FRAT BOYS OF FAITH

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Television, Film, and New Media Production

by
Philip Martin Austin Wilson
Spring 2012
The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the
Project of Philip Martin Austin Wilson:

Frat Boys of Faith

Timothy A. Powell, Chair
School of Theatre, Television, and Film

Gregory C. Durbin
School of Theatre, Television, and Film

Elisa J. Sobo
Department of Anthropology

April 18, 2012
Approval Date
DEDICATION

Cara, I couldn’t have done it without you.
ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

Frat Boys of Faith
by
Philip Martin Austin Wilson
Master of Arts in Television, Film, and New Media Production
San Diego State University, 2012

Frat Boys of Faith is a thirty-three-minute documentary that investigates the formative college experience from the unique perspective of two students who pledged Greek fraternities early on in their college years, only later to become devout Christians. The film’s narrative structure follows two distinct subjects: Ben Falealili, a Samoan anthropology major who is a leader and spoken word artist, and Patrick Barbour, a political science major, who leads a life of abstinence with his current Christian girlfriend. Both are graduating seniors, and on the verge of making crucial career choices.

As these young men form their identities within the “brotherhood” of Christianity and Greek fraternities, we observe the role religion plays in their everyday lives as students, “brothers,” and boyfriends. We are offered an inside look into how the subjects deal with the college routine, job hunts, and life-changing conflicts that arise. This thesis project explores the critical issues of Christianity and sexuality, doubt and faith, and religious interpretation. It does not take sides, but rather attempts to answer the question: what does a life devoted to God on the college campus look like?

According to a recent UCLA study, more young people are claiming to be “non-religious” than ever before. This project is an analysis of a group on the other end of the spectrum. It will examine why these subjects joined their fraternities, how they came to believe what they believe, and what impact that belief has had on their individual realities. Through careful observation and analysis, Frat Boys of Faith attempts to offer a valuable contribution to the conversation about religion on the college campus. This thesis paper will address the many inherent challenges in making a film about religion on campus. It will also present research about the role religion and Greek fraternities play on the college campus; it will present the films, documentary modes, interview tactics, and influential television series that have been examined for this project.

A DVD of the film is available for viewing at the Media Center of Love Library.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT ...............................................................................................................................v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem and Its Setting.................................................................2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem .....................................................................................2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Sub-Problems ..............................................................4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals and Objectives .................................................................................6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms ....................................................................................6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Topic Terms ....................................................................................7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film Terms .....................................................................................................8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations .................................................................................................9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Project .......................................................................9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE, FILMS AND GENRES ..................10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature on Project Topic ........................................................................10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Fraternity Culture..........................................................................10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational and Religious Studies ........................................................11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature on Project Style ........................................................................13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational Mode ...................................................................................13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Mode ................................................................................................14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films and Genres That Relate Thematically and Stylistically .................15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jesus Camp</em> and <em>Friends of God: A Road Trip with Alexandra Pelosi</em> ...15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shape of the Moon</em> and <em>Devil’s Playground</em> ........................................16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>American Teen</em> and <em>American High</em> .....................................................17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Greek</em> ...........................................................................................................18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hoop Dreams</em> .............................................................................................19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 GENERAL CREATIVE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH ..................20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mise-en-Scène ..............................................................................................20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Setting .......................................................................................................................... 21
Cinematography ........................................................................................................... 21
Editing ............................................................................................................................ 21
Sound Design ................................................................................................................ 22
Restating the Creative and Pragmatic Approach ......................................................... 23

4 CONCLUSIONS ........................................................................................................... 24
Assessment of Goals Achieved or Not ................................................................. 24
Summary of Lessons Learned and Their Significance ........................................ 28
Conclusions from Project ......................................................................................... 31
Recommendations for Further Study ........................................................................ 32

WORKS CITED ............................................................................................................ 33

APPENDIX

ORIGINAL TREATMENT FOR FRAT BOYS OF FAITH ........................................ 35
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My wife and I were walking on campus at San Diego State University when two fraternity brothers passed us a flyer for Alpha Gamma Omega, which was billing itself as “San Diego State’s only Christian Fraternity.” At this point, I had only been thinking about making a narrative short for my thesis project. But a documentary short that explored the inter-workings and everyday lives of the most devout brothers in Alpha Gamma Omega sounded compelling. I immediately saw the juxtaposition I would want to explore: the college party atmosphere vs. men who practiced abstinence and lead Bible studies on campus. This was a film I had not seen, and that fact alone was enough for me pitch it that next week to my thesis preparation class.

I pitched two ideas in the thesis preparation class, a short coming-of-age narrative about a mother and child mother who make a fresh start, and a documentary short about a group of Christian men in a fraternity who attempt to live out their beliefs and values in the college atmosphere. Professor Louisa Stein quickly jumped on the second idea, and said it was “fascinating.” Producing and directing this documentary project as my thesis somehow felt like a bold move. The more I researched by reading and watching documentaries, the more I found myself drawn to the idea, ready to take on the challenge. Actually, making a short narrative for my thesis now felt too safe and too straightforward. One month later, I set up a meeting with Nick Davis, the president of Alpha Gamma Omega. With the latest version of my treatment in hand, I pitched the concept to him with as much vigor and enthusiasm as I could muster. Nick seemed impressed; he said that the idea, “sounded good,” but that he needed to talk to his fraternity brothers first before giving me the official “go-ahead.” For two weeks I waited to hear back, confident that my camera and I would be greeted with open arms. But I was wrong. After visiting the fraternity multiple times and sitting down with the fraternity’s chaplain to explain how I thought the project would not interfere with the members’ Christian “walk,” I was denied. No one ever officially said “no” to me. I was
simply given the cold shoulder, which was frustrating. This was the first setback of many, but
fortunately, a setback that ultimately turned into a positive.

By turning down my project early on, the fraternity members did me a favor. I realize
now that any half-hearted commitment from my subjects could have ultimately led to the
documentary’s downfall. My subjects needed to be just as excited about the project as I was.
So, rather than re-write my whole thesis topic, I discussed my difficulties with Professor
Stein and the thesis preparation class. Professor Stein and the class helped me understand that
my concept wasn’t strictly bound to Alpha Gamma Omega, and that I could still get the
results I wanted by observing two or three Christian men in one of the traditional Greek
fraternities on campus. This new concept, featuring the lives of single subjects instead of a
group of like-minded Christian fraternity members, actually sounded more compelling. This
was Frat Boys of Faith 2.0. So I contacted Beau Crosetto, the leader of a Christian
organization that works primarily with Greek students called Greek Intervarsity. I asked him
if he could recommend some candidates for my project. Two weeks later I was shooting with
my two subjects, Ben Falealili and Patrick Barbour, at a Greek Intervarsity event near
campus. Thus, my journey of making Frat Boys of Faith began.

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

In 1816, Thomas Jefferson wrote: “For it is in our lives, and not from our words, that
our religion must be read.” These inspiring words are the theme of this thesis project.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Religion is such a polarizing topic. As such, the main problem of Frat Boys of Faith
was how to make a compelling film for general audiences that observed characters who
openly discussed religious themes. Early on, I decided that I was going to avoid the debates
over evolution vs. creationism, arguments about the divinity of Jesus, or how society should
teach religious principles to children. These topics had been covered. Instead, I simply
wanted to observe what a life devoted to God on the college campus looked like. I wanted to
find out where the subjects struggled, what they worried about, and how much they relied
upon their faith in everyday life. I wanted to present two unique lives, two distinct
perspectives, and two compelling story arcs while also addressing the themes of faith and
sexuality, religion and addiction, and the “college experience.” I was mindful of the fact that
as a married Christian who did not have a conventional “college experience,” I needed to maintain a healthy sense of objectivity throughout the filmmaking process. I did not want to end up with a finished film that forced its audience to pick a side.

Frat Boys of Faith was my first attempt at a serious documentary project, so I knew I needed to research documentary modes and acquaint myself with the general documentary production process. I watched a lot of documentaries, read textbooks, and met with my professors to understand how other filmmakers had done it before. From films, books, and professors I gleaned a little information about everything documentary: from ethics and story-lines to interviews and narration. Doing the research and asking for guidance was a great learning experience for me. I knew it was going to pay dividends during production.

