

Media students give and take in community

Our Media Arts Program has always been concerned with the access of students to ideas, personalities and current technologies; and the access of the communities we serve to our facilities, technologies, faculty and students.

We determined early to use the kind of equipment that is widely available—Super 8 film, 1/2" video, 35mm slide and sound production units; encouraging students to use those relatively inexpensive technologies in marrying live theatre, music, the electronic media and film. This makes us accessible to public service organizations, small businesses with limited resources for media use, elementary and secondary schools where we complement the work of the teachers and their audio visual department, and provincial and regional government agencies.

Students receive a thorough grounding in media production: photography, script writing, cine camera operation, production planning, sound recording and video assembly; as well as elective choices in graphic design, theatre experience, play production and music. The range encourages students to explore new areas, new combinations and applications of abilities.

Students initially concerned with film making will explore the other media and the performing arts, examining the interrelationship of these other arts with film.

This development will be faculty directed initially, to provide a basis for production experience, but will increasingly reflect the expectations of the students and the communities to which they address themselves.

Our graduates can be found working with major TV networks, film production houses, and operating freelance multi media companies. An increasing number of them are able to continue their work in the community and can be found with school boards, or technicians, with cable TV companies and with the audio visual departments of corporations and government agencies. In time we expect our graduates to make a unique contribution to the evolution of the media in this country.

Media Arts students come from a wide range of backgrounds, and reflect a diversity of interests. They are recent graduates of secondary school or adults developing the skills for a second career. Each perceives the integration of the media and his or her own capacities in a totally individual way. The best way to



Student Don Wackley instructs Grade 6 students from Pauline Street Public School, Toronto, on filming techniques.

touch on this diversity is to examine the activities, background and expectations of some of our students.

PROGRAM DEVELOPED AWARENESS

Heather Summerhayes joined the Media Arts theatre elective after two years in Ryerson's Theatre Arts Program. Just 21, she has an impressive range of theatrical education and production experience: The Banff School of Fine Arts, Ryerson, The Ontario Youth Theatre Executive.

Heather has experienced considerable frustration with Sheridan's limited facilities and its "hurry up and perform" attitude to theatre. But in the process she's been thrown into production situations with a wide range of people:—photographers, slide and sound programmers, film makers, sound technicians—most of whom are more interested in their contribution to a multi-media production than with the stress experienced by an actress or director.

It's a humbling experience for anyone; but to her credit Heather is aware of her personal growth in the Media Arts multi-media environment:

"To the actor, the Media Arts program seems film and TV oriented. As a result, I have developed a great awareness of the potentials of media technology and have enjoyed the all-too-rare opportunities to work with students and staff whose attitudes and skills are so different to mine.

"Students and staff here are willing to experiment and learn, and this impresses me. I have seen some of the potentials that film and photography have in the theatre. As an actor my creative awareness has been heightened by this recognition. I have realized that there is much more to preparation than my own work on stage."

NOT JUST FOR MALES

Laurie McAllister, now in her final year of Media Arts is a graduate of T. L. Kennedy S.S. in Mississauga. She selected the Media Arts program for the range of production media offered. Laurie has produced and directed film, written and performed original music for other student productions, and is currently working with the System Research Group on video tapes used in its employee training programs.

Laurie is about to discover that media so far has been a male's domain. We think she has the potential to turn that situation around.

"I have pursued several leads on different jobs. Two companies gave me verbal replies. Each said the working conditions were too hot or dirty or that production was something a woman would not want to follow as a career. One stated that women are not strong enough to carry the heavy equipment required. But I have never heard a female cinematographer complain about carrying 30 odd pounds of equipment on her back. Not once since I came to Sheridan have I asked students in my class to help me carry equipment or do petty little things like open doors.

"I've always been very athletic—the fastest, the highest jumper. If anything since coming here, my physical strength has improved; so has my confidence."

A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Doug Berry, 24, is part of the Preliminary Year Elective of Media Arts. That special elective allows students with very little practical experience in production to enrol in specially organized courses in the fundamentals of film, sound, photo, and video

production. While initially interested in expanding his skills in music and recording, Doug has increasingly found himself involved in related areas:—community TV, theatre arts, work with elementary school students, and film making.

"I came to Sheridan with no real experience in production. The concept of communication fascinated me but I was always on the receiving end. In my few months in Media Arts I have been exposed to viewpoints about communications and to opportunities to work in several media—super 8 film, sound, 35mm photography, video tape. I've also had an opportunity to work with performing arts people as a technical assistant. I've found the atmosphere here informal and exciting—a good learning environment."

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Don Wackley is the elder statesman of the Media Arts student body. At 43, he has maintained an openness of attitude, an energy level and enthusiasm for exploring new situations that is a working model for students and faculty alike.

Don is president of the student senate, maintains an honor standing in his courses and spends three half-days a week in local elementary schools as a volunteer. In addition he has received an Ontario Arts Council Grant for work in non-broadcast TV, and has several productions in the initial planning stages that will occupy him for the next year or so. Don's experience with children and the media has been used by teachers in Metro Toronto, Windsor and Detroit as part of professional study workshops.

Don is currently organizing the efforts of other Media Arts students to take film, TV, cartooning and theatre workshop out to the community.

"I want Sheridan to open up even more. Most of us in Media Arts think that community colleges should really be community resources; not just the preserve of a few fortunate enough to be able to afford full-time education.

"The real potential for the colleges is with the adult community—not for year-long programs, but for highly practical and intensive workshops; the kind of work a person can apply to his job or leisure time, right away. I think the media will have an increasingly important role in opening up education. Film, TV—images—are universal languages that break up traditional structures like age, sex, social and economic classes. When you see the kind of work in video a 10 year old kid can do after a few hours you know that you're dealing with a range of fundamental human skills and not the function of a 'creative elite'."

Don came to Sheridan to develop a set of skills in film and TV. He's acquired many of those but in the Sheridan environment he's become more concerned with making those skills a resource for other people.

One of the most satisfying things being discovered by Media Arts students is that we're not alone in our approach to media. We've begun to exchange visits, student productions and course outlines with people at Simon Fraser University, New York University, Rice University in Houston, the Film and Television School of Australia as well as with individual film, TV, and multi-media artists across the country.

We're likely to be even more outgoing in the years to come. It seems that the Media Arts community is even larger than we suspected.

Prospective students or organizations interested in using Sheridan's facilities may direct their inquiries to the Media Arts Co-ordinator at: Oakville 843-9430, Toronto 362-5861, Clarkson 823-2110, Burlington 632-7081, ext. 235.

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Doug Berry studies film, sound, photo and video production in special one-year elective in Media Arts.