Call for Applications for Summer 2018: Robert Flaherty Film Seminar

The Five College Film Council is now accepting applications for the 2018 5C Flaherty Program, a week-long summer program for Five College students in partnership with the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar. Applications are due February 12, 2018. Details below.

What is the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar?

With a storied history dating back to 1955, the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar (aka “The Flaherty Seminar”) is an annual, week-long seminar devoted to non-fiction film and media. The Flaherty Seminar brings together filmmakers, artists, curators, media professionals, film students, teachers, and enthusiasts for a curated program of films in an intimate, immersive environment. Participants gather for a communal experience that includes housing, meals, social hours, and special events. Each day of the seminar is organized around at least three screening sessions followed by discussion.

When does the Flaherty Seminar take place?

The 2018 Flaherty Seminar will be held June 16-22, 2018 at Colgate University in Hamilton, NY. For details on this year’s theme and programmer, see http://flahertyseminar.org/ (go to Flaherty Seminar tab). Further information about the Flaherty Seminar and its history can also be found on this site.

What is the 5C Flaherty Program?

The 5C Flaherty Program, now in its second year, aims to foster learning and networking opportunities for students from constituencies that are underrepresented in leadership positions in film and media. We are currently seeking undergraduate student applicants who are interested in attending the 2018 Flaherty Seminar. One student will be selected from each of the five campuses and this 5C cohort will participate in a week-long guided program during the Flaherty seminar coordinated by a faculty mentor. This year’s 5C faculty mentor will be Josh Guilford, Assistant Professor of English in Film and Media Studies at Amherst.
The student selected to attend from each campus will have the 5C Flaherty Program fee—which covers registration fees for the Seminar, accommodations and meals for the week, and special Five College programming—paid by the 5C Flaherty Program. Student participants will be responsible for arranging their own travel to and from the Seminar. Applying students should be prepared to pay a portion of the travel expenses, but assistance will be available.

Eligibility:

The goal of this guided program—qualitatively different from an internship or work experience—is to cultivate learning and networking opportunities for undergraduate students from constituencies that are underrepresented in leadership positions in film and media, including women, LGBTQ persons, ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, students with financial need, and undocumented students. In choosing a UMass Amherst student to attend, our selection committee will give particular consideration to applicants who confront multiple challenges to professional advancement in this field.

Preference will be given to undergraduate students enrolled in the Interdepartmental Program in Film Studies Certificate Program and to students who have completed at least one film studies and one film production class. This program is best suited for students who will be entering their junior or senior year in Fall 2018; returning students in these years will be considered over graduating seniors and first year students.

Requirements:

Students selected to be part of the 5C Flaherty Program cohort will be required to:

(A) Attend a half-day orientation in Spring 2018, in which they will meet fellow participants and learn more about the Flaherty Seminar and what will be expected of them there.

(B) Arrive at Colgate University by 2PM on June 16, 2018 and stay for the full duration of the Seminar, which concludes at noon on June 22, 2018.

(C) Participate in a guided program of daily lunch and dinner conversations with attending media professionals and filmmakers during the seminar. Additionally, they may be asked to serve as liaisons to next year’s participants and to speak about their experiences and this program with other interested students during the following school year.

What we are looking for:

We are searching for undergraduate applicants who have demonstrated passion and inclination for creative and critical work in film and media, with a special interest in nonfiction, and who can integrate themselves respectfully into non-academic venues for discussing nonfiction film and filmmaking. Applicants should demonstrate that they have taken some time to acquaint themselves with the structure and history of the Flaherty Film Seminar. Applicants should effectively convey reasons why they would like to attend the Seminar and also how they feel they can contribute to the event. All Seminar attendees are encouraged to participate in discussions and the overall discourse, and we want to know what you can add.
How Can UMass Students Apply?

In a separate document, please create your application with the following sections, and submit it via email to Professor Shawn Shimpach at shimpach@umass.edu by Feb 12, 2018. Notifications will be sent out soon after the deadline.

SECTION 1: Name, major, year, email address, home address, phone number

SECTION 2 (200 words or less):
Please tell us a little bit about some of the experiences that have shaped your sense of yourself and/or your community in relation to the film and media industry. Please feel free to address issues of access, representation, mentorship, or any other challenges or obstacles to professional advancement that you may have encountered.

SECTION 3 (500 words or less):
Please write a short statement about why you are applying to the 5C Flaherty Program and why you would be a good candidate for the program, addressing:
(A) What are your relevant interests in and experiences with film and media, both academic and otherwise? What work do you hope to do in the future, related to these fields?
(B) How will participating in the 2017 Flaherty Seminar contribute to your personal and professional goals in and beyond college?
(C) What skills/experience will you bring that can contribute to discussions and community at the Seminar?

SECTION 4 (under 1 page):
Please supply a 1-page resume that includes evidence of any achievements or experiences related to film and media (e.g.: coursework, films, community projects, etc.)