After researching the general documentary production process, one major challenge was deciding what type of documentary mode or modes to observe while making the film. As one of the major goals of the project was to be mindful of the audience’s viewpoints regarding religion, a literal “Voice of God” narrator and Expository Mode approach was out of the question. I considered a Reflexive Mode approach where I, as the filmmaker, would demonstrate and discuss the project’s aims openly, and fully disclose my own belief system, but my thesis committee chair, Professor Tim Powell, and I decided it would be best if I let the story unfold through the actions of the characters. Choosing a documentary mode was probably the most complicated part of the process, as they have many overlapping and ambiguous characteristics. The most effective documentaries I watched appeared to use a single mode, so I wanted to adhere to this principle as best I could. Eventually, Professor Tim Powell and I finally settled on using a hybrid mode: the Observational Mode to deliver most of the story content, and the Poetic Mode to act as a bridge between scenes. Now that I had a firmer grasp on what my film was and what it was not, I had a better idea of what sorts of events in the subjects’ lives I should be shooting. Without an expository narrator at my disposal, I planned to rely on certain Observational Mode devices, such as overheard speech and long takes, to move the story forward. It is important to note that descriptions of these modes were first found in film historian Erik Barnouw’s 1974 work, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*. In a sense, narrative films have genres, while documentary films have modes. Barnouw’s framework allowed me to be precise in deciding where, and how, I would concentrate my full efforts to get the results I wanted.
Visually, I realized that the film needed to have the highest possible production values to be taken seriously on the film festival circuit. I consider myself a skilled camera operator, yet I had to learn some documentary shooting fundamentals. I needed to learn how to follow the subject in space, keep him in focus for the most part, and maintain decent sound levels and composition. If I was strictly following the principles of the Observational Mode, I would not have the advantages of additional takes or re-shoots. As a director of primarily short narrative fiction, I also needed to learn how to capture moments while simultaneously constructing how those moments would fit into the overall story in my head. I believe that this particular skill can save a documentary director hours in the editing room; and it is one that I must continue to develop, as I found having the ability to determine what you don’t need is almost as important as knowing what you do need.

During the editing process I knew I needed to be patient and driven to keep all of my footage highly organized. I planned time to create transcripts of every interview to help me assemble and edit the story. I was aware that multiple edit decision lists would be used during editing. Pacing was also a concern; as deciding how much time to devote to each subject’s individual scenes while limiting transitions so that the viewing experience felt cohesive would be very important. This would be my first time editing a full-scale documentary. To further prevent frustration during the editing process I acknowledged early on that the film would go through a variety of different rough cuts at varying lengths from the outset, so that all of the possibilities for creating the most compelling film possible could be explored.

**STATEMENT OF THE SUB-PROBLEMS**

In order for the film to be successful, the subjects needed to be honest, open, and vulnerable enough with me to share their lives authentically with the audience. This film would be character driven. To this end, I knew that I needed to come up with a game plan to build trusting relationships with the subjects. I planned to call the subjects during the course of shooting to talk about their day-to-day experiences outside of production. My wife and I made plans to go out for lunch with Ben and Pat regularly on campus together. I went into the project knowing that Pat and Ben were young, but I was sure they had faced some harsh realities in their lives. To uncover and explore these difficult times would be one of the major
goals of the documentary, as it would offer the real humanity and characterization the film absolutely needed to be effective. Bringing out the uncomfortable details of my subjects’ traumatic experiences would be a major sub-problem to contend with.

Another sub-problem to prepare for was getting access into the subjects’ Greek fraternities and personal lives. To address this problem, I planned to give the subjects their own individual high definition cameras to keep weekly video diaries of their religious activities, frustrations, and experiences. I wanted to see and hear from the subjects between the scheduled interviews, to allow me to better understand them and possibly let the audience in on the more quiet and personal moments that happen outside of the formal interviews. Yet with this solution, other sub-problems arose: ensuring that the subjects kept their video diaries regularly, and ensuring that they knew how to use the cameras properly. To contend with these sub-problems, I planned to have training sessions with the cameras to show the subjects solid examples and talk about simple lighting techniques. I also planned to hold screenings of certain documentaries so that I could show examples of what I thought a compelling “confessional-style” diary entry looked like. I wanted to make a film about two graduating college seniors with busy lives of their own, and I knew that access would be a problem, so I equipped them with cameras to shoot the important events I could not. I planned to monitor the use of the cameras and do periodic calls to check on progress to ensure the cameras were being used properly and regularly.

Another major sub-problem would be figuring out how to schedule the film. I needed to have a plan of action. I needed to know where my subjects would be, and when they would be there. This would allow me to discern what would and would not be worth shooting. Even though Pat and Ben signed up to be my subjects, they were still full-time students with jobs. I needed to plan accordingly. A piecemeal approach to shooting the film would be my only option, as I wanted to be considerate of my subjects’ time and not interfere with their schoolwork or relationships. Over the course of one year, I planned to shoot everything my subjects were involved in: from San Diego State football games and UCLA Christian conferences to fraternity parties and trips back home to see family. In scheduling the shooting of the film, clarifying with Pat and Ben what events I thought would be important for the film and what events would not would be crucial. I was the film’s director, so I would need to find the time in my schedule to shoot important events in the subjects’ lives. The
responsibility of the film was not going to rest on Pat’s or Ben’s shoulders, but squarely on mine.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The primary goal for Frat Boys of Faith is to examine, through an in-depth exploration of the lives of two Christians at San Diego State University, how a traditional Christian worldview operates in a contemporary college environment. In a broader sense, Frat Boys of Faith aims to observe a specific group of individuals with a specific religious perspective. A secondary goal of the project is to discuss personal topics, such as how the subjects viewed religion and addiction, the college experience and identity, and faith and sexuality. Within the realm of sexuality, Millennials Rising authors Neil Howe and William Strauss argued that Millennials are more prone to prefer abstinence over premarital sex, while sociologist Michael Kimmel, in his recent work Guyland, argued that this technologically savvy generation has “made sex readily available to meet the needs of the individual through magazines, videos, and online chat rooms” (187). As these contrasting viewpoints illustrate, sex would be a major topic of discussion in the lives of the subjects and in the film. For this reason, an entire section of the film will be devoted to discussing the topic of sex.

In an effort to make the film as compelling as possible, it was essential to draw upon the humanity of the Christian frat members and simultaneously weave the themes into two specific stories. These stories required individual arcs that evolved naturally from beginning to end. I intended to employ an editing style that would divide the individual stories into separate sequences strung together by related themes. This would allow the viewer easily to navigate the broader issues of the film. By shifting from one subject to another, this method would also augment the story’s suspense, affording the viewer a new set of circumstances at each pivot.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

This thesis project utilizes both specific topic terms and specific film terms.
**Project Topic Terms**

College Experience: A term used to summarize the positive and negative effects of the college years. Having the freedom to try new things, meet new people, make your own choices, embrace new ideas, develop tastes, and participate in a variety of social activities.

Fraternity: Formed in the 1880s, a group of men joined together by common interests at a college or university. Fraternities promote brotherhood, offer housing, and provide excellent networking opportunities for their members after college, as the members claim they are “brothers for life.” A staggering number of fraternity members hold offices of power in government and business.

Generation Y: The tech literate, optimistic, open-minded cohort born between 1981 and 2001. Also known as the “Millennial Generation.” Gen Y comprises a group of confident, individualistic and educated young people that are currently enrolling in the university system. Researchers argue that Gen Y cohorts are more open to discussing “spirituality” than religion (Cherry, Deberg, and Porterfield 275).

Organized Religion: An institution that expresses a belief in a divine power. The term also represents the rituals and structures of religion. Members attend church, temple, mosque and/or participate in religious ceremonies and belong to a group of fellow believers. According to some in Generation Y, current organized religion is out of touch with the modern college student.

Party School: A university or college that has a reputation for an active nightlife: parties, drugs, drinking, and sexual promiscuity. The term “Party School” is a designation San Diego State University has tried to eliminate, as Party Schools are more known for vibrant social scenes than for their academics.

Religious Expression: A broad term encompassing all the methods by which one expresses one’s religion or spirituality; from prayer, going to church, synagogue, or mosque, to wearing certain garments, hairstyles, or facial hair.

Spirituality: A system of belief that focuses on the spiritual nature of existence; a broad term which can take on many forms, from the belief in a general higher power to religious fundamentalism. To the Millennial Generation, spirituality means an active journey. It represents an alternative to organized religion that usually draws on broader religious themes that is self-determined.
Traditionalist Christian Worldview: An adherence to the doctrines or practices of a traditional Christian religion that upholds traditional religious practices and beliefs. This worldview upholds that the scriptures written in the Bible are true, that Jesus Christ is the son of God, that he died for our sins, and that we can have a relationship with God through Christ. Pat and Ben maintain this worldview.

