



Stony Brook
University

MANHATTAN CENTER

MFA in Film

MFA in TV Writing

SPRING 2025

NEWSLETTER

APPLICATION DEADLINE

The final deadline for the Fall 2025 cohort for both TV Writing and Film programs is July 15th for domestic students.

Materials needed to apply can be found at this [link](#).

Apply Before the Deadline!

Why You Should Apply to Stony Brook

From an MFA in Film Student:

"As a first year student, I have loved the past two semesters. I came in without set experience, and I have classmates who, on the opposite end of the spectrum, worked professionally in the industry for many years before joining the program. We've all taken away something from our classes, professors, and peers.

In the program you jump right in, learning all gear and set language, writing, re-writing, and directing short exercises each week. By the end of the first semester I had written a short screenplay I felt proud of, worked on crew in sound and camera, and even felt more comfortable editing my own work and mixing sound. By second semester we were able to write, produce, and crew on six, 10-minute short films. This process of learning, doing and repeating is what makes the program so special. We don't just learn about how to produce or direct. We learn about it and then immediately use that knowledge on our own films and on our classmates' films. For example, I had never worked with SAG contracts, but we talked about them in that class and that same week I applied for my first SAG project.

Being able to see the upperclassmen work on features and longer shorts has also been incredible. There are students shooting features abroad or back home in all genres and with different budgets. I used to wonder if I could walk out of the program with my first feature under my belt, but I know when the time comes, I have so many professors and classmates to lean on. It all feels less daunting or like a mystery, each project just grows from the last one. "



Why You Should Apply to Stony Brook

From an MFA in TV Writing Student:

"During my first year, I wrote a spec script for Yellow Jackets and learned about creating compelling stories, episode structure, character and emotional arcs and more. Then I created my own series concept and completed an original pilot script. The one-on-one advising from seasoned faculty was invaluable. Plus, we had a Showrunner class taught by renowned Executive Producer, Jackie Reingold who ran a mini-room where we developed the series arcs for one of her pilot scripts. The Guest Series run by Alan Kingsberg brought in Laura Eason, showrunner of Three Women, Debra Cahn, showrunner of Netflix's The Diplomat, Nick Bakay, showrunner of HBO's The Bookie and James Ponsoldt, director of Apple's Shrinking who shared inside tips with us and answered our questions.



TV Pilot Incubator Success



Unlike anything else offered in universities nationwide, Stony Brook's MFA in TV Writing has launched a program connecting recent graduates with industry professionals to take their series pitches to the next level. Five program graduates (Walter Stafford '22, Jeff Bernier '22, Nelson Downend '22, Tristan Rodriguez '23, and Greg Abbey '23) pitched their pilots to an audience of peers and industry heavyweights, with the eventual goal of producing them through funding from private foundations and industry partnerships.



TV Pilot Incubator Success

An Exciting Pitchfest Win for Tristan Rodriguez ('23)

