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USOAR Final Report

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Acting for Film in Paris: Reflection and Final Report

Studying film acting in Paris, France, surrounded by students and instructors from across the world was a unique, fascinating experience that would be impossible to imitate. I met incredible people that I never would have been able to meet otherwise. My partner Samantha Welch and I each received \$2,500 from USOAR to support our research and to study at La Femis in Paris through the New York Film Academy and Performing Arts Abroad. We were on camera many hours per week, and were pushed outside our comfort zones everyday with techniques and exercises that we were wholly unfamiliar with. We had the opportunity to film two scenes and two monologues each in class, and I also participated in two short films directed by other students in the filmmaking program. We had the opportunity to see important historical sights such as the palace of Versailles and the Louvre. We were fully immersed in art. Because I was pushed out of my comfort zone, I grew immensely in my time in Paris.

Sam and I sought to explore the differences between French and American filmmaking, as well as the differences in technique and style. Overall, I have learned that no matter where in the world you go, or whether you are on film or on the stage, truth is the most important thing. It is especially true on film; the camera catches everything that you do, and the moment you are telling rather than showing, the camera will catch that, too. Every choice must be grounded in

reality. The biggest difference I noticed, however, was that my instructors at La Femis preferred us to work at a much slower pace, taking the time between sentences to think and feel before moving on to a new thought. This became noticeable to me in our first on camera exercise. One actor would sit in front of a camera, whilst the second would sit just behind it. The actor behind the camera would give the other a piece of news that they would choose- they might tell the second actor that their significant other was cheating on them, or that a close relative had just passed. Without using many words, the second actor would only have to react to the news they received. They would live in that moment until the instructor said 'cut', which could take anywhere from thirty seconds to a few minutes. These moments of silence are so important on film; they're full of secrets, discoveries, and insights into the mind of the character. We were encouraged to always take our time with all of our text. This is contrary to how I've been encouraged to treat text onstage in the past. For the stage, pacing is kept faster, with fewer pauses. Any pauses must be incredibly purposeful. This is because for the stage, the goal is to keep the audience involved and engaged, and if there is too much air in the pace, it makes the audience become less interested. In addition, when you finally do slow down, the impact becomes much more powerful. Whereas for the screen, taking your time makes more sense, because the camera picks up everything you do, so the more you take your time and allow yourself to feel, the more the audience sees, and the more compelling your performance is. The important thing as an actor is just understanding the medium that you are working with so you can give the best performance possible.

When Samantha and I returned to NIU, we were able to share our research with students of the School of Theatre and Dance by teaching a one day workshop. Our workshop took place

on November 24th. For the first half, Samantha and I gave a presentation about travelling abroad and how we used the USOAR grant to do so. After that, we lead our classmates in some exercises we learned at La Femis, including the one I previously described. It was really rewarding to get to share our research and experiences with NIU, and to get to continue to work with the camera. As an acting student, I will get one year of on camera training, but theatre students who are not getting their BFA in Acting don't have any opportunity to learn these techniques. So, it's a big deal to be able to bring this research to our BA Theatre Studies and Theatre Minor populations, and I'm very lucky that I got to be a part of it.

I learned a lot in Paris, and none of it would have been possible without the USOAR grant. I have been able to accomplish things I never knew I could. I knew I wanted to travel during my undergrad, and USOAR made that possible for me. And not only that, but I got to experience acting on camera for the first time, which pushed me and allowed me to grow in my craft. I had never written a grant proposal before this, but I was able to learn. USOAR taught me that I can work hard and accomplish my goals.

In conclusion, I gained so much by using the USOAR grant to travel to Paris. I have gained new acting skills that will help me with my career when I graduate. I have experience living in a new place where I didn't speak the language, and learn how to navigate in the beautiful city of Paris. I met great people from all over the world, and studied at the prestigious film school, La Femis. USOAR gave me opportunities I could not have had any other way, and I am so grateful.