Worldview: A comprehensive personal philosophy about the reason for the world and humanity’s existence and purpose. Researchers argue that the Millennial Generation’s worldviews are more individually determined than those of previous generations.

**Film Terms**

Expository Mode Documentary Filmmaking: Uses a narrator to speak to the audience directly and to impart exposition to directly inform the audience of what they are witnessing on screen. Because of the nature of the narration, this mode of documentary is could be called the Voice-of-God Mode.

Observational Mode Documentary Filmmaking: Stresses the nonintervention of the filmmaker. Filmmaker cedes control of events more than in any other mode, using indirect address, speech overheard, synchronous sound, and relatively long takes. This mode is used to acquire most of the film’s content, such as campus life, classroom footage, and community service.

Poetic Mode Documentary Filmmaking: Uses images and juxtapositions to frame broad concepts and themes, rather than narrative storytelling. It provides a non-linear representation of events that is more concerned with ideas than characterization. This mode is used to transition from one thematic sequence to another, giving the documentary and its subjects a broader visual context.

Reflexive Mode Documentary Filmmaking: Emphasizes the filmmaker’s openness about the project’s goals and production process, as well as his or her epistemological position relative to the subject matter. The reflexive mode film is uniquely aware of itself. The filmmaker will break the fourth wall to address the audience and discuss production problems or thematic elements.

Sequence to Sequence Editing: A type of documentary assembly seen in the films Hoop Dreams or American High, in which two or more stories overlap and the film shifts in
and out of sequences based on the filmmaker’s preference. This style of editing helps add tension to the piece by providing the viewer with a progression of time and new imagery with every scene change and builds the stories simultaneously. This style of editing will be used in *Frat Boys of Faith* to provide an appropriate pace and two simultaneously resolving narrative arcs at the film’s narrative climax.

**DELIMITATIONS**

Though Frat Boys of Faith aims to highlight the broad themes of the college experience and identity, faith and sexuality, and religion and addiction, it is not a feature length film, and does not explore these themes comprehensively.

As discussed previously, Frat Boys of Faith was not meant to be an exposé that relies on shock value in place of actual content. It does not present the “real and shocking truth about religion at San Diego State University,” but rather, it attempts to treat its subjects and viewers with respect and sensitivity.

The project does not go in depth about the origins of Christianity or how the subjects’ fraternities came into being, but offers a day-in-the-life approach following the subjects over the course of a single year. It intends for the subjects to disclose honestly what they believe about God and what their fraternities mean to them, by sharing definitive examples from their lives, both positive and negative.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT**

The UCLA study, *The Spiritual Life of College Students*, indicates that the number of students who marked “none” as their religious preference reached a record high of 17.6% (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 17). Other studies on religion and Generation Y state that not enough research has been done to illustrate what this possible cultural shift entails for this cohort of individuals. Documentary films like Alexandra Pelosi’s *Friends of God* (2007) or Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady’s *Jesus Camp* address the issue of faith to draw specific political conclusions about the American Evangelical Movement, but no documentary has attempted to address the impact religion is having on Generation Y, let alone within Greek fraternity systems. As more and more students mark “none” as their religion, Frat Boys of Faith endeavors to observe two lives on the other end of the spectrum, and pose the question: What does a life devoted to God on the college campus look like?
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE, FILMS
AND GENRES

LITERATURE ON PROJECT TOPIC

Producing and directing Frat Boys of Faith required a well-researched perspective. I needed to understand what had been previously filmed and written about fraternity culture, religion on campus, and the modern college experience. As Pat and Ben are religious Millennials in Greek fraternities, they represent a unique worldview within the college atmosphere. To give the subjects’ stories a broader context, a look into the academic fields of religious studies, generational studies, and a close study of Greek fraternities and masculinity in college would be required.

Greek Fraternity Culture

In terms of fraternity culture, two recent works, from 2008 and 2009, bring us closer to the life of the male in college: the first is American sociologist Michael Kimmel’s Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men. “Guyland,” as Kimmel describes, is the male Millennial’s overall attempt to shirk the responsibilities of manhood, postpone marriage, and re-live the “glory days” of college. “Guyland” is the transitional period between boyhood and manhood, from high school through college, during which young men drink, watch sports, porn, and play video games (9). In “guyland,” young men aspire to be very wealthy and respected as real men, but have no plans to achieve those goals. Kimmel’s work relies on research and interviews to substantiate his claims about “guyland” and its impact on the Millennial generation. He argues that athletics and fraternities, among other things, work to enforce and maintain the “guyland” culture (233). This performance-based culture of delaying manhood and proving one’s masculinity to other men is the essence of “guyland.” It is the environment with which my subjects, as fraternity members themselves, had to grapple on a daily basis.
The second work is Nicholas L. Syrett’s The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities. Syrett tracks the history of the first Greek organization established on an American college campus to Greek fraternities after World War II. He points out that in addition to offering affordable housing, camaraderie, and the concept of “brotherhood,” a very large number of congressmen, senators, and U.S. presidents have been fraternity members (4). Syrett’s study on the inner-workings of fraternity organizations is eye opening, covering topics ranging from the white Protestant exclusivity in its formative years (that denied membership based on race and religion) to the pervasive binge drinking, sexual assault, and hazing that “frat boys” became so well-known for after World War II. Syrett’s work operates very much like a documentary. It is a very thorough recounting of events, especially those surrounding binge drinking and sexual assault; yet it allows the reader to form his/her own conclusions about the value of Greek fraternities within society.

Kimmel’s and Syrett’s studies provide a great amount of history and analysis to generate specific questions about masculinity, religion, and the Greek system, such as how do the two concepts of fraternal and spiritual “brothers” help the subjects form their own individual identities, and how do the two entities of the fraternity system and organized religion interact? Or, how does the combination of belonging to a fraternity and practicing Christianity interact with the subjects’ concept of their own masculinity? Frat Boys of Faith has attempted to answer those questions in discovering how the subjects develop and define their identities within specific Greek organizations and their distinct belief system.

**Generational and Religious Studies**

Three specific research texts have helped shape the project’s generational and religious outlook for the Millennial Generation. The first is Millennials Rising by Neil Howe and William Strauss, which analyzes the Millennial Generation’s quest for a generational identity in the twenty-first century. The authors argue that the Millennial Generation should not be seen as just a more tech savvy, cynical extension of Generation X, but the opposite, even in the order of religion. The authors cite data collected from research and interviews showing a marked increase in the number of religious clubs and organizations in the 1990s. They argue that Millennials are the next “hero” generation, heading back to church to seek a faith of spiritual satisfaction that relies heavily on good deeds and group unity (326, 235).
Yet, Howe and Strauss are not completely objective. The partners founded LifeCourse Associates, a generational advisory firm that has worked with organizations from the U.S. Coast Guard to Time Warner Cable. AARP has even partnered with LifeCourse Associates to “appeal to the coming floodtide of Boomer retirees” (LifeCourse). Undoubtedly, it is in the company's best interest to project a dramatic generational shift in values and tastes as it creates more business for the firm. But just because the analysts are in business does not invalidate their theories. However, the reality that more Millennials claim their religion to be “none” than ever before, 22% of those aged 18 to 29, does not bode well for Howe and Strauss’s optimistic projections (Kosmin and Keysar 12).

The second text is Religion on Campus by Conrad Cherry, Betty A. Deberg, and Amanda Porterfield. Unlike Millennials Rising, which uses statistics and interviews to paint the future of the Millennials with broad strokes, Religion on Campus utilizes four different American colleges in four distinct locations to offer a specific geographic and ethnic analysis. The authors do not attempt to project an accurate representation of the whole generation, but they do offer a very close, year-long study of each university's religious activities and highlight the beliefs of its student body. Portions of the book discuss the Millennial generation’s understanding of “religion,” referring to the organizations and institutions, and “spirituality,” referring to a more personal experience of God or having “ultimate values” (275). It argues that while universities may be becoming more secular, opportunities to express one’s religion have not diminished, as students have formed groups similar to Greek Intervarsity, which plays a key role in Frat Boys of Faith. In its close study of four American colleges, Religion on Campus was an excellent asset because it offered a blueprint for Frat Boys of Faith to follow: an analysis of a specific religion on a specific campus. The authors conclude: “If the definition of religion includes spirituality as well as the more traditional, denominationally based forms of religious expression, we can say with utter confidence that opportunities for undergraduates to practice religion were widely available at all four schools” (Cherry, Deberg, and Porterfield 275).