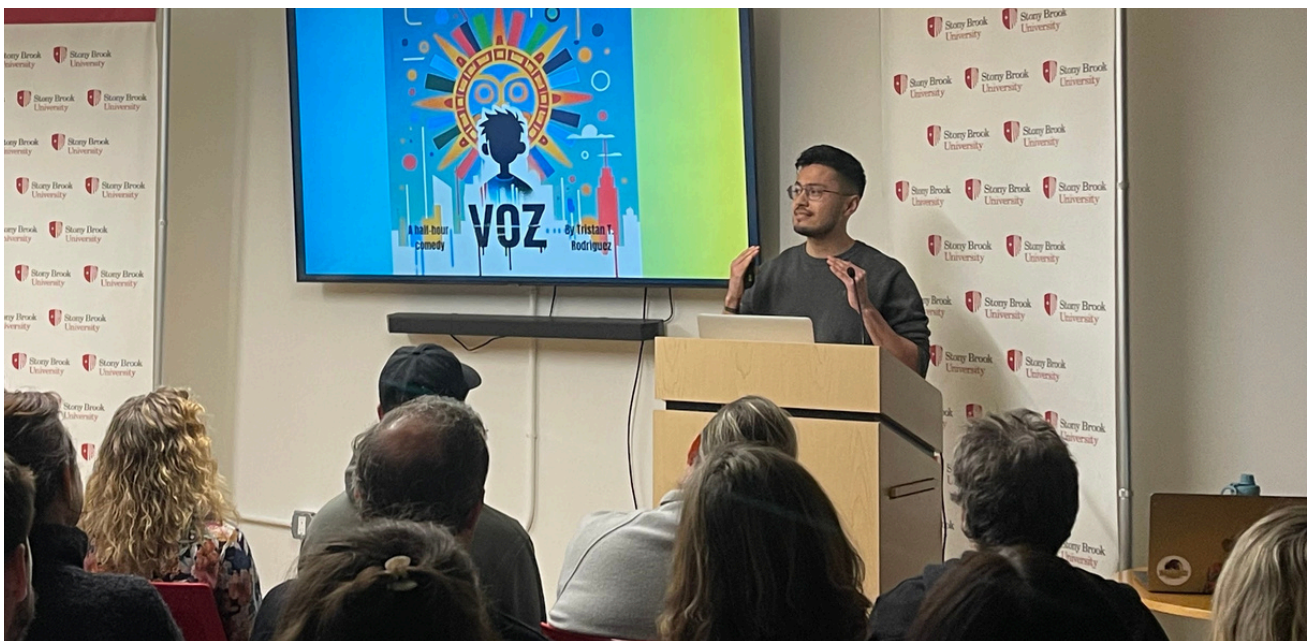


After brilliant presentations in front of judges Bash Doran (*Beef*, *Outlaw King*, *Boardwalk Empire*), Laura Eason (*Three Women*, *House of Cards*), and Nina Braddock (*The Sinner*, *Berlin Station*) and tough deliberation, we were honored to announce the winner of Pitchfest was...

Tristan Rodriguez with his 30-minute comedy *VOZ*!

After being tricked into a manhood ritual by his misguided white stepfather, Jaime – a directionless Hispanic teen – begins to hear an Aztec voice in his head. Mild mannered and timid, he must now navigate the “conquer and pillage” credo of the Voice with his own high school insecurities.

In addition to bragging rights, Tristan won a pass and travel stipend to attend this year’s SeriesFest in Denver, along with a travel stipend.



TV Pilot Incubator Success

"Almost each week, there was a new professional with a different career in the business that would come and tell stories and give us their unique advice and thoughts." - Tristan Rodriguez

"The incubator provided us with many actionable insights into taking a project to market. I've already had the opportunity to pitch a project to buyers, and I used everything I learned during the incubator." - Nelson Downend

"For the first time, I feel genuinely ready to get out there and start pitching." - Jeff Bernier

To prepare for their pitches, participants were mentored by:

Bryan Goluboff - Executive Producer of *Elsbeth* and *Law and Order: Organized Crime* and *George and Tammy*

Michael Rauch - Showrunner on *Instinct* and *Royal Pains*

Jacquelyn Reingold - Executive Producer of *The Good Fight*, Writer, *Grace and Frankie*

Steve Basilone - Writer on *Community* and *The Goldbergs*

Additionally, there were masterclasses led by faculty member Kris Lefcoe and MFA in TV Writing Director Alan Kingsberg. Notable guest speakers included John Coles, Tom Sellitti, Dan Perlman, L.E. Correia, Mary Rohlich, and Stephen Gates.



SeriesFest

Learning the Latest in Independent Television at SeriesFest Stony Brook's MFA in TV Writing Goes to Denver

TV Writing Program Director Alan Kingsberg and five current and former students attended the 11th annual SeriesFest in Denver, Colorado. SeriesFest is the ultimate destination for TV enthusiasts, creators, and industry professionals to celebrate the art of episodic storytelling. Stony Brook provided students with badges for the SeriesFest collegiate program, which included special seminars led by showrunners and industry executives, geared toward writers looking to break into the industry. Alan Kingsberg led one such session, providing advice on different ways to get staffed and teaching a mini-lesson on the essential components to crafting a stand-out pilot.

Seriesfest kicked off with a standup comedy performance by none other than Amy Schumer at the famous Red Rock amphitheater. Throughout the festival, students had near-endless opportunities to network with independent creators from around the world and learn from industry stars like 30 Rock writer Tracy Wrigfield, President of Universal Television Erin Underhill, and showrunner Patrick MacManus, to name a few.

"It was such a great opportunity to see independently produced shorts and pilots, which were inspiring in terms of production quality but also let me know where the bar is so I have a better sense of what I'm working towards," said second-year MFA in TV Writing Student, Carolyn Bergier.



New Television Class

***Showtime's* Dan Perlman Teaches Comedy, Pitching & More Comedy**

TV Creator/Comedian Shares How To Turn Stand-Up Into a TV Series

Dan Perlman, known for his stand-up career and ground-breaking Showtime series *Flatbush Misdemeanors*, joined Stony Brook's faculty this semester. Students dove into the stand-up comedy of Gary Gulman (HBO), Dina Hashem (Amazon), and Emmy Blotnick (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert), turning these comic's work into pilot pitches and series outlines. At the end of the course, students presented their pitches to the comics. Yes, it was as cool as it sounds. From wannabe drummers to love-blind Rabbis to detention centers, these students turned existing Intellectual Property into an entire TV season of ideas and possibilities.



