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### **Gardner-Webb Student's Internship Leads to More Opportunities in Film Industry**

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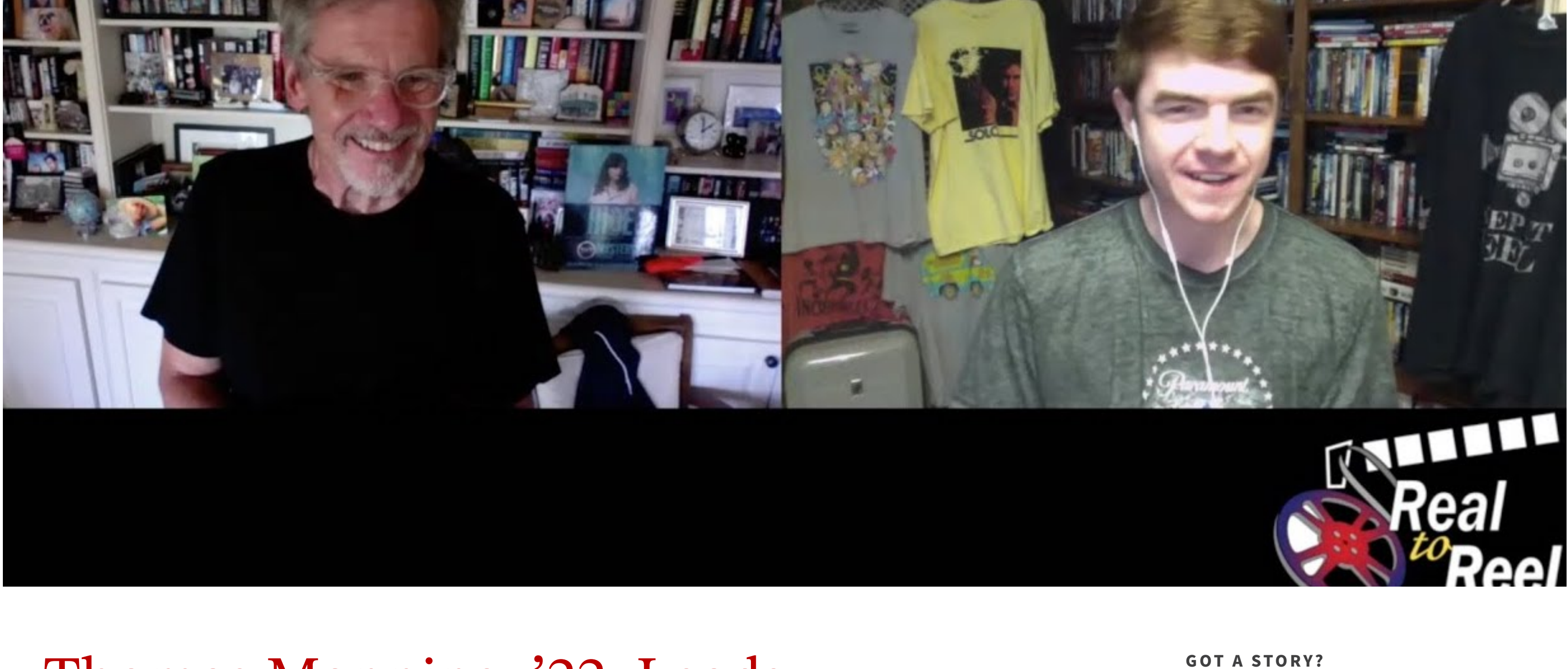
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ACADEMICS