Lastly, the 2004 UCLA project, The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose, surveyed over 100,000 incoming freshman at campuses across America who disclosed how they “conceive of spirituality, the role it plays in their lives, and how colleges and universities can be more
effective in facilitating students’ spiritual development” (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2). The study was implemented because researchers observed that the university system, by neglecting the teaching of values, emotional maturity, spirituality, and self-understanding, was educating only the “exterior” of its students rather than the “interior” (2). Just as the Howe and Strauss research is used to project what the Millennial generation will require of educators, the UCLA study is intended to help college and university systems better understand their students. The hard evidence of the UCLA study offers beneficial insight into the religious perspective of the Millennial generation. Whether Millennials are actually going back to organized religion or if they prefer to be categorized as “spiritual” but not “religious,” the depth of the research and the objectivity offered in the UCLA study helped me cut through any false presumptions and quell any inconstancies between arguments.

**LITERATURE ON PROJECT STYLE**

The documentary style of Frat Boys of Faith was influenced by two key literary works: Bill Nichols’ Introduction to Documentary and an invaluable collection of essays, For Documentary: Twelve Essays edited by Dai Vaughan in 1999. The essays provide technical and stylistic analysis as well as theory. Portions of Frat Boys of Faith will use the Observational and Poetic Modes of documentary filmmaking to attain the depth and authenticity required for the most beneficial analysis of the subjects as possible while maintaining the type of artistic integrity seen in many of the examples cited in the books.

**Observational Mode**

In one essay in particular, Bill Nichols, the same author of Introduction to Documentary, writes in his 1974 essay, “The Space between Shots,” about the initial stylistic movement away from the expository mode, with its use of voice-over and systematic cutting, to an observational style that relied on filming the action as it happened. He states that when the Observational Mode was first introduced, the producers struggled to follow a strict set of guidelines in order to maintain objectivity. Early BBC guidelines of the observational mode are: (1) the unit would never intentionally influence the course of events; (2) the unit would shoot only what was relevant to the specified theme of each film, and nothing, however interesting, that was not; (3) no one would be asked to do anything, or to repeat anything, for the benefit of the camera; (4) the finished films would have no commentary beyond a brief,
This stylistic shift offered an exciting opportunity to provide the audience with an authenticity not normally seen in documentary film before the emergence of the Direct Cinema Movement. But to achieve it, the producers went to great lengths in their attempts to achieve objectivity and realism, and burned through a lot of film in the process. Frederick Wiseman, for example, shot well over 80 hours of film to achieve his 105-minute documentary, *Primate*. An additional objection to this style of shooting is the number of hours the crew must put in to get enough footage to compile a story. With the advancement of tapeless high definition technologies, much like the shift from 35mm to 16mm in documentary work, Frat Boys of Faith relied heavily on the Observational Mode without cost being a major concern. As stated earlier, I attempted to form strong relationships with Pat and Ben so that my roaming camera would feel more like an everyday activity than a novelty. In his essay on the series “The Space between Shots,” Nichols states, “to proceed in an atmosphere of relative trust . . . the crew made a point of being on location, with their equipment, for anything up to a fortnight before the start of shooting so that their presence, being familiar, would cause minimum distraction” (18). I aimed to create a similar environment of established trust for Pat and Ben, as the nature of religion is such a personal one. While the Observational Mode would work for certain sensitive portions of the project, such as prayer and other religious activities, the Poetic Mode was intended to be used to transition between scenes.

**Poetic Mode**

Only certain portions of the film were supposed to rely on a Poetic Mode of storytelling, which, as defined by Nichols, “emphasizes visual associations . . . and formal organization” (*Introduction to Documentary* 33). The goal in employing this method of storytelling was to evoke an audience response with direct images rather than the conventional documentary construction of voice-over and interview. Frat Boys of Faith aims to use the Poetic Mode to explore the impact of religious and non-religious imagery on its audience and subjects by organizing it in a manner that evokes an understanding between contrasting worldviews.
FILMS AND GENRES THAT RELATE THEMATICALLY AND STYLISTICALLY

There are a variety of films in the documentary genre, as well as TV series, about religion. The film’s topics range from exploring the lives of a Christian family in predominantly Muslim Indonesia to investigating the American Evangelical movement during the Bush Administration. I examined these styles closely. In addition to the theme of religion, this thesis paper will examine the documentaries and reality TV series that focus on education in the formative high school years, along with a narrative TV series, which looks at college life through the Greek system. It will also examine the ethnographic style of documentary in one film, and its efforts to provide a more thorough understanding of its subjects through that particular mode. All of these films and TV series inform Frat Boys of Faith thematically and stylistically, as certain components of each would provide a valuable model for the film to follow.

Jesus Camp and Friends of God: A Road Trip with Alexandra Pelosi

Jesus Camp is an excellent example of the type of documentary filmmaking that can spark major debate. The film depicts young children being indoctrinated into a fundamentalist Christian faith as they confess their sins through tears, speak in tongues, and are brought to Washington, DC by leaders to protest Rowe v. Wade. Jesus Camp ultimately caused its main protagonist, Becky Fischer, to shut down her camp amid a slew of hate mail and threats of vandalism to the camp’s premises. Structurally, the film uses the Observational, Expository, and Poetic Modes. The narrator of the film is a radio DJ, who critically examines the religious right while the film’s subjects, in their portrayal of their beliefs and practices, are used as supporting material. The film has major shock-value; for example, in one scene, Becky Fischer informs the children that Harry Potter is ungodly, “had [he] been in the Old Testament . . . , he would’ve been put to death” (“Jesus Camp (2006): Memorable Quotes” n. pag.). Throughout the film, many adults and children opened up to the filmmakers and spoke about the religion in their lives and the desires of their souls. This is the strength of Jesus Camp: its ability to earn the trust of its subjects. Frat Boys of Faith aimed to create a similar environment of trust and understanding between its subjects and the filmmakers.
Another film, in the same vein as Jesus Camp, is Friends of God: A Road Trip with Alexandra Pelosi. The film chronicles Pelosi’s journey across America’s heartland to discover the religious, cultural and political beliefs of evangelical Christians. The film’s strengths are similar to those of Jesus Camp in that it gets its subjects to open up about very personal religious issues; but it is the film’s weaknesses that are the most influential to the project. Friends of God maintains a very minimalist journalist approach with very little production value. During a majority of the film, Pelosi is the one holding the camera and asking the questions while the subjects are framed in an extreme close up in the dead center of the screen. The aesthetics of this production may possibly be intended to make the audience feel that Pelosi is on the level with her audience by employing a type of amateur filmmaking that does not maintain high production values. The film obviously has a small budget, but Pelosi carries a will and determination to get her questions answered and uncover the truth. In this way, I believe that Pelosi becomes a sympathetic underdog character that her audience will root for. On the contrary, Frat Boys of Faith attempted to maintain high production values and dynamic cinematography while still being focused on the primary goal of examining the religious and fraternity experience of its subjects.

**Shape of the Moon and Devil’s Playground**

Shape of the Moon won the Grand Jury Prize for documentary at Sundance in 2005. It uses strict observational methods to tell the story of a Christian family living in predominantly Muslim Indonesia. It is the best example of the type of cinematic approach Frat Boys of Faith attempted to take. This documentary uses the Poetic Mode to transition between major sequences with striking and elegant photography. It contrasts religious symbols with scenes of war, crime, and political protesting to portray the environment of conflict that its subjects live in.

The aesthetic quality with which Shape of the Moon proceeds is quite remarkable. In one sequence, the camera rises, as on a crane, while one of the subjects crosses a bridge in the opposite direction in slow motion. In another sequence, contrasting beams of sunlight pour into the house of one of the subjects amidst clouds of dust. In both of these sequences, and throughout the film, the camera moves closely, intimately, dynamically around its environment, aware of its own powerful cinematic capabilities. Shape of the Moon illustrates
that Observational Mode films can maintain very high production value. It demonstrates that
the camera is capable of interpreting an unpredictably unfolding reality with grace and
artistry. In the same vein as this film, Frat Boys of Faith attempted to be both aesthetically
engaging as well as socially and dramatically compelling.