Film Alumni & Student News

Alumni Doug Forrester's Thesis Film Lands on Festival Circuit

Forrester's feature, *Carry the Darkness*, Showed at the Nevermore Film Festival

Doug Forrester's thesis film "Carry the Darkness" was featured at the Nevermore Film Festival. The 1993 period piece explores what happens when a community fraught with dogmatic echo chambers tries to force misunderstood teenagers into prescribed labels.

From the Director: *"I wanted to create a film with a big beating heart at the center of an ominous thriller with social commentary that is as relevant now as it was in the 90s (thanks QAnon). As a child of that era, I grew up with the media that inspired it."*



Thesis Student Liza Renzulli Finishes *ICE CREAM* Film Shoot

Renzulli's First Feature Filmed in Multiple Locations Near the Hudson River

ICE CREAM is a fable about hope, love, bulimia, and the American Dream. It is set in fictional Torrington, Ohio, a rust-belt town going from bad to worse, in the great recession of 2009. The story centers on Celia, an optimistic, naive 24-year old who has never left her hometown. Celia spends her days working at Frank's Olde Fashioned Ice Cream Shop, a Norman Rockwell-esque anachronism that sits in the middle of Torrington's otherwise rundown Main Street. Her life outside of Frank's consists solely of caring for her ailing mother, with whom she shares a love of the past and a sense of eternal optimism, even in the face of illness and mounting financial instability. Celia's secret is that she is bingeing and purging the ice cream. When Celia's high school crush Sam arrives at Frank's, everything changes.



Film Alumni & Student News

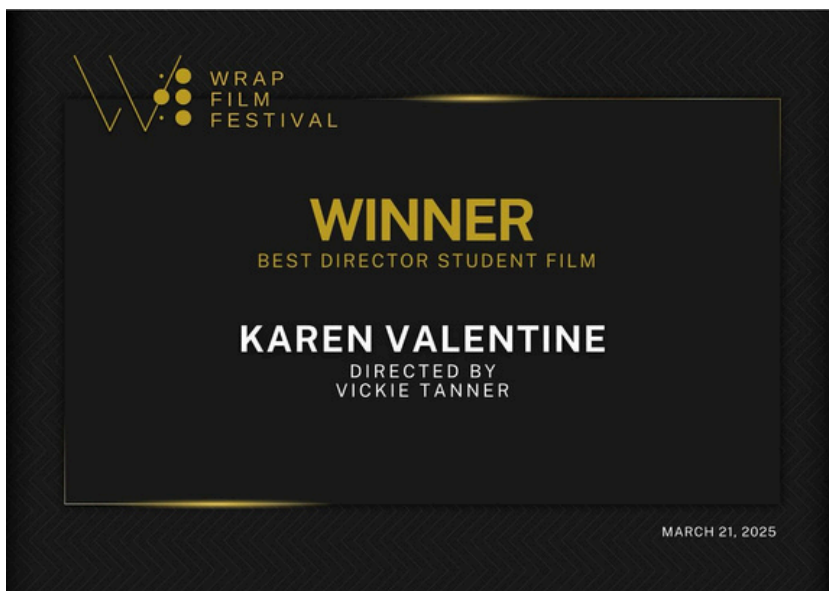
Best Director Win for Second Year Student Vickie Tanner

Wrap Film Festival is described as a "celebration of cinematic artistry" dedicated to showcasing films from "the most talented filmmakers across various genres." So, it is only fitting that one of Stony Brook's very own won the Best Director of a Student Film award. Vickie Tanner's film Karen Valentine is about a white, middle-aged woman battling irrational fear to find a connection with others.

This was Tanner's first film that she had ever written, directed, and edited. "Stony Brook forced me to tackle all the technical stuff I was afraid of," says Tanner.

"I'd already felt very much validated by my classmates, family, and professors. But being accepted into and given an award from Wrap means the piece impacts those with zero connection with the making of the film. It helps fuel inspiration to continue the work."

Tanner's success is ongoing. Stony Brook partnered with Black Film Space to jury the first-ever SBU BIPOC Filmmaker Award, created to recognize and support the filmmaking talent of a Stony Brook MFA Film student ahead of their master's thesis production. The award total is \$1,500, and this year's recipient is writer/director Vickie Tanner.



Film Alumni & Student News

Thesis Students Anson Fok & Surya Shahi Finish Filming First Feature Fok & Shahi Filmed *FAMILY MATTER* in Nepal this Spring

FAMILY MATTER is a story about an American-raised Nepali adoptee who gets called back to his homeland for his estranged father's funeral – a 13-day death ritual forces him to bridge two cultures—and discover who he truly is. Now in post production, both students plan to do a pickup production where they will film in New York in Fall 2025.

