

# FREE SPIRIT MEDIA

## newsletter • fall 2007

YOUTH PRODUCED TELEVISION FOR CHICAGO AND BEYOND

### Connections Make All the Difference in the Media World

From the newsrooms of NBC Channel 5, ABC Channel 7, and WGN Channel 9 to WTTW Channel 11, Harpo Studios, and media outlets throughout the Chicago area, Free Spirit Media students are climbing their way up in the media world.

Through the FSM **Connections Initiative**, students interested in media are able to learn more about the field by interacting with guest speakers, visiting colleges, and touring hi-tech production facilities. For many, the highlight of the program is spending a day shadowing professionals around studios, sets, and post-production houses.

FSM students at North Lawndale College Prep shadowed media professionals across Chicago. At the Daily Planet, a post-production company, Dwayne Smith helped to edit a Glade commercial. Brittany Jefferson helped direct the ABC News at Noon show, while Kamaria Harmon toured Harpo Studios and even met Oprah herself.

As Brittany Wiggins learned while shadowing at Post Effects, "media is not just about making movies." Participants learn that the media field can be fun, but it also takes a college education, hard work, networking, and the drive to be successful.

Students hear from speakers and participate in workshops that help to develop their own interpersonal skills. During a guest visit, Brandi Thompson, FSM's past board president, explained to a group that eye contact, a firm handshake, and the unavoidable "small talk" are critical to success in the business world.



FSM students Bianca Bryant and Helen Block meet WGN Morning News anchors Larry Potash and Robin Baumgarten.

Zilijan Jones learned that "if you have a positive attitude, you can do anything." Zilijan put his own skills to the test while job shadowing at NBC Studios.

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### HoopsHIGH: A Training Ground for Teachers as Well as Directors

For the last four years, **HoopsHIGH** was Ashley Frazier's show. As the show's lead director, she 'called the switch,' choosing the flow and sequence of camera shots in the weekly sports broadcast. As a leader, she kept the crew on task behind the scenes.

This fall, however, **HoopsHIGH** has had to go on without Frazier, who graduated from Westinghouse Career Academy in June and started school at Cornell College where she is studying psychology and education. Still, Frazier isn't worried about the show. She has left the director's chair to Ashley Schaeffer, now a sophomore at Clemente High School, whom she trained as a director last year.

**HoopsHIGH** empowers its participants not only by giving them technology and context to create their own show, but also by challenging them to pass their skills onto their peers, as Frazier has done with Schaeffer.



Ashley Frazier (right) teaches Ashley Schaeffer how to use a switcher and direct a show during a **HoopsHIGH** game.

With each new school year, new apprentices join **HoopsHIGH** and work under the tutelage of advanced apprentices to learn the roles and responsibilities required for a quality production. Free Spirit Media developed this model for peer mentoring and progressive skill platforms with its partner **After School Matters**.

After watching Frazier direct, Schaeffer became Frazier's technical director (her 'button pusher'). In this position, she was able to learn the technical skills of directing as well as build an appreciation for how to pace the flow of shots. By the time she directed her first full game, Schaeffer was not nervous at all.

Watching somebody else direct **HoopsHIGH** can be difficult for Frazier. "Each director has their own style," she says. "Ashley is still developing hers."

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## New FSM Show Lets Teens Talk as They Learn

When the South Shore Drill Team made its inaugural appearance at the **Gary Comer Youth Center (GCYC)** in the spring of 2006, the HoopsHIGH crew traveled from Chicago's West Side to the South Side to record the drill team's performance from a makeshift set-up in the corner of the new auditorium. At this year's performance, the HoopsHIGH crew stayed home while the youth center's own FSM crew recorded the event, its members coming from the surrounding Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood.

Since the summer of 2006, Free Spirit Media has risen to the challenge of replicating its successful model at a brand new site. For the program at GCYC, FSM chose to reach beyond its tested documentary and sports broadcasting models and introduce its new students to the idea of creating a talk show.



Brittany Owens and Ramesha Myles get ready to follow the **PTC** discussion.

"We ran with it," Michael Hill, a senior at the South Shore School of Entrepreneurship, says. What started out as an exercise in live production grew into **Perspective of Teens in Chicago (PTC)**. The GCYC crew has produced 8 half-hour episodes of PTC. Three new episodes will air in November on CAN-TV, Channel 19.

"Adults get to say what they feel, but you never hear young people's opinions, so that's why we started the talk show," says Xavier Hawthorne, a junior at South Shore.