While Shape of the Moon offers a look at living as a Christian in a Muslim world,
Devil’s Playground examines living as a member of the Amish Church in contemporary
“English” society. The film presented a useful structural model for Frat Boys of Faith to
follow. While the film mainly focuses on the life of eighteen-year-old Faron Yoder, the film
divides much of its time between four subjects and asks how living an Amish life has
affected the subjects’ view of themselves and the outside world. The film tracks the lives of
its subjects through a period known as “Rumspringa,” where Amish teens are given time to
decide whether they want to join the Amish church for good. During this time, Amish teens
are allowed to dress “English” and party with friends, which often leads to drinking and drug
use. During his time of “Rumspringa,” the main subject, Faron, drinks, smokes, begins
selling drugs and becomes addicted to methamphetamines. The other subjects in the film
either join the church, or, like Faron, move out of Amish country to find jobs in the “English”
world. A great deal of delicacy was used by the filmmakers in that they had the opportunity
to present the audience with material that would pass judgment against the religious practices
of the Amish church, but rather, the film focuses much more on the lives of its protagonists,
and how their personal Amish religion affected their choices. The film allows the audience to
determine whether the subjects are being aided or held back by their Amish heritage. In one
scene, the film’s main protagonist, Faron, provides the crux for the film; in a playful nod to
Shakespeare, he states, “to be, or not to be, Amish. That is the question.” Through this
delicacy, a great deal of access was granted to the filmmakers, allowing for an intimate and
authentic portrayal of a particular religious experience. Frat Boys of Faith aspired to achieve
a similar level of intimacy, access, and structure.

**American Teen and American High**

American Teen and American High offer very similar viewing experiences. While
American Teen is a feature-length documentary and American High is a TV series, both
attempt to chronicle the last year of high school for graduating seniors in a small, middle-
American town. One of the most striking characteristics of both works is their honest portrayal of their subjects and the intimate relationship the subjects have with the filmmakers. In one scene from American Teen, in particular, one of the main subjects, Hannah Bailey, has a tough breakup with her boyfriend. The filmmakers were not present for the actual scene, but Hannah called the crew to make sure they could get an accurate account of what happened. Aside from the level of intimacy, another influential component is the “video diaries” used in American High. While the filmmakers were not present for every event in the lives of their subjects, they lent the subjects video cameras to speak out their emotions at the end of every day. The results are very compelling, and add an entirely new layer to the project. Frat Boys of Faith planned to use the same “video diary” device, in an effort to obtain the level of honesty that only a subject alone with his or her camera can bring.

**Greek**

The ABC Family TV series Greek was another influential project in that it attempts to portray life within the Greek system at an American university. The main protagonist, Rusty, played by Jacob Zachar, is an incoming freshman who aspires to “rush” a fraternity, build friendships, and have “that real college experience.” Through Rusty’s attempts to succeed in his new college environment, the audience is drawn into his identifiable quest for friendship and feats throughout his first formative year in college. Rusty is also challenged his first day at school by his new roommate, Dale, played by Clark Duke. Dale eagerly presents himself as a Baptist Christian to Rusty and serves as one of the motivating factors for Rusty to rush a fraternity, as later in season one, he hinders Rusty’s sex life. In a debate with his girlfriend, Rusty defines Dale as “a conservative right-wing Southern Baptist with a Confederate flag on the wall,” while his girlfriend defines Rusty as “just a frat guy who’s asking Dale to push his religious beliefs aside so that you can have sex with your girlfriend” (“Depth Perception”). Greek provides three elements that have influenced *Frat Boys of Faith*: it demonstrates the inner-workings of a Greek fraternity, it illustrates the process of “rush,” and it incorporates the challenge of living out a religion in college. Similarly, Frat Boys of Faith attempted to explore the Greek system and what it is like to live out a religion in college. It also aimed to
present the story from Dale’s perspective, as if he had decided his first day at school to rush a fraternity.

**Hoop Dreams**

Another influential film, and nothing short of a masterpiece, Hoop Dreams is a groundbreaking film about two NBA hopefuls in impoverished Chicago. Spanning five years and over 250 hours of footage, the International Documentary Association ranked it the best documentary of all time. The film’s power comes from its observational and ethnographic methods to document the young men’s journeys into the world of collegiate sports. Although an ethnographic approach in which the filmmakers live with the subjects and become integrated into their lives and culture is an appropriate method for Frat Boys of Faith, the amount of time and resources that such an effort requires were well beyond the scope of this year-long thesis project. With regard to the group’s religious practices and habits, however, we did maintain a respect for the ethnographic mode of filmmaking. Though the project isn’t a journey piece, for which the filmmaker functions as the main protagonist and offers his own commentary throughout the film, I planned to fully participate in Bible studies, church services, group prayers, and other on-campus events to build and maintain trust as well as increase my understanding of the subjects. Like Hoop Dreams, Frat Boys of Faith aims to be both socially and culturally relevant, as a portrayal of a specific group of individuals attempting to form their own identities within an organization and through a certain belief system.

**Frat Boys of Faith** is a film about religion in college, and all of the inherent difficulties and challenges implied by this particular lifestyle. It draws from the strengths of each documentary style and from the theoretical and technical examples of the aforementioned models. With these principles in mind, the documentary aims to engage the audience with an incisive portrayal that is both authentic and artistic.
CHAPTER 3

GENERAL CREATIVE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Frat Boys of Faith aims to present the lives of two Christian men in Greek fraternities. The project attempts to initiate a dialogue of spiritual understanding as a work of discovery that treats its subjects and the topic of religion with delicacy and respect. The film’s stylistic strategy is visually to engage the viewer by employing creative cinematography: visually striking interviews, compelling b-roll, and the inclusion of spontaneous events that speak directly to my subject.

As suggested above, Frat Boys of Faith aims not only to be informative, but visually intriguing. To this end, the film employed new advances in filmmaking technology at the production stage. In addition to using HDV cameras, we used digital SLR cameras equipped to shoot high definition video. These cameras are the perfect tool for the documentary filmmaker in that they are small and unobtrusive, offer slow-motion capabilities, a film-like depth of field, and higher resolutions.

Structurally, the film followed two distinct subjects: Ben Falealili, a senior anthropology major, and Patrick Barbour, a political science major, in their own individual attempts at navigating college while adhering to their faith. The project was organized around specific themes of fraternity life, testimonies, service, doubt, and sex. Rather than a linear approach that tells both stories separately, this organization of edited sequences allows the viewer to track the characters simultaneously while building to a climax that resolves both story arcs at the end of the film.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Frat Boys of Faith is not a fiction narrative film and therefore does not feature a dedicated set designer. This demanded that even closer attention be paid to mise-en-scène.
Setting

The primary location for the film is the iconic picture of southern California, the campus of San Diego State University. In 2009, *Playboy* magazine voted San Diego State University the number three party school in the country, based on its beaches, active nightlife, and attractive student body (“Playboy’s Top Ten Party Schools”). Patrick Bourber’s fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau, is currently located in an area known as “Fraternity Row.” Ben Falealili worked as a Research Assistant (RA) in the dorms and lives in University Towers on campus. While the documentary was shot primarily in the dorms and classrooms at San Diego State University, I intended to shoot the party school atmosphere around campus, adding an additional layer to the piece and reminding the viewer that the fraternity members are far from living on an insulated island.

Cinematography

As discussed in chapter 2, documentaries that investigate faith usually let artistic expression and creative cinematography fall by the wayside. Even though Alexandra Pelosi’s documentary, *Friends of God*, may have been shot the way it was intentionally, I believe the film’s poor cinematic quality gets in the way of its primary message. The entire film was shot on a standard definition 4 x 3 television news camera, the interviews are poorly framed with the talent placed dead-center frame, and most of the b-roll is shot from the inside of a moving car, producing a shaky and often blurry image. *Frat Boys of Faith* aimed to offer higher production values through carefully planned b-roll of the college atmosphere, church services, fraternity life, establishing shots, and interviews that are well-lit and appropriately framed. New digital SLR technology also afforded the use of fast lenses to acquire a film-like shallow depth of field and better utilize available light. The diminutive size of the camera offered an unobtrusive handheld option that greatly enhanced my ability to shoot in the Observational Mode. Moreover the camera is tapeless, so that the many hours of footage were easily ingested and tape cost was not a factor.

