-qualified and supported
- MSU will support Native American students, programs, and communities
- MSU will be an inclusive community, supporting and encouraging diversity
- Our publicly provided resources are used efficiently and effectively
- Natural resources are used efficiently and sustainably
- MSU nurtures a culture of resource conservation and ecological literacy among students, faculty and staff
- Our physical infrastructure (e.g., building, equipment, open spaces) will be well-maintained and useful

INSITUTIONAL BENEFIT

Campuses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bozeman <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Billings <input type="checkbox"/> Havre <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Great Falls <input type="checkbox"/> FSTS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Extension <input type="checkbox"/> MAES
Cross Depts	Please List: SFP and potentially all science and engineering departments especially in terms of research and grant outreach.

TIMEFRAME

Proposed Dates	Start July 1, 2012	End: June 30, 2015
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COST AND REQUIREMENTS

Funding Type	One-Time (\$)	Multi-Year (\$)			Base (\$)	FTE
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3		
Personnel (w/benefits)					\$110,000	3.8
Materials & Supplies					\$75,000	
Travel					\$25,000	
Contracted Services					\$15,000	
Capital					\$25,000	
Other Operations					\$50,000	
TOTAL					\$300,000	3.8

As indicated in the proposal scope below, the tuition revenue from our graduate program has been used to fund all operations of the School of Film and Photography, not only the graduate program. The base budget of the School has not increased since revenue sharing of graduate tuition was adopted, and is less than the total cost of faculty and staff salaries. Thus, in order to move our graduate program to normal funding, the general operating costs of the department in excess of its current base allocation, as well as some costs related to the graduate program from other sources, would have to be added to the annual base budget of the department. Because the university would receive approx. \$215,000 tuition per year and already provides \$25,000 per year for graduate student support, only \$60,000 of the costs above represent "new" funds.

- Notes:
- Personnel: funding for adjunct faculty and ten graduate teaching assistants each academic year at .25 FTE each as well as .15 summer salary for the program director.
 - Materials & Supplies: Includes production equipment rental and maintenance as well as administrative supplies.
 - Travel: Includes Montana, U.S., and international student travel support to attend conferences and film festival internationally as well as faculty/staff travel to national and international conferences, festivals, and program stakeholders' headquarters.
 - Capital: Includes facilities modifications for program needs as well as production equipment purchases to maintain professional standards.
 - Other Operations: Includes scholarship support for students, student fee waiver support, research and development support to faculty, student recruitment, program website and promotional expenses and operational material expenses.

Please comment, if necessary, regarding cost and requirements.

PROPOSAL SCOPE

Describe the Proposal

PERMANENT ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SCHOOL OF FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHY MFA IN SCIENCE AND NATURAL HISTORY FILMMAKING

SUMMARY: This proposal requests funds to move the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking (SNHF) away from its current tuition-supported funding model to the funding system that currently supports all other campus-based MSU graduate programs except the M.Sc in Science Education (which is essentially an online initiative).

PROJECT OVERVIEW: Currently completing its tenth anniversary as a graduate program at Montana State University in the School of Film and Photography, the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking (SNHF) has firmly established itself internationally as a major educational force in the rapidly growing field of science media and communication. Begun in 2001 with a grant from the Discovery Channel, the SNHF program has graduated 77 students representing almost every state in the country, at least five foreign countries, and multiple scientific disciplines. Created on the premise that scientists need advanced, innovative, and sophisticated film/video training to clearly and forcefully bring scientific knowledge and discoveries to a wider public audience, the SNHF program has trained graduate students whose previous training was in biology, physics, ecology, psychology, medicine, environmental law, psychologists, zoology, archaeology, geology, astronomy, and veterinary medicine. Working with both SFP faculty and visiting film professionals, the students have taken this unique field of nonfiction filmmaking into new contemporary areas including transmedia, podcasts, and broadband Internet communications. They have literally filmed on every continent in the world, assisted in space exploration, and recorded life deep within the oceans. They have established a website/podcast (TERRA) that enjoys between 90-100,000 downloads a month. Their work has won five EMMY Awards, five Fulbright scholarships, a prestigious Fred Rogers Children's Programming Scholarship from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, a WEBBY award, and many other honors. They have become major creators of outreach support for some of MSU's most prominent projects and scientists including WildFIRE PIRE, *Deep Gulf Wrecks*, Professor Gary Strobel, EPSCoR, the National Park Service, USDA, NSF, NASA the Museum of the Rockies, and Professor Jack Horner. Upon graduation, the students have gone on to successful careers as independent producers, staff members at National Geographic Television, Discovery Channel, PBS, the BBC, the Goddard Space Center, NGOs, leading foundations, and private corporations.

