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USOAR Final Report

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### Final Narrative Report:

#### Film in France

Over the summer myself and my fellow cohort member, Beth Kahan, had the fantastic opportunity to travel to Paris France to attend a three-week film intensive workshop specifically tailored for acting. We used this opportunity as a means to bring the skill of acting for the camera back to the university population, a skill set that is not taught at all till the senior year and then still for the most part restricted to the BFA Acting track. We also both wanted to look at the difference of acting technique on camera versus on the stage where both of us have spent our entire acting career. Each of us received \$2,500 from USOAR to help us with this goal. I used my money to pay for my plane ticket to and from Paris as well as help pay a portion of the program's tuition cost. While we were at the workshop Beth and I were in classes from 9 to 5 Monday through Friday and were encouraged on weekends to perform in student films, something we both partook in. The classes themselves ranged from a more tradition on-camera class ,where you would do an exercise on camera for the first part of class and in the second you would watch a playback and give and receive critiques, to improvisation classes, as a means to not look stiff on camera. Our two professors for the program, Erin Forsberg and Sonia Backers, both had vastly different training than both Beth and I. Sonia, is one of the professors at The Method school in Paris. The Method is an acting technique that both of us had heard of before but since we as acting students at NIU train primarily in the Misner sequence, a different acting

technique, we had never had exposure to until Sonia. Erin was also part of a different school of acting namely the Stella Adler technique, something from my past schooling I had some familiarity with, though definitely not to a large degree. In total by the end of the workshop I had two filmed monologues and two filmed scenes as well as starring in a short film by one of the student directors in the program to have under my belt. In the midst of the workshop myself and Beth started compiling the main differences we could find technique wise for film acting and where consequently the overlap was.

The first difference I gathered was the misconception among actors, especially those who started on the stage, that you needed to be smaller for film. This practically makes sense as you don't need to project your voice to be heard by hundreds in your mic is only inches away. Apart from voice though, making yourself smaller is actually quite detrimental on film. You want to instead of making yourself smaller, make sure you are being real and authentic. Though this can seem vague and hard to grasp onto what it really comes down to is having clear image of what you want in a scene and clear actions of how to get it. If you are able to achieve those things you will be seen as real and authentic on screen.

Another difference we landed on was the importance of objectivity of your work. We generally in our everyday life don't have to see what we look like except in the mirror or pictures we coordinate. As an actor appearing on film you must see past the more trivial things in your appearance to be able to critically examine your work. When your acting on stage you gauge how you are doing based solely on your partners reactions, so having a tangible piece of your work to look at is a different game entirely. This was a skill we worked on a lot in our first week as it became very necessary the farther, we got from the work. As simple as this concept seems

though, it is easily, in my opinion, the most important thing we were able to bring back to the NIU population as I will touch on later.

The final difference we found wasn't as much to do with technique as it was more to do with a reality of working as an actor on film which is that most film directors, especially those just starting out, don't know how to ask for what they want from actors because their vernacular is so different from ours. In the theatre there is a much more common vernacular used between directors and actors, but that isn't the case in film. As actors then it is our job to take the sometimes less than helpful critiques and turn it into something workable. I personally experienced this firsthand there while working with a young Italian director. She would film a scene and her only critique after was usually either "bigger" or "smaller". Neither of these directions are particularly helpful to an actor, but I had learned to translate them into what they mean to me as an actor and able to execute what she wanted from me.

I believe that Beth and I by the end of the program had a much better grasp on what the differences between film and stage acting are as well as what we thought was important enough to bring back. Throughout this whole process I kept a journal logging what we did in class as well as the activities and my reactions to them, so we wouldn't forget all the thing we did and learned. An unintended, but much beloved, discovery through this program though is how regardless of nationality or language the fundamentals of acting are the same no matter for the stage or screen. More than half our classmates in our program didn't have English as their first language. Our class as a whole spoke 8 different languages and yet at the core of it we all had such similar techniques and approaches to acting.

When we got back to the states we started working with our faculty mentor Patricia Skarbinski on the best way to bring this information we had gather back to the NIU School of

Theatre and Dance population as a whole. We decided on a workshop that in the first 45 minutes would inform the attendants on the grant and grant process as well. Professor Skarbinski believed, and we did as well, that teaching the population about grants and how they can be applied to the arts was something important that we should add to our workshop as a way of encouraging this kind of expansion of learning in our school.

The final hour of our workshop was to be dedicated to an on-camera film class Beth and I would co-teach and run similar to the ones we received in Paris. We decided to do an exercise we were taught the first week as it encompassed the first two differences we had identified very nicely and was simple enough people in attendance would not need to prep something beforehand. The exercise itself was one person in front of the camera and one person off camera telling them a big piece of news. The person in front of the camera only has to react truthfully to what they're being told. Our attendee's, though not large in numbers, took to this exercise amazingly. Beth and I chose to tell them the differences we discovered first so when they got in front of the camera they were already applying the first difference of just needing to be truthful not small.

After the first round of shooting we showed them what they had done and worked on our second point, looking at your work critically. The main way we facilitated this was through how we worded our questions about how they did. Asking "what did you like about this?" first makes them have to stop critiquing how they look and focus on how they actually did and from there we could actually look critically at what they had done. Again, our group of attendee's blew us away with how quickly they were able to grasp and apply this concept.

Finally we ran the exercise one final time with the same person off camera giving them the same piece of news, except this time the person in front of the camera would have a secret.

This was a clever way for Beth and I to teach our final point as the actors had to interpret what we meant about a secret and apply it to their work. We had already told them before about our personal experience with young film directors and thought their notes will be different from the secret exercise it still stretches the same muscle. Once again, our group of actors rose to the occasion and were able to take this note and transform it into something wonderful.

Overall, I will say this project, as a whole, was a success. If I could change anything I would have loved for more attendance at the final workshop, but I believe the group we had proved that these lessons can really land within the school of theatre and dance population. This experience I was able to partake in thanks to USOAR has changed my whole perspective on film acting as a whole and gave me a new found appreciation of the craft I have been a part of since I was 11. Without this opportunity, I would have never had this early of exposure to film acting in my training. For me that is such an important thing because only being able to work on film acting in my last year was not going to be enough. I am now able to use this new skill I have to more confidently audition and work on film projects that I would have been too scared to work on before. I also now have a network of actors I have worked with around the globe spanning from France to Moscow to Mauritius. This grant has given me avenues to explore my passion like nothing else before and for that I am so grateful.