Proposed Project: “Movies on Campus and Beyond”

Pete Porter
Assistant Professor of Electronic Media and Film

Narrative description of the initiative:

The bulk of the “Movies on Campus and Beyond” project consists of 21 film screenings from Fall 2006 to Spring 2007 at the EWU campus in Cheney. This is a screening every week that is not followed by a holiday or final exam week. It also excludes the two weeks of the Spokane International Film Festival, which offers many independent and international films. As explained below, a portion of this proposal includes funds that aim to get more EWU students to attend this festival.

EWU Screenings will alternate between wide-appeal features and an alternative film series. This proposal advocates continuing and expanding the current wide-appeal screenings to include an alternative film series. Wide-appeal screenings would continue in Showalter 109, which seats three hundred persons and has a state-of-the-art 35 mm projection and sound system. The Alternative Film Series will screen mainly in R-TV 101, which seats fifty persons and has a video projection and sound system. An alternative film title will screen in SHO 109 if anticipated attendance exceeds the capacity of R-TV 101. The proposal also leaves open the possibility of adding Alternative Film Screenings at Riverpoint Campus in Spokane as this would not increase expense.
In the fall of 2005, the EWU Film Society began screening wide-appeal films, thus restoring a favorite community activity that had been absent from EWU and Cheney for some time. Our best screenings reached nearly 200 attendees, with many Cheney residents attending. In addition to reaching out to the community, we also hoped that campus screenings would be an alternative to “Thirsty Thursday,” an EWU student tradition of drinking alcohol on Thursday nights. As we all know, alcohol abuse and its consequences continue to be negative factors in student retention and academic performance. The effect of Thursday screenings on alcohol abuse is very difficult to measure, but the screenings have clearly contributed to an institution-wide commitment to community engagement and cultivated a community culture. Projecting from our current attendance and anticipating raising ticket prices, wide-appeal screenings promise to become economically self-sufficient in the near future but our funding is uncertain. The first part of the “Movies on Campus and Beyond” proposal is to continue the wide-appeal series as an opportunity to bring Cheney residents and EWU students, faculty, and staff together for a community activity. Through such events, Cheney residents learn that they are welcome at EWU. It was also my observation over the course of this year that many shy students, who might avoid most non-obligatory social situations, found the movies pitched at their level of community engagement. Such “low risk” activities promise to attract students, such as transfer students and students of color, who might otherwise never engage the university experience outside of the classroom. Ideally, the mainstream series will lead them to take more steps into community culture, perhaps by attending our alternative film series.

The second part of the proposal is to add an alternative film series of independent films, historically significant films, and films by and for traditionally marginalized persons. Film
showings on campus will then be more balanced between community event and academic
learning opportunity. Adding films by and for traditionally marginalized persons promises to
engage currently under-served students, particularly those of color, in the life of the university
and to improve their retention and civic engagement. Such an emphasis also raises the
possibility of more input from academic areas, such as African-American studies and Native
American studies, in the screenings and adjacent activities. Currently, Steve Bertram of S.A.F.E.
(Student Alliance for Equality), Angela Schwendiman of African-American Studies, and a
faculty representative of the Women’s Studies Program are in line to participate in choosing the
titles that will comprise the Alternative Film Series. I will also be collaborating with Susan
Lopez, who has ties to the Latino community in Spokane and is working to bring Women’s
Center programming Riverpoint Campus. Of course, such involvement cultivates, as the
Strategic Plan recommends, “An academic community culture that supports and engages faculty
and staff throughout their careers.”

The third and final part of the proposal is a subsidy for EWU student attendance at The Spokane
International Film Festival (SpIff). SpIff 2007 will screen at The Met in downtown Spokane
over two weeks in late January and early February. As before, the festival will screen
independent and international cinema (I am currently charged with finding the works that will
screen). Increasing student attendance and participation (current and former EWU students
screened short films in 2006) would demonstrate a commitment to Goal III of the Strategic Plan:
“an institution-wide commitment to community engagement that benefits the university, the
region and the world.” I can also attest that the students who screened their work at SpIff
benefited immensely from engaging with their audience in the question and answer session that
followed. As would the alternative film series, attendance at SpIff would expose students to international films and the cultures that they represent.

These activities touch on many goals of the strategic plan. As mentioned earlier, the mainstream series currently strengthens community bonds between EWU and Cheney. Adding an alternative film series attains additional benefits. For students, the film series promises learning that explores multi-cultural and international perspectives and experiences. For faculty, the film series offers opportunities to collaborate across disciplines, cultivates a collegial environment that values new ideas, and has the potential to contribute to annual campus-wide learning themes. Wherever possible, screenings in the alternative film series will include faculty participation, such as introducing the films and holding panel discussions or question and answer sessions after the screening.

The EWU Film Society, a student organization composed of diverse majors and devoted to the cultivation of a film culture at EWU, will coordinate and oversee the publicity and screening of the programs. The experience of running the screenings over the 2005-2006 academic year made a significant impact on these students by cultivating responsibility, creating community, teaching them new skills, such as running the film projector and equipment.

Complete timetable for implementation
The “Movies on Campus and Beyond” proposal will commence in Fall of 2006 and continue through Spring of 2007. The proposal advocates 21 screenings, 12 wide-appeal films and 9 films in an Alternative Series. The SpIFF portion will be in January and February 2007.