Much like FSM's documentaries and public service announcements, the talk show has become an outlet for teen

expression. Co-hosts Simone Bryant and Vanswa Garbutt serve as moderators for a panel and audience discussion of topics such as relationships, health, respect, and youth entertainment. The teens have been rewarded with positive feedback. Jelicia Adams says that audience members came up to her after their first episode on teen relationships, "they wanted the show to keep going and said that they couldn't wait for the next show."

**PTC's** topics emerge from group brainstorming sessions and surveys that the participants take of other teens asking what they would want to see on television. FSM's dedicated staff at GCYC has developed a curriculum that focuses on producing, directing, on-camera talent, control room and camera operations, and editing. Each participant rotates through an intensive two-week unit that culminates with the shooting of a new live show. The youth are responsible for every aspect of pre-production, including marketing, audience recruitment, research, and set design.

Michael Hill says he likes directing because he, along with the producer and the hosts, is in control of what happens.

He also feels that "being in charge comes with responsibility for the quality of the show." Based on **PTC's** emergence as a popular live ticket at GCYC and viewing choice on CAN TV, the whole crew's commitment to quality is apparent.



Tim Densmore (left front), professor in Columbia College Chicago's Television Department, advises students in the control room during a taping of **Perspectives of Teens in Chicago (PTC)**.

## Connections Continued (from page 1)

On visits to Northwestern University and Columbia College, FSM students have learned to produce news shows and act as anchors, camera operators, and floor directors. They have also met with professors, students, and admissions officers to learn more about the college experience.

The **Connections Initiative**, which is supported by a multi-year grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation, is now central to all Free Spirit Media programming. Exposure to professional adults not only helps prepare students to pursue careers in media, but also is a critical component to inspire our young people to work hard and pursue their dreams, whatever they may be.

If you would like to be involved in FSM's **Connections Initiative**, please contact Mona Yeh at [connections@freespiritmedia.org](mailto:connections@freespiritmedia.org) for more information.

## HoopsHIGH Continued (from page 1)

There are also times when she thinks, "I would have done something different, but it works." Frazier also adds, "It makes me learn that I have to be patient." Considering that she wants to teach junior high in the future, she'll need to master patience.

One month into the new **HoopsHIGH** season, Schaeffer has already begun to fill the shoes left for her. As the lead director this year, Schaeffer is committed to working hard and setting an example for the rest of the crew. When asked what she was most excited about for this year, Schaeffer responded with a grin, "working with the apprentice crew and helping teach them that they can work the cameras and produce!"

Ashley and Ashley wonderfully represent the teamwork and torch-passing that make **HoopsHIGH** special.

## News Highlights

### FSM Brings Home Student Emmy

*In the Pocket*, the summer 2006 collaboration between FSM and Umoja Student Development Corporation at the Gary Comer Youth Center, was recently awarded a *Crystal Pillar* (a.k.a. Student Emmy) in the Documentary category from the National Academy of TV Arts & Sciences as well as a *Hometown Video Award* in the *Making a Difference* category from the National Alliance for Community Media. This was the fifth consecutive summer that FSM received the Hometown honor. *In the Pocket* explores the past, present, and future of the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood, where Gary Comer grew up and where the youth center bearing his name was established in 2006. The student producers were challenged to balance the optimism and the anxiety around the changes facing their community; they did a beautiful job weaving together over twenty interviews with residents and community stakeholders.



### Alumni Come Home to FSM

When FSM students graduate from high school, they often ask how they can stay involved with the organization. The answers usually have been “come to the reunion,” “visit our classes,” and “open some doors for the next kid.” All good answers, but this past summer, FSM went further. Two former students returned from their freshman year at college to assist with programming. Antwone Smith (Westinghouse '06) worked on the HoopsHIGH staff. He helped the announcers improve their speaking, researching, and script writing skills, and challenged each announcer to develop an individual style. The former HoopsHIGH announcer is studying Communications at the University of Illinois where he has his own radio show. Sable Narett (NLCP '06) brought her energy and new knowledge as a first year broadcast journalism major at Syracuse University in New York to work as a production assistant on FSM's Umoja Community Builders Summer Internship program. Sable, who wants to be a talk show host, helped the young video makers overcome their shyness as they conducted interviews for their documentaries on violence in communities and schools. Both Sable and Antwone returned to college this fall with increased confidence and leadership skills from their work this summer.