Testimonials from 2017 5C Flaherty Program Participants

[Thank you for creating the opportunity for Five College students, such as myself, to attend this program. The world of cinema can often be closed and difficult to access for younger generations of aspiring film professionals—and as such, is lacking in diversity. But at the Flaherty I felt the world of film opening for me, both intellectually and through the connections I made with people. During screening discussions, I could navigate a different context of critical thinking outside a classroom setting; while during meals, I could talk with film curators, scholars, and makers about their work. Whether it be through conversations with ethnographers about documentary ethics or speaking with media producers about the institutional steps needed to publish my own creations, I have never been more inspired to pursue and create film works after such an intensive experience.]
In an industry where you see so little of your identity represented, you essentially need to become your own role model (a practice that can be discouraging at times). At the Flaherty however, I not only met women of color working in film (like myself) but witnessed the gathering of a diverse group of thinkers who serve as a representation of their own stories. I am so grateful for this experience that will benefit my current academic pursuits at Smith, as well as continue to inspire me in my future life... [Without this program] there would be films I might have never seen, ideas I might never have thought, and people I might never have met. I hope this program will be as valuable to future students as it was to me. I hope this program will be as valuable to future students as it was to me.

- JANAYAH IVY, Smith College

I would like to say thank you for providing the support for this year’s cohort to attend the 2017 Flaherty Seminar. It was an enriching experience that allowed for me to gain insight into the world of film, from filmmakers all the way to the distributors that control the circulation of their films. It was important for me to be there, it was important for me to speak to filmmakers and hear their stories off the screen. It was a time that I will always remember and, the tools that I gained will aid in the success of my own film career.

- CELESTELLE WEBSTER, Mount Holyoke College

I have wanted to attend the seminar ever since I read about it in a class called "Film and Video Curation" because of its unique curatorial vision and immersive, stimulating environment—little did I know that any description of the seminar is only capable of scratching its surface.

I have long heard about the unique mix of people at the Flaherty—but to witness, and participate in, the organic explosion of conversations first hand was stimulating in a way incomparable to any intellectual environment I have ever been in. I had the opportunity to sit next to filmmakers I have long admired as their films played on screen, and to turn to them afterwards to discuss it. Instead of placing these makers on an unreachable pedestal—as the classroom environment often incidentally does—they, and their films, became approachable, intimate, human. I listened to them defend their works, and recognize—with us—the tensions and connections that appeared or deepened when they were placed in conversation with other films and makers. Probably the most transformative experience for me was when I watched a film I had wholeheartedly admired—Trinh T. Minh-ha's film *Reassemblage*—lose its subversive power when screened next to a more contemporaneously sensitive and poignant film. Afterwards, in discussing the film with others watching it for the first time, I realized I could not defend the film alone when it was taken out of its historical, ethnographic context.

As a Chinese student from Shanghai, I have never been in a more international crowd in my academic career (it was simultaneously alien to me yet made me feel, for the first time, unalienated). This inevitably changed the American-centric discourse I had been accustomed (unfortunately) to ground my perspective in, and instead expanded and re-centered my point of view, and even, relocated my place in
the discussion. For example, in discussing Portuguese colonialism—an important thread in this year's program—participants were quick to point out its relation to American imperialism and our current occupation of indigenous land (also coincidentally, I grew up in a former Portuguese colony, Macau). Aptly, a film called "Of the North" screened later in the week sparked intense conversation and controversy precisely due to the filmmaker's unquestioning, white Canadian perspective that places himself at the center to portray the North, the South, the East, the West—all the while reinforcing his own self as "the center" which, of course, follows the historical violence of Western imperialism. In the diverse and intense Flaherty environment, this film and its curatorial choice was thoroughly discussed with passion, fury, honesty, and insight from a wide range of perspectives and experiences that really moved and inspired me to think more deeply about my own position as an "expat" and artist.

Perhaps more importantly, the disruption of my usual position forced me to confront the potential of the expansive unknown. As a recent Amherst graduate, I have never encountered discussions of film outside of an academic context, and have a hard time even articulating what exactly is my relation to film when faced with confident professionals. However, meeting the wide range of people at the Flaherty (especially during our lunch meetings) I came to realize that so many different paths are possible, and there's no singular way to relate to film. This unexpectedly helped reaffirm my uncertain position, and gave me confidence to explore a multitude of paths whether it is in writing, curation, making art, or something in between. The ambitious and all-encompassing goals of the Flaherty mean that the seminar strikes an eclectic balance between creative openness and rigorous critique, moving between creator, viewer, curator, insider, outsider with fluid courage—opening up a space in between academia and creation that I have long sought to explore, and giving life to a community I believe can exist nowhere else. Another surprising outcome from the seminar is that meeting people who have thought deeply about the politics of representation, interview, and positionality, has given me inspiration and courage to interview women for my Watson project in the upcoming months.

Of course, these conversations with participants with much more experience were at times intimidating—and here, the 5-college cohort proved to be especially valuable. I am so grateful to have had my peers to share the experience with, and we were able to together navigate the seminar and have a base to fall back upon during meal times or when the intensely social environment was overwhelming. Best of all, we all became fast friends and regretted we hadn't met earlier in college.

Next year's program will be curated by Kevin Jerome Everson and Greg de Cuir Jr., both of whom attended the seminar this year—when their names were revealed on the last night, there was a collective bubbling of excitement amongst all the participants. I believe their upcoming program will be thoroughly rewarding and reflective of today's political climate. I am already envious of next year's participants, and I sincerely hope that many more five college students will also be able to partake in this unique opportunity. I certainly hope to return in the future.

- JINJIN XU, Amherst College