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Macaulay Honors the CUNY Filmmakers

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The CUNY Film Festival at Macaulay Honors College
 The official film festival of CUNY's 24 college campuses

By Robert Small

I am the current Director of the Macaulay Honors College New Media and Digital Content Lab that is part of the CUNY educational system. To understand Macaulay you need to realize that Macaulay is not a separate school from the rest of CUNY. It is an honors institution for CUNY students who show they have exceptional abilities and keep a high GPA. The school is made up of students who have their home base campus at one of 8 CUNY institutions; Baruch, Brooklyn, City, Hunter, Queens, Lehman, College of Staten Island and John Jay College.

The New Media and Digital Content Lab currently offers a 2-semester course. The first is a theory approach to the academics of branding, storytelling and marketing, the second is more of a hands-on, trial by fire, sink or swim approach to the theories taught in the first. In the 2nd semester our student's main task is producing and marketing the 8th Annual CUNY Film Festival at Macaulay Honors College. This is the toughest assignment they will get all year and if successful, students will receive the Digital Content Strategies Fellow when completing both semesters.

Almost 500,000 students make up our educational institution. To have one festival that merges the creativity and interest from such a large group of people is a great thing and as an assignment it's a little scary. All those lectures and discussions about community building, story telling, demographics and rolling out the creative

plan to grow the audience will be put to the test. The students of Macaulay were ready for the challenge. The toughness and resourcefulness of our students is reflective of what New York City is all about. We are the perfect sample of why people know and love this city all over the world. We represent it all. Multi-everything! Multi cultured, rich-poor, black-white, straight-gay, male-female...on and on. Everyone has a place in this university and this great city. So how do we do entice such a diverse audience to participate in one festival? The Macaulay students step up!

First we took the necessary steps of getting the “call for submissions” posters designed and out on social media as well as through word of mouth at the television and media departments throughout CUNY’s 24 campuses. We designed and created a new website at www.cunyff.org. The site needed content, so we created it. Our students interviewed directors, created 2 min documentary pieces for our website, shared them on social media and industry blogs. Next Macaulay joined forces with WNET and the CUNY Film Festival became part of their short film event, a transmedia effort further growing our audience and giving the filmmakers more exposure. This very blog on the Huffington Post is another development in the growth of the festival. We also solicited and received support from traditional media outlets; AMC Networks, WNET, MTV Networks, Frederator Studios, Shine Global, BBC America.

Remembering the core reason we do all this work is the belief in the filmmakers and their art. As we learned in our marketing theory lectures you must know your product and it’s audience. This involved watching all 150 films entered this year. In doing this, I got to see our world through the eyes of the generation that is about to inherit it. Some films were better done than others but as a group and a spirit they were all amazing. Though it did surprise me that there were no comedies. That’s for a different article I guess. The films offer up young views of lost love, race relations, incarceration, homophobia, aging, selfishness, exploitation, sex, love and fear. These visions and voices realized in the form of great animation, documentaries, narratives and experimental films will be honored at the April 16th awards gala at Macaulay Honors College. Hopefully due to the efforts of our lab the audience and impact may be double the audience of last years festival. A great learning experience for all... with popcorn!

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