# Gardner-Webb Student’s Internship Leads to More Opportunities in Film Industry

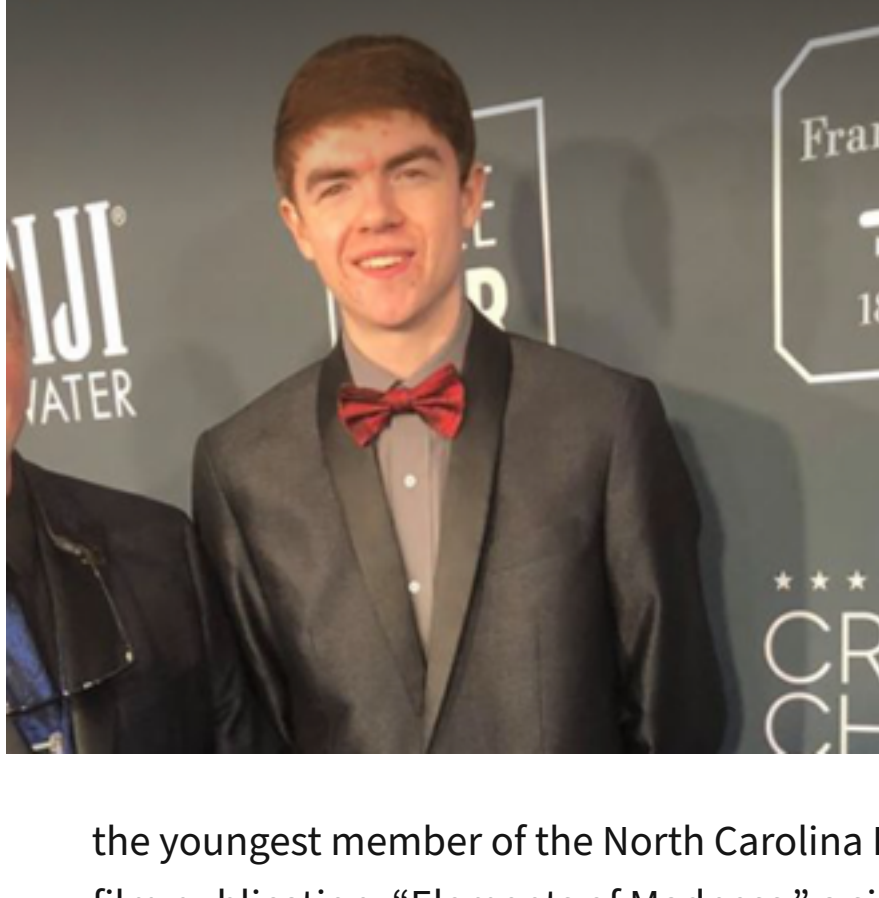
BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2020



## Thomas Manning, '22, Leads Marketing Efforts for 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Real to Reel Film Festival

As a partner in the community, Gardner-Webb University connects students to various hands-on work experiences. This year, COVID-19 restrictions altered experiential learning opportunities, but students adapted. When plans for his internship project changed, Gardner-Webb student Thomas Manning, of Boiling Springs, N.C., adjusted and grew in the process.

A communication studies major with a concentration in video/film, Manning interned with the Cleveland County Arts Council in Shelby, N.C. His primary responsibility was to market and promote the Council's 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Real to Reel Film Festival. The live event transitioned to a virtual format because of COVID-19. Manning promoted the festival by using skills learned in his GWU classes to interview directors of the films and post them to official Arts Council digital media channels and official social media networks.

