



Humber College Professor Teaches Screenwriting in Bhutan _____ by Eva Ziemsen

Eva Ziemsen, Professor and Program Co-coordinator of the Film and Television Production Advanced Diploma Program in the School of Media Studies at Humber College, was given the opportunity of a lifetime to travel to Bhutan to teach an intensive screenwriting workshop this past May. Her pupils ranged from existing screenwriters to veteran journalists to recent high school graduates. The students were eager to learn the craft of scriptwriting at a professional level so that they could better tell their own stories in cinematic form.

The workshop was organized by the Department of Information and Media in Bhutan with the aim of developing the emerging Bhutanese film industry. Many of the students travelled from remote parts of Bhutan to the capital, Thimphu, to learn one semester's worth of material in an intensive workshop, distributed over two weeks. The workshop was based on the second year screenwriting curriculum of the Humber College Film & Television Production Advanced Diploma program.

From the very start, the students displayed passion for the subject matter and a deep appreciation for the workshop initiative. The students wore traditional Bhutanese attire, as is required when attending any officially sanctioned event. Prof. Ziemsen also decided it would be appropriate for her to wear the traditional clothing of Bhutan on the first day, for which the students later expressed great appreciation.

The goal of the first day was to discuss the nature of storytelling and screenwriting in Bhutan. The students engaged in a lively debate about whether they wanted to go in the direction of commercial cinema, in the style of Bollywood, or to preserve indigenous cultural Bhutanese cinema. Each day the students, administrators, and Prof. Ziemsen ate lunch together; usually a dish consisting of hot green chili peppers-- a Bhutanese staple.

Over the course of the workshop, students presented daily mini script assignments, quickly incorporating the lessons into their work. Since English is taught in Bhutanese schools, there was no significant language barrier. On the last day of class students read their final short screenplays, which they had been developing over the course of the two weeks. The scripts were original stories that ranged from folklore adaptations, to current affairs issues, and always reflected their unique experiences of living in Bhutan.



Eva Ziemsen sitting with students atop of Buddha Point in Thimphu, having a picnic lunch at the end of the course.



Eva Ziemsen with her students at the end of the two-week intensive workshop.

The last day concluded with a closing ceremony, attended by the Minister of Information and Communication, who presented the students with special certificates of attendance. The students made a collective speech and presented Prof. Ziemsen with a gift of a painting depicting "The Story of Four Harmonious Friends," is a symbol of connection and interdependence. The students' gestures and words of gratitude were profound and moving, and expressed the transformation that resulted from this truly meaningful teaching and learning experience.

Prof. Eva Ziemsen has maintained contact with many of her Bhutanese students and is currently developing ways to connect them with the Humber College curriculum and students.