



Roll out the red **carpet**

By Wanda Schmöckel BJ'13

More than four decades ago, some pioneering faculty members took the first tentative steps to establish a film program at the University of Regina. In 1980, the first of the University's film degrees was handed out. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has put a halt to this year's 40th anniversary celebrations of the only degree-granting film program between the Great Lakes and Vancouver.

C

andy Fox BFA'15 has had a very busy few years. Since graduating from the University of Regina's Department of Film in 2015, the Cree independent filmmaker has maintained a fast-paced schedule while enjoying many successes along the way; her fourth-year graduating film, *Backroads*, has garnered several awards and was included in the Toronto International Film Festival's Canada Top Ten Student Films for 2015.

Her most recent production, *ahkameyimo nitanis/Keep Going My Daughter*, a poetic documentary that expresses the hopes of two young Indigenous parents for their daughter, was made in 2018 through the National Screen Institute's Indigidocs program and selected to premiere at the 2019 Hot Docs festival. These accolades have since attracted the attention of the film industry; Fox's network television directing debut, *The Other Side*, will air on APTN this fall.

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In the meantime, she has several new projects in the works with plans to begin development in the coming year. Fox credits the University of Regina's film program – and the connections she made there – for equipping her with the tools necessary to succeed as an independent filmmaker in an increasingly challenging landscape.



Regina filmmaker and Department of Film graduate
Candy Fox BFA'15. (Photo courtesy of Candy Fox)

"I was really glad that we had a degree-granting program in Regina," Fox says. "A lot of work that I've gotten was because of the attention I received for *Backroads*. I appreciated that I was able to take my time at school, go at my own pace, find my footing, and really develop my voice. I think my career would be vastly different if I went east or west because I wouldn't be focusing on stories that relate to my own familial history here on these lands. For me, there's a huge value in staying on the land that I come from for my storytelling." The Department of Film at the University of Regina offers the only degree-granting film program between the Great Lakes and Vancouver. Regina is perhaps an unlikely locale for a film school, in a part of the country more often associated with agriculture and resource extraction. It has put the University in a unique position to attract emerging filmmakers from across the Prairies.

The Department of Film at the University of Regina offers the only degree-granting film program between the Great Lakes and Vancouver.

"Some of our best students come from smaller communities in the province," says associate professor Gerald Saul BFA'93. "We're training our own kids from our own province and helping them find their voice here."

Saul has been teaching in the program since 1997 and says film culture has changed, with more images on different platforms being generated than ever before and technology that changes every year. However, the basics of what he teaches – frame composition, editing, film language, and working collaboratively – are similar to what he learned back when he was a film student. "We shoot more projects now, just because resources used to be more expensive, and that meant making multiple projects every semester was very difficult," he says. "Now students are able to make more projects – and they can work faster – but the same learning milestones are there."



Former department head, associate professor, Gerald Saul BFA'93. (Photo by Trevor Hopkin)

"A truly great quality of the film program, both undergraduate and graduate, is how impressively the faculty and staff support and mentor the students," says Rae Staseson BFA'87, dean of the Faculty of Media, Art, & Performance. "Film students quickly have a sense of 'home' once in the Department, and this sense of place allows the students to prosper in ways they may not have in a different kind of program."

