School of Film & Photography
MFA in Science & Natural History Filmmaking

The mission of the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking is to train aspiring filmmakers with an interest and background in scientific disciplines to develop the creative, technical, and critical skills needed to produce work that will contribute to the greater public understanding of science.

The graduate program in Science and Natural History Filmmaking at Montana State University is the largest and best known of its kind in the world. Graduates of the program work as freelancers for nonprofit organizations such as WITNESS, The Wildlife Conservation Society, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the Nature Conservancy. Additionally, graduates work with major channels such as The Discovery Channel, National Geographic, The Science Channel, CNN, the BBC, the Smithsonian Channel, and for other major producers such as the Field Museum, the National Park Service, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Agriculture, NOAA, and NASA-Goddard. Student and alumni works have appeared in numerous festivals, major museums, and cultural venues. When the opportunity arises, students travel the world with leading scientists to make films in the Pribilof Island, Easter Island, the Galapagos, Australia, Japan, Mongolia, Africa, Chile, New Zealand, Colombia, and Antarctica. The home of the Webby-winning website LifeOnTERRA, the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking has been recognized through major awards including multiple student Emmys, Telly Awards, Fulbright grants, a Panda award, and numerous other festival and artistic honors.
ADMISSION

We seek candidates with an undergraduate background in biological sciences or physical sciences, engineering, technology, environmental or conservation sciences, or the social sciences. Laboratory or field research experience is highly desirable. Many of our applicants already have graduate degrees in other fields. Candidates are not expected to have any prior formal education or experience in filmmaking. We also seek candidates with degrees in other disciplines who have at least a minor or equivalent experience in a scientific field. Equivalent experience in science media production will also be considered to satisfy the admission requirements. An average GPA of “B” or above is required.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The three-year curriculum consists of a minimum of sixty semester credit hours of study, a written thesis, and a thesis film. To graduate, a student must complete the course of study in good academic standing and produce the thesis and thesis film. Candidates for the MFA take courses that include the history and theory of science and natural history filmmaking and general film studies. They also complete extensive work mastering film and video production skills, including cinematography, sound, production management, editing, writing, and new media. The philosophy informing the MFA curriculum is based on the idea of promoting a greater public understanding of science by training filmmakers who understand the complete media production process. These professionals will then have the intellectual and technical foundation necessary to further creative innovation in science and natural history filmmaking and science communication throughout their subsequent careers.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Depending on the availability of funds, a limited number of teaching assistantships and research assistantships are available each year.

FACULTY

Director, School of Film And Photography
Theo Lipfert, M.F.A.

MFA Option Coordinator
Dennis Aig, Ph.D.

Professors
Dennis Aig, Ph.D.
Christina Anderson, M.F.A.
Robert Arnold, Ph.D.
Nancy Cornwell, Ph.D.
Theo Lipfert, M.F.A.
Andrew Nelson, Ph.D.
Tenzin Phuntsog, M.F.A.
Alexis Pike, M.F.A.
Lucia Ricciardelli, Ph.D.
Cindy Stillwell, M.F.A.
Ian Van Collier, M.F.A.
Tom Watson, M.F.A.

Adjunct Faculty
Kayla Bedey, B.A., B.S.
Joy Dietrich, M.F.A.
James Joyce, M.F.A.
Kathy Kasic, M.F.A.
Gianna Savoie, M.A.
Karl Swingle, M.F.A.
Dan Wise, B.S.

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