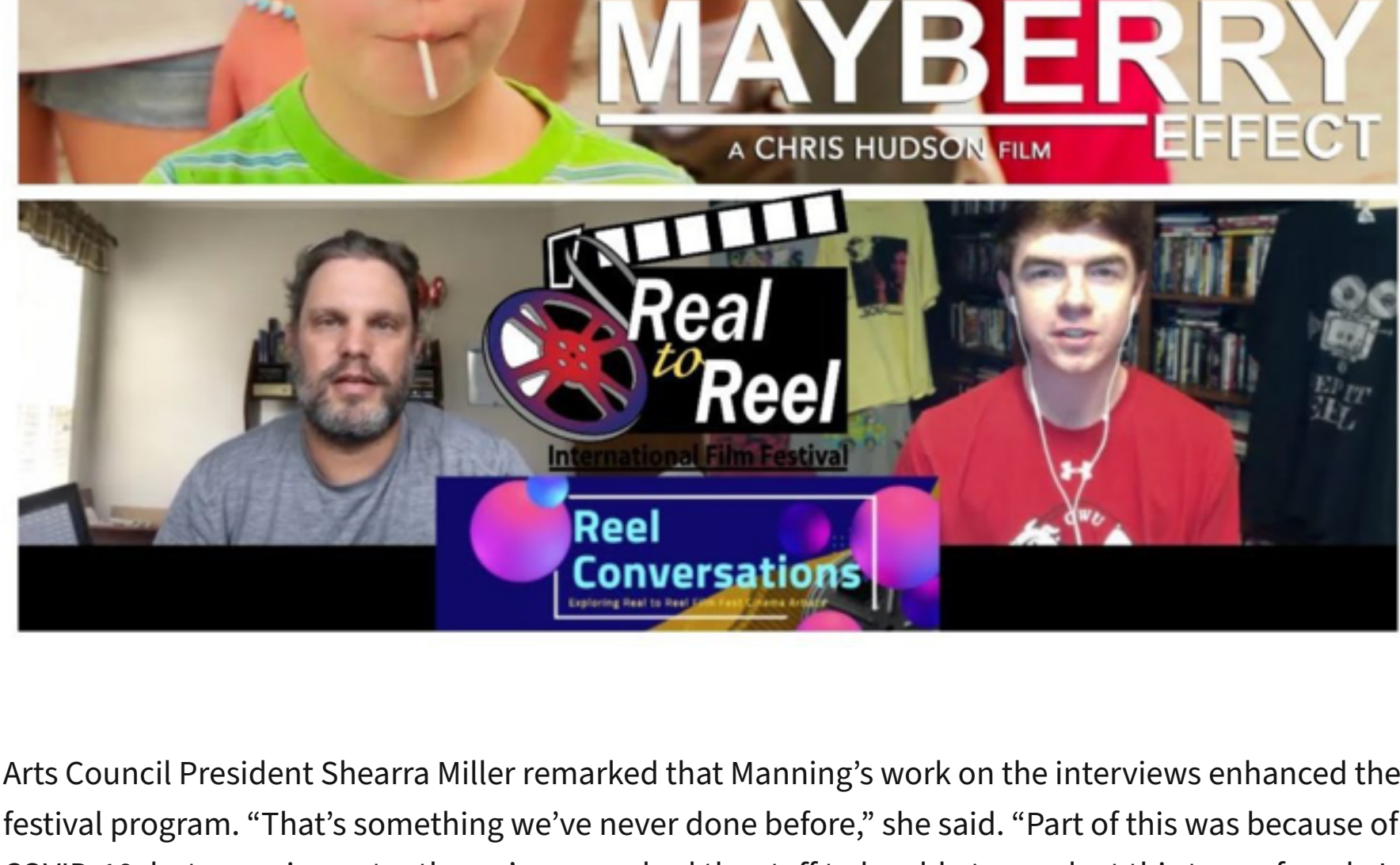


"Throughout my time at GWU, I have continued to expand my horizons as a student of film, taking on as many opportunities as possible—both in school, and in outside extracurricular activities," Manning offered. "I have worked with GWU's radio station, WGWW, for the past three years. Within the past year, I also developed a presence on local television as the co-host of C19's 'Meet me at the Movies,' a film talk show and podcast hosted by my father, Noel Manning. The majority of guests we bring onto this show are critics, journalists, and members of the industry."

Besides his broadcasting experience, Manning is the youngest member of the North Carolina Film Critics Association. He writes reviews for an online film publication, "Elements of Madness," a site managed by Critics Choice Association member, Douglas Davidson. "In the English department at GWU, the courses I completed with Dr. Chris Davis and Dr. Jennifer Buckner helped hone my skills and talents as a writer and communicator," Manning related. "The ability to effectively and coherently communicate one's thoughts in written form is an invaluable tool, which certainly assisted me in my internship on a daily basis."

Manning's first task for the Real to Reel Fest was serving on the Film Selection Committee, which entailed watching, reviewing and rating a total of nearly 150 film submissions. After the committee's votes were compiled and averaged, 43 films were selected for the festival.