Editing

*Frat Boys of Faith* alternates parallel sequences that are thematically related, each hewing closely to the featured protagonist. Both subjects would have introductory scenes establishing their distinct story arcs for the piece. The themes include, but are not limited to:
doubt and faith, sex and relationships, religious background, the fraternity as community, and the impact the subjects’ faith has had on their overall college experience. I planned for the documentary to be edited around these general themes, rather than depicting the linear journeys of its subjects. Editing would cement the subjects as part the Millennial Generation by specific juxtapositions. An early sequence was planned to open with wide shots of the college campus, then move to close ups of the two subjects, medium shots of members of a church congregation, and close ups of the subjects at a Bible study. This specific sequence was seen as too abstract once I was in the editing room. Instead, a sequence of Ben’s fraternity performing a choreographed step routine was used, as it provides immediate energy, directly introduces Ben, and touches on the thematic elements the film addresses.

Technically, *Frat Boys of Faith* hinges dominantly on the Observational Mode. Therefore, over-cutting the film was deliberately avoided. Creative title design, as in Devil’s Playground, which uses an almost Biblical font, provides necessary exposition with a stylistic edge. Pacing was a primary concern as the Observational Mode, which does not allow for narration, was the central means of imparting information to the viewer. Where the Observational Mode would leave gaps in information, I relied on the Poetic Mode or the Expository Mode (via interviews) to provide critical story content. The uniqueness (and challenge) of this film lies in the fact that, while I relied most heavily on the Observational Mode, I integrated that with the Poetic and Expository Modes to create a hybrid that intended as a meditation on what I believe to be a significant and topical issue.

**Sound Design**

Sound design was one of the most challenging aspects of editing the film as the Observational Mode would prompt me to make the film without music. Atmospheric sounds of campus life and the classroom environment were to be captured during shooting and used throughout the film as room tone, but no Foley or additional effects would be used. A lavaliere microphone was used during interviews, in addition to a dedicated Zoom H1 hard-disk recorder on a tripod. The choice was made not use a musical soundtrack so that the film would communicate its message to the audience as authentically as possible. My feeling was that if music was in the soundtrack of the film, the audience could possibly interpret the score as a method of manipulation, and it would somehow lessen the impact of the film and
cheapen the reality it aimed to present. One major challenge to be prepared for would be sweetening the audio of live interviews. Without a music bed to soften the imperfections of the audio, the film’s sound would be laid bare with all of its flaws. I planned to spend a lot of time in post-production working with audio and adding room tone to the entire piece, as poor audio can distract the audience from having the best possible viewing experience.

**RESTATING THE CREATIVE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH**

Frat Boys of Faith attempts to maintain a sense of exploration, discovery, and insight into a world where ideology and reality collide. As stated in earlier chapters, there is possibly no more sensitive an issue than religion, and documentaries on religion have not yet covered the college campus. It is uncharted territory. Frat Boys of Faith was meant to be an exploration into the world of the very formative college years. Many students enter college with a set of values and beliefs and exit with a completely different, or at least altered, worldview. This film has attempted to personify those statistics through its subjects, who present their lives to us with honesty. These two frat members decided to abandon their old ways and suddenly become devoutly religious. As they turn toward graduation and the future, they must look back at their pasts and discover what they might learn. Frat Boys of Faith invites us to look back with them. This project aimed to proceed with an optimism that it might positively affect the lives of those who see it, providing a stage for understanding and awareness.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

I was not a documentary film director when I took on this project, and now that my film is finished, I still don’t know whether I am or not. Part of the creative process for me before and after production was treading a lot of new ground and learning a lot of new practices. I now know that I still have a lot more ground to cover. In terms of providing a conclusion, my own ability to objectively determine whether my efforts were successful is clouded by my own insecurities as a filmmaker. As I will discuss later, I was confident in my ability to photograph the piece, but as a director, editor, sound technician, and interviewer, I am hesitant to say that I executed each job properly. Many times over in the course of shooting, I felt like I was in over my head. I would say to myself, “Why didn’t I just shoot a movie with a script and actors?” But if I look past my shortcomings, I think the film hits significant notes of emotional intensity and honesty, making it, on balance, a compelling documentary piece. The lessons I learned while making Frat Boys of Faith will be invaluable to me as I pursue future projects. An original treatment and budget for the project can be found in the Appendix.

ASSESSMENT OF GOALS ACHIEVED OR NOT

Admittedly, I did not make the film I planned to make. The one I intended to make captured more of the subjects’ social lives, more of their difficulties with fraternity life, and did not feature an eight-minute section of spoken word poetry. One of the film’s main objectives was to find out where the subjects struggled, what they worried about, and how much they relied upon their faith in everyday life. To witness these events happening in real-time I intended to submerge myself in the lives of Pat and Ben. I wanted to witness their conflicts and arguments with friends and girlfriends to see whether they were putting the principles they shared with me into practice. I wanted the audience to witness multiple days-in-the-life of a Christian fraternity member. But this didn’t happen. There were far too many scheduling conflicts and privacy issues to contend with.
Early on in the production process both Pat and Ben were excited to let me into their lives. They also did a great job of maintaining excellent communication. I was able to shoot Pat and Ben at events on campus, in their classrooms, dorms, even Bible studies. But during the second half of filming, Pat and Ben both had to concentrate on their studies so that they could graduate. Both seemed fatigued from their schoolwork, jobs, and the additional pressures of production, so they stopped checking in. It is my belief that Pat and Ben knew that if they informed me they were going to take a test or attend a campus event, I was going to ask if I could be there to film it. I think at certain times they grew tired of me and my camera.

This feeling of being an inconvenience to my subjects definitely caused me to make certain compromises. For example, I would have liked to have captured more classroom interaction, but I settled on only shooting one day in the classroom with each of them. This fact is very apparent to me while I watch the film, though I made sure to get their reactions after they finished finals. I think that if I had pushed for it, I could have gotten inside the classroom to witness their last finals with my camera, rather than hear about it secondhand. I think this would have made the event more compelling and dramatic, as it would have made the story feel more like a portrait of life on campus.

There were many other instances in the filming when I could have pushed to get the shots I needed. One day, I saw Pat handing out flyers for his fraternity just after I told him I needed more footage of him just “hanging out” with his fraternity brothers. This “rush” event would have been perfect for the film. But rather than confront him about his lack of communication, I remained optimistic that there would be more fraternity events to cover. I was wrong. Later in the production, Pat (even more so than Ben) began pulling away from his fraternity and his fraternity brothers. When I asked him later about why he was so hesitant to let me into this major part of his life, Pat said that he was really worried about getting thrown out of Zeta Beta Tau because of his involvement in the documentary. Though I admire his courage, I thought Pat’s commitment to the documentary could have been stronger than his commitment to his fraternity. I’ll admit I know that is a lot to ask. He told me that he thought it could ruin his future networking opportunities, and that once a fraternity member is banned, they are banned for life.
I realize now that finding reliable, honest, and enthusiastic subjects is half the battle. My subjects also needed to be familiarized with filmmaking practices in a very short amount of time. Where I brought years of film experience to the project, my subjects brought zero, so we needed to work hard to bridge the gap and develop a production language as quickly as possible. I realize now how important production meetings are and how great a very intense viewing period and discussion would have been to this project. The main lesson that I learned here, and the one that is so well highlighted by this example of Pat handing out flyers, is how important it is to communicate your expectations to your subjects. I needed to tell Pat and Ben upfront that documentary production is invasive, complicated, and arduous. They then should have been given the opportunity to decline, or grant me full access into their lives.

In terms of access, Ben was a far more compliant subject. Aside from withdrawing from his fraternity, his zeal for the project never waned. He opened himself up to us from the beginning of the project to the end. There was only one important event that he would not let us cover. As the former president of the Pacific Islanders Student Association at San Diego State University, Ben was still involved with the luau performances of this group. To have Ben’s performance at the luau in the film would have cemented our understanding of Ben’s appreciation and celebration of his culture. I was compelled to respect Ben’s requests because he had been so open and vulnerable with us during interviews, but this event would have highlighted his Samoan culture, something that was obviously very important to him. I knew this, but I wanted the audience to understand it as well.