When asked about how Stony Brook has guided their work, Fok and Shahi said: *"Countless faculty and cohorts have helped us in the process, especially from the early developing phase. We appreciate the environment our faculty cultivate; all the work sessions were professional and progressive, lot of good ideas were sparked in the process."*



Culture & Collaboration from Alumni Peggy Tseng

Peggy Tswerwen Tseng Continues to Tell Enticing and Culturally Rich Stories

Peggy Tswerwen Tseng's filmmaking is deeply rooted in her Taiwanese heritage. Her short film *Jade* landed her in 15 film festivals, with support and collaboration through Brooklyn Artist Station (BAS) and Imperial Taiwanese Gourmet. The film centers on a young, Taiwanese girl who, until she becomes pregnant, has obeyed her mother her whole life. Tseng is now in post-production with her feature, *Miss Mermaid*. The protagonist, May, slowly realizes how little she knows about her sister when her sister experiences a coma and premature pregnancy.

In addition to the two films, Tseng stays busy as a student and through content creation as a producer for Reel Short. When talking about how short content creation has impacted how she makes films, Tseng mentioned how it has enabled her to make quick decisions.

Film Faculty Spotlight

Simone Pero's Feature Film *LILLY* Makes Its Debut

Professor Produced a Film About Working-Class Hero Lilly Ledbetter

Our working faculty are part of what makes Stony Brook's Film MFA so special. One such professor, Simone Pero, is celebrating success with a robust film festival tour and a theatrical run of *LILLY* in more than 60 cities across the country.

Audiences have particularly enjoyed the performance of the film's Oscar-nominated lead, Patricia Clarkson who has also been featured in most major media outlets about *LILLY*. Students in Pero's production and marketing courses have had the opportunity to follow and learn from Pero's producing experience with the film this past year.

True to Pero's social impact-oriented filmmaking career, *LILLY* partners with organizations like the National Women's Law Center, American Association of University Women, and Equal Pay Today advocating for fair pay and workplace equity. The film continues to play in select theaters and will be released digitally on June 10th.



Film Faculty Spotlight

Jennie Allen's Sabbatical Project Finishes Production

MFA in Film Associate Director Jennie Allen Shoots in Switzerland & Canada

For the Spring 2025 semester, Jennie Allen, Associate Director of the MFA Film program, returned to the classroom after a short sabbatical to be on the set of a feature film she wrote. Allen, who has been with Stony Brook's MFA Film program since its launch in 2015, collaborated on the project with director Mauro Mueller, her fellow Columbia University graduate school alum.

"After grad school, I was part of a writing group that went on for ten years," said Allen. "He came to our writing group and said 'I have a producer who wants to make a film about this famous plane crash' that was a Swiss Air plane going from New York to Geneva that crashed off the coast of Canada in this beautiful place."

After pitching an idea of an ensemble piece about people dealing with the aftermath of the tragedy and coming together to visit the crash site annually, the producers accepted the idea and brought Allen aboard the project which took "several years" to secure funding from Switzerland and Canada to film in both locations. "It was a really long process, but finally we managed to raise \$5 million to make this movie," said Allen.

Her connection with Mueller also brought upon another opportunity to work abroad towards the end of this semester and one of the film's producers sold an idea for a miniseries. Allen, Mueller and other members of their writing group were enlisted to bring the idea to life.

"They didn't really have a fleshed out idea, so they wanted to get a team together all-in-one place to kind of crack the story of this miniseries," Allen said. "We all met in Portugal to crack the story and then several of us went to Spain to continue working on a kind of mini bible that we could present to the television station."

Reflecting upon her connection to Mueller through their days at Columbia University's MFA film program, Allen emphasizes the importance of networking and building professional relationships to graduate film students.

"It's super important for a million reasons," said Allen. "One of the reasons is just that when you leave grad school, it's so helpful to have people who are in the same position as you're trying to get stuff made and trying to make a living while you try to get stuff made. And inevitably someone has some success and then they share that. Someone has questions about something happening and other people may have already been through that so it's just a great support."

Through all of her creative endeavors, Allen felt very supported by Stony Brook University, heralding the program's support of their faculty maintaining their professional careers.

Congratulations to Our Graduates!





Stony Brook University
Manhattan

MFA IN FILM & IN TV

IN ASSOCIATION WITH KILLER FILMS



CONNECT WITH US!

THANK YOU FOR TUNING INTO OUR FALL '24
NEWSLETTER. FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL FOR UPDATES!



[@sbufilmtv](https://www.instagram.com/sbufilmtv)



[@SBUfilmtv](https://www.facebook.com/SBUfilmtv)



MFAManhattan@stonybrook.edu



<https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/mfa-film-tv/>