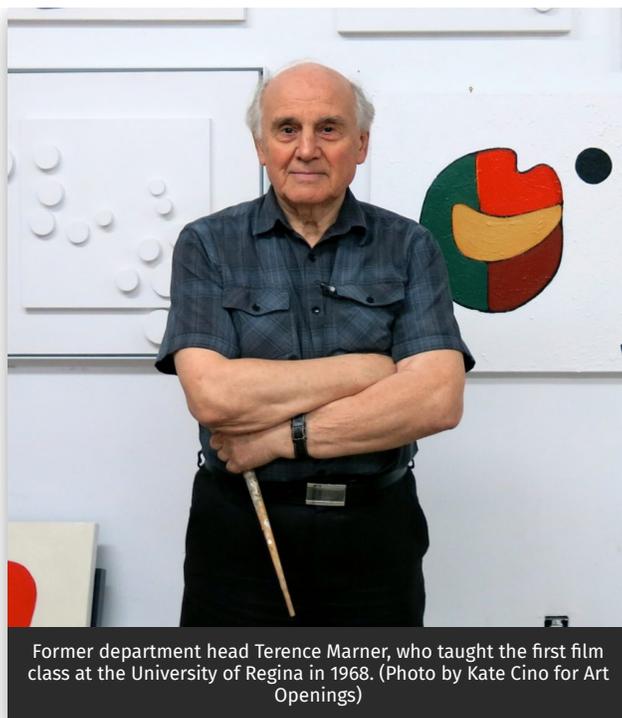
In its early years, Marner brought a pageant of prominent filmmakers to visit the University's burgeoning program, including Indian Film Crew (National Film Board) founding member Noel Starblanket, experimental film giant Bruce Baillie, National Film Board founder John Grierson, and father of Canadian direct-cinema Allan King.



Dean of the Faculty of Media, Art, and Performance, Rae Staseson BFA'87. (Photo by Trevor Hopkin)

This year marks 40 years since the University of Regina awarded its first degree in film. Its first graduate, Ron Forsythe, went on to enjoy a decades-long career as a Gemini and Canadian Screen Award-winning director for CBC Sports, whose credits include Olympic Games, Stanley Cup finals and Grey Cup games. But the origins of the program date back more than a decade earlier to the late 1960s when the University of Saskatchewan's fine arts school (then at the University of Saskatchewan's Regina Campus on College Avenue) attracted Terence Marner, an English painter and recent transplant to Canada. Marner had a personal interest in film and started teaching an introductory course in 1968, but when he started putting the wheels in motion to establish a program, it wasn't an easy sell. "There was an interest in film but unfortunately, when Dr. William Riddell (first principal of the University of Saskatchewan's Regina Campus) sent a proposal to the faculty, they didn't think of film as being one of the fine arts," he says.

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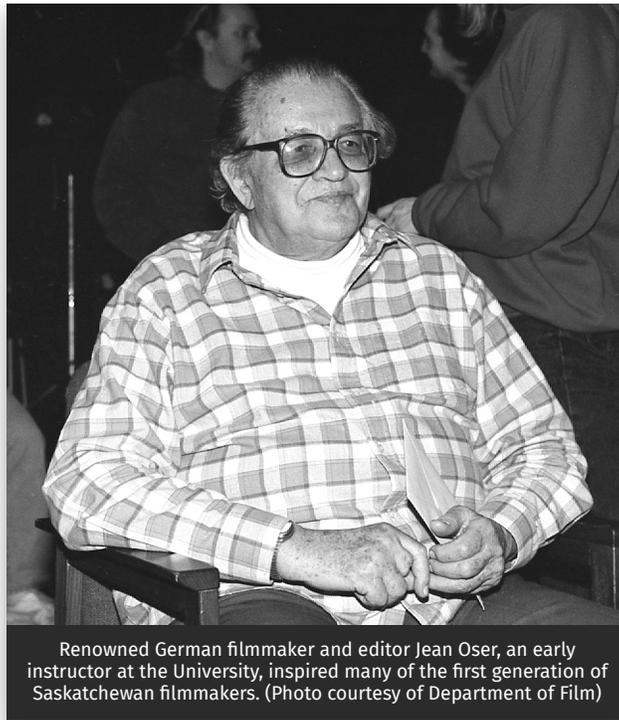
In 1970, Marner took leave from the University to attend the London Film School. In the meantime, he'd reached out to Jean Oser, a renowned German filmmaker and editor with a 40-plus year career working on such films as *The Threepenny Opera* and *Westfront 1918* by G.W. Pabst. Marner convinced Oser to leave his residence in New York to cover Marner's classes while he was away. Oser, whose legendary expertise and enthusiasm for film became synonymous with the program, found a welcoming home in Regina. He decided to stay and quickly became a favourite instructor.