When Ben failed to communicate with me about when and where an event took place, he more than made up for it by attempting to shoot the event himself. Most of the shots of Ben’s fraternity involvement come from Ben using his own Flip high definition camera to get us an inside look into his fraternity. He also filmed the entire section “Yvonne Visits” with his Flip HD camera, which is why sound in that section is an issue. Yvonne flew in from New Zealand and was in southern California for only a limited time, so Ben did not want me to disrupt their time together with an interview. I asked Ben to shoot as much of her visit as he could with his Flip HD camera, which he did. Ben was by far the more active participant in the documentary. He certainly has the most screen time in Frat Boys of Faith because he gave me the most to work with.
I knew from the beginning that access was going to be a problem, but I really had no idea of the full extent of the challenge. While I might have pushed a little harder to get the shots I wanted, I also needed to respect my subjects for donating their time. This was a fine line to walk, much like deciding how deep the film should be delving into religious themes.

One objective that I believe I achieved is to avoid the trap of heavy-handedness. I believe this comes from my own sensibilities as a filmmaker. I was committed to the idea that this film would not make the audience pick a side on a religious issue. In some ways it would have been easier to make a straightforward piece that presented several religious arguments and questioned the practices of modern society. Instead, the film attempts to present the characters as they are in actual reality and does not argue for or against their views. Early on in the editing process, when I was worried about the film coming across as too religious or sanctimonious, my thesis chair, Tim Powell, advised me, “stick with your characters, your story is going to be told through them. As long as you stick with your characters you have nothing to worry about.” As this was my first time directing a documentary, this was advice I needed to hear. This sentiment directly influenced my choice to avoid narration or music within the film, as I felt utilizing either would contribute to the heavy-handedness I was trying to avoid.

As stated above, assessing whether or not the film achieved its original goals and objectives is a challenge. First, I must admit that the film fails to a degree in its intention to juxtapose Christianity and fraternity life. On the other hand, the film addresses a few of the more powerful issues I did not plan on having it address: such as faith, sexual abuse, and addiction. I will be the first to admit that Frat Boys of Faith is less about the subjects trying to strike a balance between their religious and fraternity life and more about a lifestyle change that led to recovery from abuse and addiction. I think this happened because Pat and Ben evolved to be different people than when they first got involved with their Greek fraternities. As audience members we lose track of the Greek fraternities, but we become privileged witnesses of some very unexpected events such as Pat’s story of sexual addiction and Ben’s spoken-word poem about recovery from sexual abuse.

I would argue that these stories probably wouldn’t have come to light if I had been solely focused on making a film strictly about fraternity life and Christianity. While I had many ideas about where I thought the film should go, I still needed to allow my characters
and their stories to lead me. For me, this aspect of exploration and discovery, of things unfolding unpredictably, was one of the most attractive and compelling dimensions of the documentary process. As much as I wanted to plan everything out, I was still filming real people in real situations. As I shot the film, I found myself involved in a process of successive feedback in which I was continually discovering and reassessing what the film was going to be. This method of filmmaking was at once exhilarating and nerve-racking. In the final analysis, I think I made a film that is different than the one I set out to make; but that doesn’t necessarily mean it is better or worse than the original—it is just different.

**SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE**

Directing this project was scary, arduous, demanding, and, at times, awesome. I had to implement a lot of newly acquired documentary film practices to make the largest scale film I have ever made. I wrote over sixty pages of single-spaced transcripts, and had many variations of my outline written as I tried to include new events as they occurred. At the beginning of this process, I had no idea what it would take to make a documentary. Now I know that in addition to a vision, it takes a lot of patience, research, organization, communication, and persistence. I think certain habits of shooting narrative films made me lazy. With documentaries one cannot let one’s guard down. The documentary filmmaker must be ready at any moment. There are no second chances. Without re-shoots, elaborate shots, emotive music, or special effects to hide behind, documentary directors can be as vulnerable as they want their subjects to be. It was a harsh reality to watch Ben’s emotionally raw performance shot by an amateur, with bad lighting and poor audio levels. He later told me that he had just finished the poem that day, and that he was not sure if he was going to be performing it that night. I’m glad he did, and thankful there’s a record of it. This is the spontaneously profound moment that I envisioned the film having from the outset, and even with its technical shortcomings, I can’t imagine Frat Boys of Faith without it.

Another key test for me was to be the project’s long-term leader. My personality is fairly easy going, so at times I found it difficult to lead. Unlike a narrative short that would require me to muster just enough nerve to helm a crew for a few days or weeks during a shoot, I needed to be up to the task of motivating Pat and Ben (and whomever I could find to be my second camera person) over the entire course of shooting. All successful films have
needed visionaries to motivate and inspire the crew to go the extra mile. Just as leadership is a characteristic I’ve realized I need to develop, I also realize I need to hone my communication skills.

There were times during the production process when I could have been a better communicator, and as stated earlier, I am ashamed to admit that we never had a big production meeting. This is one of the key lessons I can take away from this project. I know all too well that an all-team production meeting would have set everything off on the right foot by covering everything from expectations to scheduling. Pat and Ben would have really benefited from hearing about the general process of making a documentary film, and also from screening examples. This became very apparent over the course of shooting. Pat and Ben would talk about things they did or events that they had gone to, without first telling us. This was frustrating, but no fault of anyone but me. I did not do my due diligence to get everybody on the same page from the outset. A few weeks after we stopped shooting I received a number of emails, phone calls, and text messages from Pat; he wanted to know if the film was finished. It came as a shock to him when I explained how long it would actually take me to edit the piece. It would have been in my best interest to provide the subjects with a timeline to limit any false expectations.

I also discovered that I need to work on my ability to adapt my vision. By this I mean a certain quality, fundamental to successful documentary film directors, that I witnessed midway through shooting. It is an ability to effortlessly and immediately determine what events are usable and what events are unusable during shooting. My default method was to shoot everything and decide later what to keep and what to throw away. But I had the pleasure of working on a live shoot with Thomas O’Hara, a seasoned videographer, who showed me the benefit of having what I like to call “an adaptable vision.” We were three quarters of the way through filming the event when Tom pulled me aside and said, “We can stop. There’s no point in shooting this, I’m not going to use it. Believe me, I’ve tried.” I was amazed at his ability to know when the shoot was over. He instantly knew that we had gotten all the pieces we needed to get, and anything else was just going to end up on the cutting-room floor. As someone who has just finished sifting through over 1.5 terabytes of footage, I now know the value of this skill. Though I feel I secured authentic answers, another area where I could still use some development is as an interviewer.
During the first interviews, Pat and Ben gave me their general stories and discussed a lot of the major themes of the film. But I found myself looking for ways to connect with them on a more personal level, so that they would feel comfortable enough with me to share some of those deeper and more meaningful life-changing moments in later interviews.

Sharing pieces of my story with them helped us all feel more comfortable, but I don’t know if this was the best way to go about the interview process. I realize now that I needed to develop more targeted questions. I needed to game plan and figure out the best way to go about getting what I needed. I could have done more research on how to conduct interviews and maintain a professional level of trust, while keeping a distance between myself and the subjects. I instinctively relied on a very personal, relational level of trust, so that by the end of shooting I had become fairly involved in Pat’s and Ben’s lives. I don’t know if this level of vulnerability will benefit me in the future, as I could see it complicating the subject-to-filmmaker relationship. In addition to discovering how to best interview my subjects, I found editing Frat Boys of Faith to be an even more demanding experience.

To skillfully edit such a long project took a lot of organization. My ability to maintain a vision for the project was tested during this phase of production. For example, I think the spoken word piece, though long, provides an additional artistic and emotional layer to the film. Ben’s honesty and rawness made it very hard to cut away and move on to a different story or subject. I tried to cut or fade to black from it many times, but all of these edits seemed very obvious and jarring. There were many decisions like this I was forced to make during the editing process. From the scene in which Pat gets his tattoo, to the scene where Yvonne comes from New Zealand to visit, knowing when and where to trim and cut to make the best film possible was a real challenge for me. I have been advised by Professor Elisa J. Sobo that the film could use a few more quiet moments that would allow the audience to pause and reflect about the film’s content, and I think I agree. But knowing when to slow down and when to keep moving the story forward is a very difficult balance to strike. I need to hold more screenings, to know when and where to expand these quiet transition shots. I am keenly aware that a “pause and reflect” style could lend a weight to content that is not important to the theme of the film, and might also make the film feel too abstract or meandering.
CONCLUSIONS FROM PROJECT

Directing Frat Boys of Faith was a meaningful and demanding experience. I am excited about what it will do for my career as a filmmaker. One of the main reasons I decided to make Frat Boys of Faith was that I knew it would round out my education, and I believe that it has done that. Some of the most positive feedback I have received from professors was that in Frat Boys of Faith I was able to capture very honest and real characters. I had a feeling that I was working along those lines when Pat told me near the end of filming, “I’m so excited to see this. Honestly, I told you things I’ve never told anyone.” I need to credit Professor Mark Freeman for advising me early on to make the relationships with my subjects a high priority. In an e-mail he wrote to me in 2010, he advised:

You may be hard pressed to find participants who are thoughtful, articulate and with enough life experience to let you create a complex portrait. Drama, emotion and strong characters in a campus based story are difficult to find, unless you can discover it in a committed process that lets you establish real relationships over a sustained period of time. (n. pag.)