Plan for evaluation and assessment

The three main facets of the proposal seek different goals and have different methods of evaluating their success. The central goal of the mainstream series is to bring together the EWU community and the Cheney community. Both seem to feel somewhat alienated and separate from the other and the film series aims mainly to bridge this divide. Its success is measured in attendance by EWU students and Cheney residents.

The success of the Alternative Film Series will be measured by its impact on the groups that participate and by their assessment of its effects on campus climate. For example, S.A.F.E., a campus group that advocates tolerance, plans to organize some screenings. At the end of the year, we will measure membership trends that stem from the screenings, such as numbers of new and continuing members. Of central interest will be increased participation in student groups that reach out to students who might otherwise feel marginalized, therefore improving retention of at-risk students. We will also ask groups to evaluate whether the series had the effects on campus climate that they had hoped for. Similarly, a screening and discussion held by African-American studies might aim to create a climate of inclusion; measurements of the retention of students of color from quarter to quarter might be an adequate barometer of the success of the screening. On one level, the success of the Alternative Film Series will be evident from the willingness of academic, student, and community groups to participate. On another level,
assessing the success of the series will need to be done in concert with those who participate and whether the series helps them achieve their ends.

Finally, the success of the Spokane International Film Series subsidy will be measured by how many EWU students take advantage of the subsidy. As with the Alternative Film Series, the screenings at SpIFF are bracketed by speakers who introduce the films and lead discussion afterward. Such activities engage students in a rigorous and challenging culture of ideas.
Detailed budget:

An exhaustive budget for this proposal is a challenge because of three unpredictable factors: admissions, particular titles, and shipping cost variations. The proposed solution is to earmark any remaining funds for purchasing DVD’s for JFK library. Adding titles to the JFK library will enable student groups to build awareness on campus long into the future. JFK offers projectors and computers for checkout—a combination that enables student, faculty, and staff to create their own film series and to cultivate a campus climate that meets their goals.

Admission, of course, varies. Our best “gate,” or total admissions, was $430 for *Chronicles of Narnia*. The worst was $30 for *The Matrix*. The average gate for all shows ran about $250 for mainstream, wide-appeal films. This was at a ticket price of $3 or $2 with student ID. The ticket price for next year will rise to $4 or $3 for students. If attendance holds or dips slightly, this will make the average gate about $300, which will cover almost half of the cost of the mainstream shows. The gate for the alternative series screenings in SHO 109 will likely be $100 at best. Screenings in R-TV will probably bring in about $20 as prices here will need to be reduced.

Predicting titles is similarly difficult because films that we would show have yet to be released. The mainstream titles will likely come from Swank Motion Pictures, a leading distributor of movies in non-theatrical release (any venue not a first-run cinema such as AMC) has quoted a series of 15 films at $725 per title plus shipping and taxes, which run between $100 and $200 because the cost of shipping varies by studio. Three mainstream films proposed for Fall 2006 will cost $55 for shipping because they are Disney/Buena Vista titles: *Cars, Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *Lady in the Water*. *Superman Returns*, however, is a Warner Bros. title and will
cost $146 to ship. Taxes make it the $100 or $200 per title for shipping and taxes. Mainstream, and some alternative, titles would then cost $825 to $925.

Remaining alternative titles are more likely to come from distributors that specialize in independent films, such as *New Yorker Films, Women Make Movies, Library of African Cinema, and Zeitgeist Films*, which charge comparable rates for 35 mm prints. For example, a fall 2005 quote for *Amores Perros* (2002) from *New Yorker Films* was $545 for print rental, $120 shipping, and taxes. Newer titles cost more and bring them in line with the Swank estimate.

Moving most of the Alternative Film Series to R-TV 101 has two very positive side effects. First, purchasing a DVD with public performance rights from *Women Make Movies, Library of African Cinema,* or *Zeitgeist Films* costs only $250 and we can put the DVD in JFK for future use. Second, it means that shows will be projected from DVD or VHS, which reduces shipping to under $10. Renting a DVD from *New Yorker Films saves* some but not as much, a new title runs $450 + $5 shipping.

**Mainstream Series: $6,900 Requested**

*Swank* Titles: 12 x $725=8,700
Shipping and Taxes: 12 x $150=1,800
Less Gate: 12 x 300=3,600
Estimated Cost: 6,900

**Alternative Series: $3,825 Requested**

In SHO 109
*Swank* or other Titles: 3 x $725=2,175
Shipping and Taxes: 450
Less Gate: 300
Estimated Cost: 2,325
In R-TV 101
*Zeitgeist* or other titles on DVD: 6 x $250=1,500
Shipping and Taxes: 6 x $30=180
Less Gate: $120
Estimated Cost: 1,560

Total Film Rentals: $10,725

Promotion of the Screenings:
Print Services or suitable alternative @ $50 per screening for 21 screenings=$1,050.

Spokane International Film Festival
Subsidy to encourage EWU student attendance: $500 (100 half-price tickets)
Subsidy will go toward reduced-price tickets or comparable enticements

Total Dollar Request: $12,275

Any remaining funds will go toward adding titles to the video materials collection at JFK library.