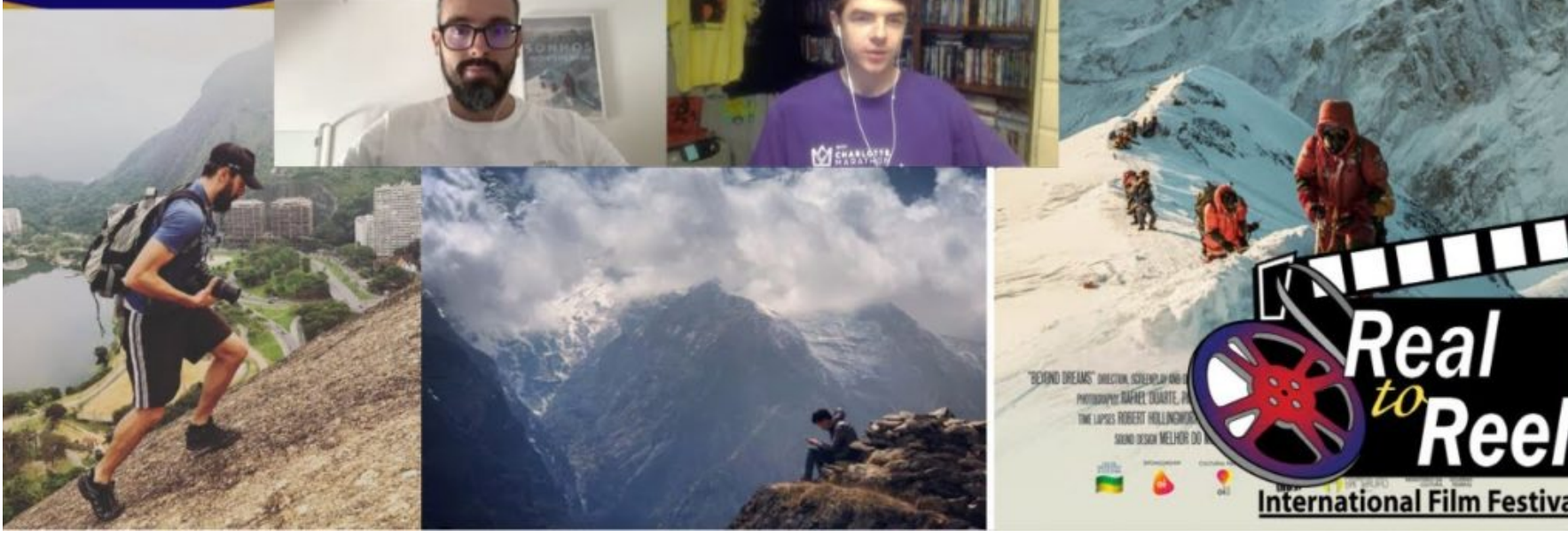
He wrote press releases and circulated them to regional newspapers and online platforms. He conducted 18 interviews via Zoom video calls, by phone or email with writers, directors and others associated with the films. Moreover, Manning helped "Elements of Madness" and Real to Reel organizers form a partnership. "After discussing some options with Douglas, as well as my Real to Reel supervisors, we decided that it would be mutually beneficial for my interviews to be posted to 'Elements of Madness,'" Manning noted. "The consistent flow of content would bring added attention to his site, and it would promote Real to Reel to a wider audience, because Douglas also serves on the executive team of the North Carolina Film Critics Association."



Arts Council President Shearra Miller remarked that Manning's work on the interviews enhanced the festival program. "That's something we've never done before," she said. "Part of this was because of COVID-19, but more importantly, we've never had the staff to be able to conduct this type of work. I think we learned through this experience that even when we go back to a live festival, the virtual interviews will be essential. I think we also learned that it will be essential to have a Real to Reel intern."