I see now that this feedback laid the groundwork for how I would proceed. I also wanted to challenge the notion that a “campus based story” could not be dramatic. I committed early on to earn the trust of my characters and also planned to shoot the film over the course of an entire school year. I found that my research on directing actors and securing good performances for narrative work actually crossed over into my documentary work. I felt that I could speak to the subjects the same way I would an actor, and that with my posture and questions, I could set an emotional tone during the interviews. Professor Freeman’s advice coupled with my narrative directing abilities helped me capture the drama and emotion in Frat Boys of Faith.

Documentary film offers so many different possibilities. The process as a whole is still fascinating to me. I witnessed two lives change over the course of a school year. I saw both Pat’s and Ben’s college romances unfold, witnessed their families struggle, and I saw them graduate college and celebrate with their families. I went into the editing room with a mess of footage, and emerged with a cohesive thirty-three-minute film and a good deal more knowledge than when I began the process. I now see that no matter how much research and planning I did, I was never going to make the film I had planned to make. I also see that if I want to direct other projects, I need to grow as a leader, communicator, and editor. Making
Frat Boys of Faith was unlike any other process I have ever taken on, and it has definitely rounded out my education on a very personal and professional level.

A DVD of the film is available for viewing at the Media Center of Love Library.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

The topic of religion and its place on the college campus is a fascinating subject. Frat Boys of Faith offers a look into the lives of two devout Christian men in Greek fraternities, and was limited in its ability to survey the religious climate on college campuses across America. A feature-length documentary film that traveled to campuses all across the United States in search of the truth about religion on campus could be a very compelling film. Even on the other side, I would also be intrigued by a film about atheists and their acceptance or lack of acceptance on the college campus. I find the college experience itself to be a very worthy subject of a documentary film, as it is like no other time in life. We send our teenagers fresh from high school off to college to explore new ideas and lifestyles; they live in dorms and go to parties, and later develop new tastes for foods, music, culture, even friends, and, if the system works, four years later they graduate as thoughtful and well-educated adults. To my knowledge, Frat Boys of Faith is the first documentary that asks the question, “What does a life devoted to God on the college campus look like?” It is my hope that there would be many more projects like it, asking similar and even more profound questions.
WORKS CITED


Freeman, Mark. Message to the author. 9 Feb. 2010. E-mail.


APPENDIX

ORIGINAL TREATMENT FOR FRAT BOYS OF FAITH
OVERVIEW
Frat Boys of Faith is a film about people who were living one extreme and suddenly decided to start living another. These are the college years, seen through the eyes of two students who joined Greek fraternities early on, only later to become devout Christians. Patrick Barbour and Ben Falealili came to San Diego State to get a degree and have a good time, but what they didn’t know is that they would be graduating this Spring with their degrees and a new religion. Some argue that the Millennial Generation is leaving the church in droves, but what about those who remain?

OUTLINE
2. Ben Falealili talks about his long distance relationship with his New Zealand girlfriend. He talks about abstaining, how he looks forward to being married.
3. Pat talks about his interests, sports, politics, the fraternity and . . . God?
4. Ben talks about his spoken word poetry, being Samoan, his fraternity, and his journey back to faith. What compels him to keep going?
5. Pat talks about his new relationship, some of the boundaries, his past and current choice to practice abstinence at the #3 party school in the US (“Playboy’s Top Ten” 2010).
6. Pat prepares to graduate; he will pursue becoming a pastor to help other frat guys.
7. Ben talks about what graduation means to him and his future career plans. He proposes to his girlfriend. They begin a new life together.

LOGLINE
Frat Boys of Faith will be a thought-provoking documentary project that will discover how two Christian Millennials in Greek fraternities attempt to uphold their institutional faith in a pluralist society. It will emphasize how “spiritual” thinkers and traditional “religious” followers often grapple with the same questions, interpretations, and practices. As these fraternity members navigate their college experience at San Diego State University, we will witness how they uphold their religious principles in the midst of an institutionally and socially evolving environment, and how they exercise the religious activities of study, prayer, and service within their communities. The primary themes the film will address are faith and religious interpretation in Millennial society, how religion, the fraternity environment, and fraternal and religious
“brotherhood” contribute to the formation of identity, and how the male college experience within a party school atmosphere is impacted by following Christianity.

**SCOPE OF FILM**

1. Follow two fraternity members whose lives were altered in college by their choice to later become devoutly religious. How do they handle the daily difficulties of college life?
2. Illustrate the additional pressure that students involved Greek fraternity systems are under to participate in activities that may be against their beliefs.
3. Present the environment of religion on campus and the Millennial generation’s attitudes toward religion and spirituality.
4. Examine the subjects’ relationships, thoughts, concerns, lessons, and stories as they reach graduation and look toward the future.

**LENGTH, DISTRIBUTION AND MEDIA**

1. Target length: 30 minutes.
2. Distribution: San Diego, Angelus, and Heartland Film Festivals
3. HD: 1080 24p. HDV and SDcards. Edited in Final Cut Pro X.
4. Soundtrack: No music was used, incidental ambience used where appropriate.

**PRODUCTION ELEMENTS**

1. Interviews: 16 hours.
2. Observational and Event footage: 50 hours.
4. Stock footage: No stock footage will be used.

**SUBJECTS**

Patrick Barbour, 22, Political Science major, works in a Veteran’s home. In a two-month-long relationship with Carolyn Chow. Member of the Fraternity Zeta Beta Tau on Fraternity Row at SDSU. Will graduate with a BA this Spring. Plans to become a pastor.

Ben Falealili, 22, Anthropology major, works as an RA in the dorms of SDSU, in a long-term, long-distance relationship with girlfriend currently living in New Zealand. Is American Samoan and practices the Samoan culture. Has plans to propose to his girlfriend over the course of the film. Will graduate with a BA in Anthropology this Spring. Career is currently undecided, but would like to work with the youth.
PRODUCTION SCHEDULE AND BUDGET

Program: FRAT BOYS OF FAITH
Producer/Director: Philip Wilson
Format: HDV and HD DSLR 1080 24P
Shoot: Sep 2010—May 2011. Approx. 92 days (Over 28 wks)
Locations: San Diego, Tracy, Los Angeles.
Post: March 2011—Sep 2011.
TOTAL: 52 weeks

Proposed Time Schedule:
Nov 2010—Filmmaker secures regular meetings with subjects. Contracts signed.
Nov 2010—Shooting begins with Chair approval. Video diary cameras distributed.
February 2011—Filming continues. Interviews with professors and students conducted
May 2011—Subjects graduate. Discuss future plans. Filming ends.
June 2011—Editing process begins.
November 2011 – Rough cuts presented.
Dec 2011 – Final Film Presented to Thesis Committee.

Pre-Production and Development Budget:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>(In-Kind)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Materials</td>
<td>(In-Kind)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos and Screening Subscriptions</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed Materials</td>
<td>$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. research</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-Total: $100
### Production Expenses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HDV Tape Stock</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDHC 16GB memory card x 4</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon Rebel t2i 550D</td>
<td>$950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habbycam Stabilizer</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera Lenses—50mm / 18-55mm</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Recording Equipment</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Balls and Light Stands</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crew and Subject Food</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-Total: $2300

### Post-Production Expenses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.5 GB Hard Drive</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750 GB Hard Drive</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Production Meeting Expenses</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festival Press Kit Materials</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Post Expenses.</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-Total: $450

Total Cost of Production: $2,850.00

### FILM CREDITS

Featuring:
- Ben Falealili
- Patrick Barbour
- Carolyn Chow
- Beau Crosetto
- Yvonne Taufa
- Kimmy Smith
Special Thanks:
  Ben & Pat
  Beau Crosetto
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
  Cara Wilson
  George Wilson
  Louisa Stein
  Tim Powell
  Greg Durbin

Producers:
  Phil & Cara Wilson

Director & Editor:
  Phil Wilson

Additional Photography:
  Kris Hanson