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“Jean was a really good teacher and a great inspiration,” Marner says. Oser’s influence on film culture in Saskatchewan would prove indelible, extending to a generation of filmmakers who would help nurture a unique film culture in the province. Some of Oser’s students eventually went on to become professors and instructors in the program: Larry Bauman, Elaine Pain BFA’91, Gerald Saul BFA’93, Brian Stockton BFA’91, Will Dixon BA’87, and Mark Wihak BA’90 among them. Oser was named Professor Emeritus in 1989 and the Department of Film named an award in his honour to

acknowledge the graduate year’s most outstanding film studies essays. When Marner returned to Regina in 1972, fueled by his experiences at the London Film School and after publishing two books on filmmaking, he was inspired to put the program on a different course. “When I went over to England, my roots were in avant-garde production,” Marner says. “However, on my return to Regina, I wanted the students to realise their individual creativity by having a good command of their craft – and a professional ethic that would prepare them to succeed either in an industrial setting or as independent filmmakers.”

When Oser retired in 1975, Marner was, once again, left to run the school’s film courses on his own. If a film program had any hope of being established, he needed at least one other faculty member – and the University could not supply the necessary financial support at that time. Marner persuaded Campion College to provide one film studies faculty member, which allowed him to concentrate on teaching production classes. Without that initial support, building a department would have been impossible. In 1976, the first discussions about how to establish a fully-fledged academic department began.



Renowned German filmmaker and editor Jean Oser, an early instructor at the University, inspired many of the first generation of Saskatchewan filmmakers. (Photo courtesy of Department of Film)

In the decades since the program's humble beginnings, Saskatchewan has produced a bumper crop of filmmakers who would find their place as leaders in the Canadian film industry (and elsewhere) with a Prairie-based perspective on the world.

In its early years, Marner brought a pageant of prominent filmmakers to visit the University's burgeoning program, including Indian Film Crew (National Film Board) founding member Noel Starblanket, experimental film giant Bruce Baillie, National Film Board founder John Grierson, and father of Canadian direct-cinema Allan King. This was more than a decade before anything remotely resembling a film production industry would arrive in Saskatchewan but by the time the industry began to emerge in the late 1980s – led by many of the program's early graduates – a bustling production hub was born.

In the decades since the program's humble beginnings, Saskatchewan has produced a bumper crop of filmmakers who would find their place as leaders in the Canadian film industry (and elsewhere) with a Prairie-based perspective on the world. University of Regina graduates have gone on to help make a number of home-grown television series and films, including *Corner Gas*, *Wapos Bay*, *Prairie Giant*, *The Englishman's Boy*, *Landscape as Muse*, *Incredible Story Studio*, *RenegadePress.com*, and others.

While the bigger industry work that once employed many University of Regina graduates on large film sets is no longer an option in this province, there has, in recent years, been a notable increase in independent production.

Alumni that have received or been nominated for Canadian Screen and Gemini awards include Jackie Dzuba BA'89 (*The Englishman's Boy*), Ian Toews BFA'99 and Mark Bradely BFA'98 (*Landscape as Muse*), Dennis Jackson BFA'98 (*Wapos Bay*), Rob Pytlyk BFA'03 (*Drug Class*), Ron Forsythe BA'80 (CBC Sports and Sportsnet), Jeff Beesley BFA'96 (*Corner Gas*), Jason Nielsen BFA'91 (*Landscape as Muse*), Darryl Kessler BFA'93 (*The Neighbour's Dog*), Lucas Frison BFA'14 and others. The program has also produced many educators, curators, and programmers, including Alumni Crowning Achievement Award recipient, Janine Windolph BFA'06, MFA'11 (Banff Centre), Jemma Gilboy BFA'08, BA(Hons)'09 (Nottingham Trent University, UK), Roy Cross BA'90 (Concordia University), Belinda New BA'86 (RPL Film Theatre and Rainbow Cinemas' Studio 7), and Will Dixon BA'87 (CityTV Saskatchewan).

If there's a path forward to producing more Saskatchewan-based film and television, it may well lay in the kinds of smaller, boutique productions that it has seen over the past five years.



