

John Salazar

Graduation Year: Senior

College: Arts & Letters

Major(s): Film, Television, and Theatre

Minors(s): n/a

Scholar Group Membership: No

Did you received other funding for this project?: ISLA

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance?

Project Title: The Toronto Film Festival as a Sphere for Critical Prestige

Project Location: Toronto, Canada

ND Faculty Mentor: James Collins

Project Type: Research, Conference - Attendance

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Research/experience necessary for senior thesis or capstone project

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Very Much

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Yes

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Very Much

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

I plan on writing a senior thesis regarding film festival culture and how it creates critical prestige for its films. Specifically, I want to analyze the role of the Toronto International Film Festival and how it is a crucial spot for films seeking Academy Awards attention. To do this, I took a very ethnographic approach at the festival, immersing myself among the attendees and comparing the experience to previous film festival experiences. I attended four to five screenings a day, making note of how many seats were filled, how many viewers left, what information was given in the press kit, and what was being written about it in real time (i.e. social media). Most of the screenings were for industry members, but there was also a significant amount of public screenings, providing additional insight to the workings of the festival. As a distributor in line next to me put it, "this festival really is the best for buyers because we see in real time how the public reacts to certain films." While the general public theoretically would have no input on the critical prestige of a film, their opinion matters in the context of this festival and is a reflection of critical opinion, creating a mutual relationship between press/industry and the public. In addition to screenings, I also attended industry lectures from professionals, one of which was Cheryl Boone Isaacs, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. She spoke on the diversity of the film industry and the Academy's role in it, something of which will surely be a point of discussion come awards

season. Ultimately, the experience gave me a plethora of first-hand knowledge regarding how people navigate the festival, how it is coordinated, and what they are looking for in a film.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

The project is very ambitious for me as a student-scholar because there is very little academic writing on film festivals, and from that small amount, virtually none is written on the Toronto Film Festival. That being said, this project allows me to use alternate means of primary research through social media, the trades, and literal word-of-mouth. It is also an experience of using scholarship in application, taking the writings of other film scholars and sociologists and applying them to a new focus of research. My advisor Jim Collins has been very helpful in guiding me along the theoretical works, and he is just as excited as I am to handle a project essentially researched in real-time.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

My experience at the Toronto Film Festival will lead to a senior thesis that I plan to have done by the spring of 2017. In addition to the written thesis, the festival also provided industry insight on how films are marketed and ultimately what makes a film successful once it is already complete. For example, at this festival, 'Jackie' basically went viral overnight, whereas 'American Pastoral' lost all chances for Oscars, and this is from general reception from the festival attendees. As someone who hopes to work in film marketing post graduation, the festival allowed me to see what led the press here, and where will the film go on.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

If there is a question you've been thinking about for some time, I think that provides an opportunity to use Notre Dame resources to explore it. Examine your thoughts and see what you often talk about, because there is most likely a question there waiting to be analyzed. From there, look into the necessary scholarship. Traveling is exciting, but the most exciting part is doing the research beforehand so you can navigate your experience as an intellectual with a specific intent. Use it as a conversation starter to talk to people; I talked to so many people at the festival about my thesis and they were much more interested in what I was doing than the next person in line who had the same job as them. Lastly, I know it's overdone to say to find something you are passionate about, but I think that coordinates with the first point I said. If you find yourself frequently thinking about something, you will be willing to devote the time to it.

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.

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