

## **Student/faculty collaborations pave way for film careers**

by **David Williams - Tuesday, May 06, 2008**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/839/professorstudent-collaborations-pave-way-for-film-careers/>

“Public Enemies” might be the biggest movie to be filmed in Oshkosh, but it’s not the only one to take advantage of the locale or tap into local talent.

In 2005, Troy Perkins ’94, an assistant professor in the radio/TV/film department, and his wife Frances, also a University of Wisconsin Oshkosh faculty member at the time, passed around a sign-up sheet in their communication classes. Three years later — and with the help of about 50 students total — the Perkinses have completed two short films.

“The goal is something that we have thought about for years: trying to create the next level of film production education,” said Troy, who wrote and directed the films. “We knew that if we could get a core group of professionals together, it would have a big impact on students here at UW Oshkosh, who, historically, have been isolated from the film industry.”

Frances, who currently teaches at UW-Fond du Lac, served as producer of the two films.

The premiere feature “Tractor for Sale,” a black-and-white comedy set in rural Wisconsin, received distinctions at several festivals, including Wildwood Film Festival, Wisconsin Film Festival and WorldFest Houston, where it was awarded the Gold Remi Award.

“Brothers” tells the story of three brothers who are faced with the decision of whether or not to sell off their family’s farm.

“I grew up in rural Wisconsin and have a lot of farmers in my family,” Troy said. “There’s so much urban sprawl all around us. It’s changing the community, changing the land. I’m always wondering, what happens to the families? What happens to the people?”

Both “Tractor for Sale” and “Brothers,” which was released at the end of April, benefited from the inclusion of Troy’s former classmate and professional cinematographer Mike Hartzel ’94. The lessons learned during the “Tractor” were applied to the “Brothers.”

“From ‘Tractor,’ we identified several areas that we realized we needed to improve on, such as getting the students better trained before moving into production,” Troy said. “The first big thing is we added an intensive tech day, where students are trained on all of the equipment.”

“For ‘Brothers,’ 90 percent of the equipment was provided by Hartzel,” he added.

### **Learning outside of the classroom**

The boon of working with cutting-edge technology was not lost on the students.

“The most rewarding thing for me was being able to get my hands on a lot of the equipment,” said Cory Reed, a senior radio/TV/film student.

Reed, of Kimberly, worked as the grip electric on “Brothers.” His primary responsibilities included setting up lights and cables and using the tools that shape the light on the set.

“I learned more than I ever could have expected to learn in the classroom on that film set,” he added.

Reed also was impressed by the professional atmosphere surrounding the project.

“There was an attitude toward doing things the right way in an organized and efficient manner,” he said.

In spite of the fact that no academic credits were offered for the internship, Michael Buck, of Ripon, dedicated roughly 100 hours to production and postproduction of “Brothers.”

“Everything was really planned out, and it seemed like an exciting story to work on,” Buck said of his decision to join the crew. “Working alongside faculty and alumni seemed like a fun experience.”

During production, Buck was an assistant camera operator, transferring the video from brand-new, high-definition cameras to a hard drive via “giant memory cards.” But his work wasn’t over after the final scene was filmed.

“In postproduction, I also worked as an editor. With the decisions Troy made, I started cutting the entire film together. Then I would take those rough cuts over to his house, and we would re-access all of the media on his computer and start cutting on his computer,” the senior radio/TV/film student said.

Other students managed lighting, electric and sound, assisted with directing and acted as extras.

“What’s really exciting is that we had two students from the music department who worked on sound design. We’re starting to spread out from the radio/TV/film department,” said Troy, adding that one of the actors in “Tractor” was a UW Oshkosh theatre major.

### **Reaping the rewards**

Troy and Frances Perkins started producing films through the University because they like to make movies and because they wanted to give their students an opportunity to take their education one step further.

“I feel like these projects help emphasize that students at UW Oshkosh can be as competitive as those from the coasts,” Troy said. “I think it’s great that they can put ‘professional film experience’ on their resume.”

Better yet, the student volunteers can add “award-winning” when referencing the film. “Brothers” won a merit award at Wildwood Film Festival in Appleton, was accepted for a screening in the 2008 University Film and Video Association and, like “Tractor” before it, won a gold Remi award at WorldFest, a national film festival in Houston.

“I’ve already used ‘Brothers’ on a couple of job applications, and employers love it,” Buck said. “People love seeing that I played such an important part in it. I guess they see it as a sign of things to come.”

The Perkinses plan to produce a third short film and hope one day to make a full-length feature. The next project is a comedy titled “Test Day,” which will focus on a college student who shows up to class late and unprepared for an exam.

Buck would recommend filmmaking with Troy and Frances Perkins to anyone else considering a career in film.

“If you’re in this to get a real job someday, it’s phenomenal. Work with a professor instead of being instructed by him,” he said.

Reed agreed: “This can only be a benefit. A lot of my friends were on the set, and I can’t think of a single person who doesn’t look at that experience as something absolutely monumental in their college career.”

- [Click here for “Brothers” Web site.](#)
- [Click here for the “Tractor for Sale” Web site.](#)
- [Click here to read about UW Oshkosh students and staff who worked on “Public Enemies.”](#)