After her graduation in 2012, Amy Mantyka BFA'12 founded Play Creative with her classmates Mike Maekelburger BFA'11 and Chris Miller BFA'11. The award-winning full-service production company is gaining a national reputation for its outstanding video productions. (Photo by Trevor Hopkin)

“Without meeting those people in film school, I really wonder what I’d be doing today,” she says of her colleagues. Mantyka graduated from the program in 2012, when the Saskatchewan film industry was taking a hit from the provincial government’s cancellation of the Saskatchewan Film Employment Tax Credit – a crucial element in attracting business to the local production industry. As it happened, Mantyka had decided to forge a business on her own a few years earlier, after spending time as a production assistant on a television show set between semesters.

While on set, even though she wasn’t yet out of school, Mantyka was asked which departmental roles she’d like to pursue. The experience gave her pause for thought and helped to refocus her career path. “Sometimes it’s about learning what you don’t want to do,” Mantyka says. “I was thinking about what I wanted to do with my film degree and if it felt right to start working on large film sets. I didn’t want to commit to a specific role, or crew position, so quickly.”

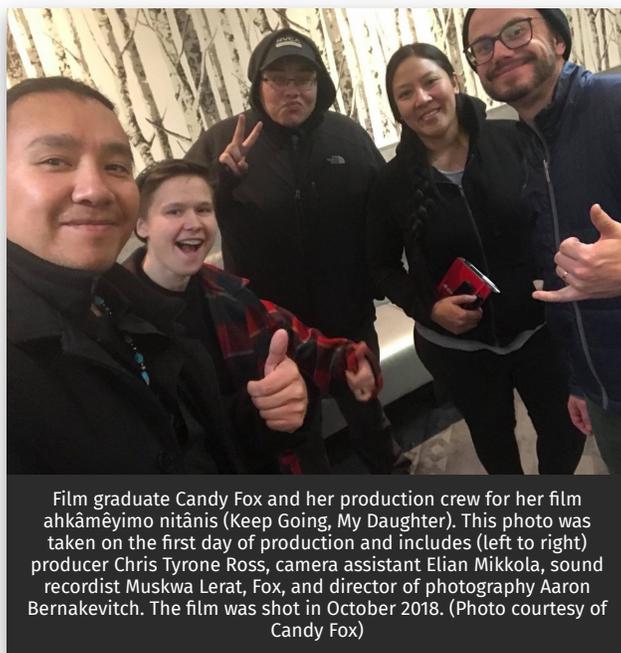
The foundations of Amy Mantyka’s BFA’12 business were laid at the film school during her graduating year. Mantyka runs Play Creative, a full-service production company in Regina, with fellow University of Regina film graduates Mike Maekelburger BFA’11 and Chris Miller BFA’11. The company creates commercial content for a growing roster of clients ranging from Crown corporations to the private sector, enabling the company to maintain a full production and post-production studio, and employ a full-time staff of six.



Amy Mantyka directs a "Plan to be Different" campaign commercial for Sasktel in June 2019 near Lumsden. (Photo courtesy of Play Creative)

Her time at the University of Regina's film program exposed her to the experience of having more control over an entire production and carving out a career that entailed directing her own work. "I'm very thankful I went to film school at the U of R because it enabled me to write and direct my own projects. It was definitely a very collaborative experience, but having that sense of authorship really influenced me."

While the loss of the Saskatchewan film industry has had an undeniable effect on the Department of Film, Saul is quick to point out that the value of its the program goes well beyond that of a training school. "We teach people to be creative and to use film as a means of creative expression," Saul says. "There is now no local industry welcoming you in – you have to make your own work. Our students today have a better sense of where they want to go. They're more realistic."



In many ways, the scene for local filmmakers and producers now harkens back to the early days before the province's film industry ever took root. While the bigger industry work that once employed many University of Regina graduates on large film sets is no longer an option in this province, there has, in recent years, been a notable increase in independent production.

University of Regina graduate Lowell Dean's BFA'02 feature film, *WolfCop*, was produced in 2014. Graduate Matt Yim BFA'12 made his feature film, *Basic Human Needs*, in 2015, as did Department of Film professor Brian Stockton when he completed *The Sabbatical*. University of Regina sessional instructor Robin Schlaht's BFA'92 arts documentary series, *Making It in Saskatchewan (CityTV)*, was produced in 2019.