### FSM Students Collaborate on Feature Documentary Film

During the 2007-2008 school year, a select team of FSM students is working alongside professional filmmakers Jon Siskel and Greg Jacobs on their feature-length documentary film, *Louder than a Bomb*. The film, which is inspired by Young Chicago Authors' spoken word poetry competition of the same name, is following teens from across the Chicago area as they prepare for and compete in the world's largest high school team poetry slam. Students are using a brand new, state of the art camera package, which will subsequently be dedicated to advanced student documentary and dramatic narrative projects. *Louder than a Bomb* is intended for theatrical release and represents a remarkable opportunity for our participants to take their creative vision to a wide and diverse audience.



FSM's collaboration is being made possible thanks to a generous grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

### FSM Builds Partnerships with Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism & Columbia College

Free Spirit Media is working to cultivate relationships with institutions of higher learning so that we can best prepare our participants for their next steps in education. Since the spring of 2007, FSM has joined forces with two of the area's most prestigious and productive programs: Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism and the Television Department at Columbia College Chicago.

FSM's staff at the Gary Comer Youth Center teamed with Medill Dean John Lavine, Professor Ava Greenwell, and Northwestern undergrads to develop and run an intensive four-week audio media production program for rising 8th and 9th graders during the summer of 2007. Participants identified themes, collected interviews and audio sound effects, wrote and voiced precise scripts, and used audio post-production software to edit stories into compelling one-minute audio packages. FSM and Medill are now working together to design a comprehensive year-round program.

Paul Teruel from Columbia College's Center for Community Arts Partnerships and Television Department Professors Tim Densmore and Chris West enlisted FSM staff and students in their *Production and Directing: Special Projects* class, which led to the production of a documentary film, *This is Kaotic*, about Chicago's dynamic Kaotic Drumline. FSM and Columbia are now developing new class ideas and planning future production collaborations, including a co-production with HoopsHIGH and Columbia's new mobile production truck.

## Letter from the Executive Director

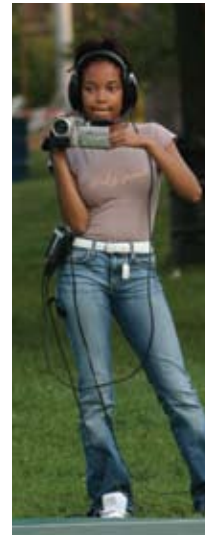
Dear FSM Friends and Supporters,

As this newsletter goes out, I am incredibly excited about the wonderful stories FSM has to share with you. They are stories of recognition, expansion, collaboration, enhancement, and impact. FSM started in 2000 with 20 HoopsHIGH participants. FSM currently serves over 350 young people each year! We are integrated into school curricula, offering paid apprenticeships, building bridges between eager students and industry partners, and through it all, we are providing a space for young people to create original and thought-provoking work. I hope that you are as inspired by these stories as I am. My staff and I are consistently amazed by what our young people are saying with their work. I am so grateful for the support that has allowed FSM to develop and thrive. Your encouragement, advice, collaboration, and continued contributions are critical to the success of our programs and our students. I look forward to sharing even more exciting stories in the future!

*With Warm Holiday Wishes and Deep Thanks,*

**Jeff McCarter**

*Founder & Executive Director*



## Watch HoopsHIGH

Catch exciting HS sports and FSM documentaries, dramas & PSAs.

**Every Saturday night  
at 8pm on CAN TV,  
Channel 19.**

FSM is a CAN TV  
Community Partner.



## WE NEED YOUR HELP

Free Spirit Media is dedicated to providing unique opportunities to Chicago's youth, but we cannot do it without the support of our partners and sponsors. Please consider making a gift in support of our programs. Your contribution will be an investment in our youth - in their skills, their confidence, and their potential.

For more information, please contact Katie Ackert, Resource Director at 773-542-1490 x125 or [katie@freespiritmedia.org](mailto:katie@freespiritmedia.org).

## FSM STAFF

Jeff McCarter, Executive Director  
Katie Ackert, Resource Director  
Joseph Berry, Technology Director, FSM at NLCP  
Elizabeth Czekner, Lead Instructor, FSM at NLCP  
Tyree Horn, Technology Coordinator, FSM at GCYC  
Trisha McWilliams, Program Coordinator, FSM at GCYC  
Kenneth Nelson, Program Associate, HoopsHIGH  
Meera Sinha, Program Associate  
Jesse Weiler, Program Associate, Amate Volunteer  
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## CONTACT INFORMATION

Free Spirit Media  
Jeff McCarter  
1817 S. California Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60608  
Phone: 773-542-1490 x 112  
Fax: 773-542-1492  
[jeff@freespiritmedia.org](mailto:jeff@freespiritmedia.org)  
[www.freespiritmedia.org](http://www.freespiritmedia.org)