The interviews are available on the [Arts Council YouTube channel](#). Preparation for each one took between one to two hours. "I had to intently analyze each film that we would be discussing in the interview, and develop thoughtful, critical questions that would serve as good conversation points," Manning explained. "Considering that I was interviewing writers, directors, producers, and actors across a broad age range, experience level, and filmmaking background, I had to adjust my approach and outlook with each new discussion."

Completing the project helped Manning gain more confidence in his communication skills and become more comfortable in front of a camera or behind a microphone. "More than anything, the challenges of my internship really opened up my eyes to the potential of my capabilities," he asserted, "And showed me what I can do if I make a conscious effort to step outside of my comfort zone."



The 43 films are showcased at [RealtoReelfest.com](#). Entries are submitted by national and international student filmmakers, amateur artists, and professionals. "Many of these films are never going to get a wide distribution, so the festival circuit is a phenomenal avenue for these creative minds to have their voices heard and their hard work appreciated by others," Manning affirmed. "Events like Real to Reel are often stepping stones for filmmakers on the way to long and successful careers. A few of my favorites include 'Beyond Dreams,' (a feature-length documentary about a Brazilian athlete surviving hardships while exploring Mt. Everest), 'Extra Innings,' (a narrative short film drama directed by John Gray, starring TJ Thyne and Peter Riegert), 'A Modern Romance,' (a narrative short comedy, created by film students at the UNCSCA), and 'Spread Among Us,' (a post-apocalyptic thriller short film, also from UNCSCA students)."

Since the internship ended, Manning has interviewed other artists in the film industry, such as actor, martial artist, and stuntman Scott Adkins, who has worked with Donnie Yen, Jet Li, Sylvester Stallone, Benedict Cumberbatch, Matt Damon, and others. Manning also interviewed Laurent Bouzereau, a legendary documentarian, film historian, and author who has produced more than 150 behind-the-scenes documentaries and featurettes. Additionally, Manning is working on a feature-length documentary with 2018 GWU alumnus Christian Jessup. The film centers around the 2018-2019 Gardner-Webb Men's Basketball team, the first team in school history to reach the (Men's Basketball) NCAA Tournament. "The confidence and communication skills I gained from my internship with the Real to Reel Film Festival and Cleveland County Arts Council are massively important to the quality of my efforts on the production of this documentary," Manning acknowledged.

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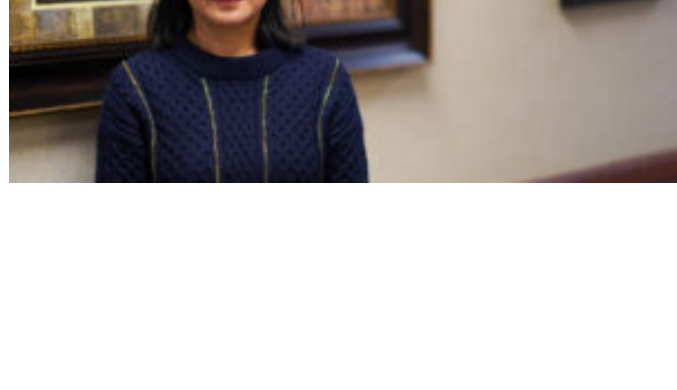
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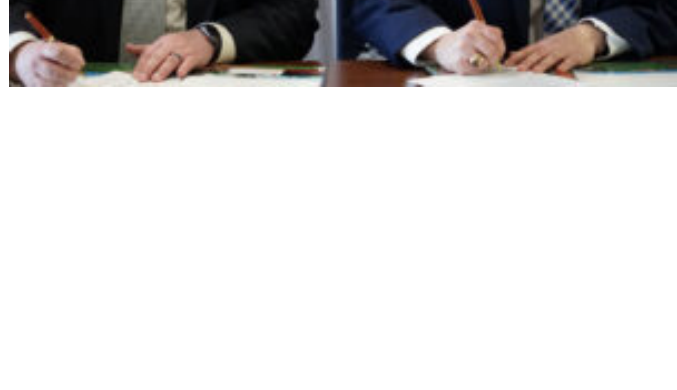


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