



Entertainment Industry Alumni Lend a Hand at Buffalo State College

July 14, 2008 Buffalo, New York -- Six of Buffalo State College's most successful graduates from the entertainment industry returned to campus in June to take part in a two-day Television and Film Arts Symposium—a series of meetings designed to assist with the long-term strategic direction of the college's new [television and film arts \(TFA\) major](#).

The star-studded lineup of alumni in attendance featured Amy Berman, '87 (vice president of casting, HBO Films), Tom Calderone, '86 (president of VH1), Tom Fontana, '73 (Emmy Award-winning producer), Marcia Mulé, '81 (producer of *Celebrity Poker Showdown*), Deborah Oppenheimer, '75 (producer of *The Drew Carey Show*), and Rich Wall, '94 (promotions manager for the Buffalo Sabres). Tony Award-winning actor Ruben Santiago-Hudson also participated in the symposium.

"The symposium was a great experience for a number of constituents," said Jeff Hirschberg, assistant professor and coordinator of the television and film arts program. "It was great for the TFA program and myself because we were able to directly benefit from the collective wisdom of these entertainment industry alumni. The entertainment alumni benefited because they enjoyed giving back and developing a sense of ownership of the program."

Perhaps the greatest beneficiaries of the symposium were the students. Eight TFA majors shared lunch with the alumni, an experience that Hirschberg called "incredible."

"The students were totally jazzed," Hirschberg said. "They were excited about being in the room with these folks. Sitting down in an intimate setting for an hour and a half over lunch—it was invaluable in an industry where networking is king."

The interdisciplinary TFA curriculum incorporates courses from the college's Theatre, Communication, and English departments, along with nine new TFA-specific classes.

TFA majors choose one of two concentrations: writing and storytelling, or directing and producing. Graduates of the program will have a portfolio that demonstrates they have written, produced, and directed short films; written short scripts and full-length screenplays; and directed before a live audience.

The highly selective program recently named its inaugural class of 15 students.

“We aspire to be the public equivalent of a USC, NYU, Syracuse, Northwestern, or Emerson,” Hirschberg said. “We want to be on the short list of every talented potential filmmaker in the country. Programs like the symposium bring us closer to that goal.

“Furthermore, we are receiving incredible support from the administration,” Hirschberg added. “Dean Ben Christy, Provost Dennis Ponton, and President Muriel Howard have shown incredible enthusiasm for this program. Their support is extremely important in achieving the program’s goals.”

Plans are already in the works for the alumni to gather on campus for a second symposium, tentatively scheduled for October 2009. In addition, several members of the group have expressed an interest visiting professorship opportunities.

“It is important that we just don’t have a once-a-year relationship with the alumni,” Hirschberg said. “There are a lot of different scenarios to play out, but we are off to a great start.”

About Buffalo State College

The only State University of New York college located in a metropolitan area, Buffalo State College’s 11,000 students enjoy tremendous advantages both on the 125-acre campus and throughout the community. Founded in 1871, Buffalo State is the largest four-year college in SUNY system, with more than 130 undergraduate and 44 graduate academic programs in the arts, sciences, education, and professional programs. For more information, visit www.buffalostate.edu.

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