Despite this stellar record achieved in a relatively short time, the SNHF does not have a sustainable funding model and cannot continue for much longer in its current form. Because of its experimental nature when it was founded, the program was put on a tuition-funded model; i.e., the program's budget is not included in the SFP's base budget but is derived instead from a formula based on the tuition money generated each academic year. Currently, the formula allots 52.8% of the tuition dollars generated each year to the SNHF with the remaining tuition dollars going to the University. In addition, MSU did not provide any new faculty or facility support for this ambitious and ultimately successful new program. Complicating matters was the withdrawal of the Discovery Channel support in 2004 because of financial problems at the Channel. Discovery did put \$200,000 into a Restricted Gift Account (RGA) in the MSU Foundation to ease the transition. These funds, however, are rapidly being depleted, since they pay for many of the expenses of the MFA Program not covered by the tuition formula.

Adding to the complexity of the situation was a decision by the MSU administration at that time to reduce the base budget of the SFP (then called the Department of Media and Theatre Arts) and replace those funds with part of the tuition stream generated by the MFA students. As a result, there was a de facto reduction in funding for both the MFA and the SFP. These changes created a financial interdependence between the graduate and undergraduate programs. As the funding mechanism currently stands, the base SFP funding covers little more than salaries for tenured and tenure-track faculty. (Special student fees do provide some support to production equipment expenses.) There is some special discretionary funding to the MFA for teaching assistant graduate student support, but these monies are allotted on an annual basis and must be re-applied for each academic year. As a result, the SNHF is the only graduate program on campus that does not offer tuition fee waivers or reductions to the in-Montana state fee rate and has no ongoing scholarships, fellowships or teaching assistantships. This situation forces the SNHF graduate students into heavy debt loads or grueling work-study situations. Additionally, were the SNHF program to cease operations, the entire SFP would suffer. The loss of the tuition stream would eliminate adjunct monies, faculty

development funds, materials and supply money, and just about all other funding except for the most basic instructional support. Both the undergraduate and graduate programs would be threatened.

The result is that a major campus program that fulfills MSU's land grant and university missions on both the undergraduate and graduate levels are currently in an unsustainable funding position. The undergraduate program is as respected and honored as the graduate program, It is a 53-year-old program whose graduates work in fields ranging from Hollywood feature production to the military to Boeing aircraft. It is the largest undergraduate degree-granting film and video training program between Chicago and the West Coast, attracting many students from Utah, Colorado, Washington State, Idaho, and even California. Three of its alumni have won Academy Awards, several are executives at leading studios and television companies, one was a late-night television host on a major network, and many others are highly respected professionals in many areas of production. In terms of meeting the objectives of learning, discovery, and engagement, both the SFP undergraduate and MFA programs are by actively engaged in these three areas on both local and international levels. The programs are interdisciplinary by definition, combining arts, technology, and science. Because they focus on communication both ideas and emotions, the programs engage in the public transmission of art and knowledge. They intellectually, aesthetically, and economically benefit both Montana and the world. Their current funding model, however, places both programs in a precarious position dependent on national and state economic conditions, student loan regulations, and other unpredictable variables.

The current funding mechanism also limits diversity among the students in the SFP, especially on the MFA level. While there have been two Native American students in the program and international students from Tanzania, Spain, India, and Colombia, several prospective students who represented other countries and ethnic backgrounds who were accepted to the program could not enroll because of the lack of financial aid and ongoing support. Despite all its accomplishments, the MFA could offer even greater influence and impact if it had the means to recruit and encourage students from a greater diversity of backgrounds.

This funding in the accompanying budget is based on an analysis of the last three years of tuition support to the SNHF. The average tuition stream contribution to SFP (i.e., the 52.8 % of total tuition) has averaged \$215,000. Added to this amount has been a total of \$25,000 annually in teaching assistantship stipends. (There are no tuition waivers for SNHF teaching assistants.) Individual contributions from the office of the Provost, the Dean of the College of Arts and Architecture, and The Graduate School are required to reach this \$25,000 teaching assistantship total. Were these funds no longer available, there would probably be a need to reduce course offerings in the SFP on the undergraduate level because of a lack of instructional support. The remainder of the current funding for the SNHF comes from the funds in the RGA. Our analysis predicts that the RGA will be depleted by 2014 at the latest.

We are aware that our request represents a significant commitment on the part the University; nonetheless, this investment would be in a program that, on both the undergraduate and graduate levels, has an outstanding track record. It is an investment in two successful programs that meet multiple goals of MSU's overall mission. In addition, the tuition stream monies will still be there. Under our request, they will all go to the University and help support our increase in the base budget funding. The advantage over the current system would be the establishment of a reliable, secure, and consistent funding model offering increased scholarship, teaching assistantship, and other financial support to the students along with funding to aid in the hiring and retention of needed faculty. Released from the pressures of financial uncertainty, the energies of the SFP may be directed to expanding the great promise of both the undergraduate and graduate programs.

As the digital age expands and visual media extends its influence (more than 72% of all data on the internet is visual), the importance of the SFP will increase. With the new initiatives from the NSF and other science funders, the SNHF will continue to be an essential part of MSU's research outreach responsibilities. (Currently, grants totaling more than \$30-million in research support depend at least part on outreach created by SNHF students, even though a very small fraction of that total is directed to the students or SFP.) A transition to a more stable funding model in line with other major graduate programs on campus will eliminate emergency decision-making in the very near future and, most importantly, allow MSU to securely establish itself as a leader in both visual media and scientific communications.

PROPOSAL SCOPE

Describe the broader impacts and benefits of this proposal

The broader impacts include the significant expansion of the SFP's already formidable accomplishments in the core areas of MSU's mission. As both an artistic and communications school, SFP promotes learning, creates new work and knowledge through innovative technologies and forms of expression, works not only with other schools and departments on campus but also with numerous community-related groups as well (five SFP undergraduate students are active members of Engineers Without Borders). The SNHF is especially involved in offering stewardship to human and natural resources. (The TERRA website/podcast focuses on conservation.) The SFP is interdisciplinary by design, choice, and action. Without a revised, secure funding model, these efforts inevitably will be reduced.

Currently, there are only three degree-granting programs that specialize in film and video training related to science and natural history filmmaking. Along with the SNHF, there is a program at Dunedin in New Zealand and at American University in Washington, D.C. Both of these programs are very narrowly focused: Otego deals only with natural history (i.e., animals and animal behavior) and American University focuses strictly on conservation. The SNHF includes both areas of specialization offered at the other two programs but it also emphasizes working with astronomers, physicists, plant specialists, physicians, psychologists, paleontologists, astrobiologists, and scientists from many other fields. This diversity has attracted the attention of organizations ranging from the NSF to the World Wildlife Fund to iTunes to Peter Gabriel's advocacy group WITNESS (whose video department is headed by an SNHF alumna) to the United Nations. To sustain this level of learning, discovery, and engagement requires a stable funding model. It is very possible that the SNHF could cease operations if an unexpected budget crisis occurs, especially after the RGA is depleted two years from now.

This proposal will both prevent the elimination of the SNHF and allow the program to seek a more diversified student body. Without scholarships, tuition waivers, and consistent teaching assistantship support, we will lose exceptional graduate students to other schools solely because of the financial burden we ask each graduate student to incur. On the undergraduate level, a consistent funding level will permit the faculty staffing and material support that will maintain the high level of instruction and student achievement that has become synonymous with the SFP over five decades. This proposal is a request to sustain the proven excellence that currently exists and invest in its expansion in the future.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Implementation Plan *(Please describe with timelines)*

The implementation plan would be as follows:

AY 2012-13 – First year of transition away from the tuition-supported model. There undoubtedly will be specifics that will have to be worked out, and these would be reviewed and implemented.

AY 2013 -14 – Major efforts to offer more financial support to qualified students to promote gender and ethnic diversity and equity in the SNHF. Continued fine-tuning of the new funding formula.

AY2014-2015 – Completion of transition, end of RGA support, and standardization of new base funding and student financial assistance.

Assessment Plan *(Please describe with indicators)*

We will assess the new funding model for the SFP as a whole and provide quantitative evaluation as much as possible. We will devise an assessment instrument (or several instruments) that would measure the five leading parameters below in each of the first three academic years of the new funding model and then for five years afterwards. The parameters are the following:

1. Budget needs and fulfillment – Does SFP have the funds on both the graduate and undergraduate levels to meet both its obligations and its discretionary and emergency needs?
2. SNHF Support – Does the new funding model direct more funds (either in dollars or waivers) to the graduate students?
3. Diversity – Does the new funding model allow potential graduate students of limited financial resources to enroll and increase gender and minority numbers and equity in the program?
4. Core Goals – Has the SFP as a whole and especially the SNHF continued its stellar record of learning, discovery, and engagement? This assessment parameter would include an examination of GPAs, public recognition, outreach efforts, and communication impact.
5. Overall Effectiveness – Do undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty and administrators in SFP believe they have the resources needed to achieve their individual and group goals?

We would probably seek assistance from colleagues in other schools and departments specializing in assessment and statistical analysis to devise the appropriate instruments and devise a simple but accurate measurement scale for all areas.

If assessed objectives are not met in the timeframe outlined, what is the plan to sunset this proposal?

The SNHF would be phased out over several years to allow enrolled students to complete their degrees. The SNHF would be discontinued by 2020.

SIGNATURES

Department Head (please print)	Signature (required)	Date
ROBERT ARNOCK		12/22/11

Dept Head Priority (please circle one): Very High High Medium Low Very Low

Dean/Director (please print)	Signature (required)	Date
Joseph Fedock		12/30/11

Dean/Director Priority (please circle one): Very High High Medium Low Very Low

Executive/VP (please print)	Signatures (required)	Date

Executive/VP Priority (please circle one): Very High High Medium Low Very Low