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A report on an Arts Administration internship with Tony Bravo Film Production

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**A Report on an Arts Administration
Internship with Tony Bravo Film Production**

Internship Report

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans

in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in Arts Administration

By

Michael Tapie

December 2003

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Preface

Tony Bravoland, LLC Internship Agency

In the spring of 1998, the recently acquired U.N.O. Studio Center was not being fully utilized. Aware of this situation, film director Francis James was contacted by Steve Hank, an instructor in the Department of Drama and Communication (DRCM) at the University of New Orleans, about a possible partnership with his independent production of *Tony Bravo: Scenes From a Forgotten Cinema*. Steve Hank felt the proposal had merit, so he arranged for Francis James to meet with a U.N.O. committee to explore a possible association, and to discuss the potential benefits that students would receive by training on a professional production. The Chairman of the DRCM, Kevin Graves, administered the collaboration and provided guidance for the complex arrangement. Elizabeth Williams, Director of the U.N.O. Foundation, enacted a legal contract and the partnership provided the film production company with many of the benefits of a nonprofit agency. It was necessary for the project to follow strict guidelines, since the use of state property, specifically the U.N.O. Studio Center, was included in the agreement. Liability was a major concern, and there was always a possibility that an actor, crewmember or a U.N.O. student could have an accident while working on the project. The contract was an unique exchange. The project could use the U.N.O. Studio Center facility and equipment and U.N.O. will have professionals in the film industry training its students on a legitimate production.

This collaboration was a ground-breaking event for the University of New Orleans and brought the studio center to a new level. The project allowed the U.N.O. Studio Center to adequately appraise its facility and demonstrate its merits to the film industry. The students received quality training that was unavailable at other regional education centers, thus giving greater value to the program.

The experience with *Tony Bravo* placed the U.N.O. Studio Center in a position to attract national recognition and established a basis for a framework to pursue collaboration with national studios and larger productions. Since the production of *Tony Bravo: Scenes from a Forgotten Cinema*, the U.N.O. Studio Center has played a major part in attracting films such as *Witness to a Jury*, *Monster's Ball*, *Runaway Jury*, and *Unchain My Heart*.

Tony Bravo: Scenes From a Forgotten Cinema was the first full-length feature by director Francis James. The film observes a lower class couple from New Orleans in a martial crisis. The character Tony Bravo sees his life depleted of color like an old black and white movie, while in his head the world is full of color and multiple personalities. The movie boasts impressive visual and conceptual effects. Older visual effects techniques were successfully combined with the latest software creating high quality digital compositing and 3-D results. Ed Nelson, a star in the TV series *Peyton Place* accepted a role along with a well-known local actor, John "Spud" McConnell. The professional wrestler Raven, who has a large following of wrestling fans, played "himself" in the movie.

The director, Francis James, is gaining recognition and respect in the film industry. Reviews and articles in national magazines have made complimentary statements about the quality of his previous films and the current production of *Tony Bravo*. *Arts & Leisure* stated in their March 1998 publication that “although new to Hollywood, James has more business savvy than most young film makers,” and the *New Orleans Magazine* August 1999, mentioned that he “sells his vision well.” The director has also received awards from the Sundance Film Festival, Kodak Vision Award, New York Short Film Festival, and the Bronze Apple National Education Award.

Success for the independent film company usually is based on understanding the film business along with a marketable product. A young production company with a successful film would find financial backing much easier for future projects and possibly attract a nationally recognized cast of actors. The mission of the production of *Tony Bravo* was to achieve a marketable product that would attract industry recognition. The goal was also to impress the national film community with a local production made with limited resources, but exhibiting high quality digital imaging and creative visuals.

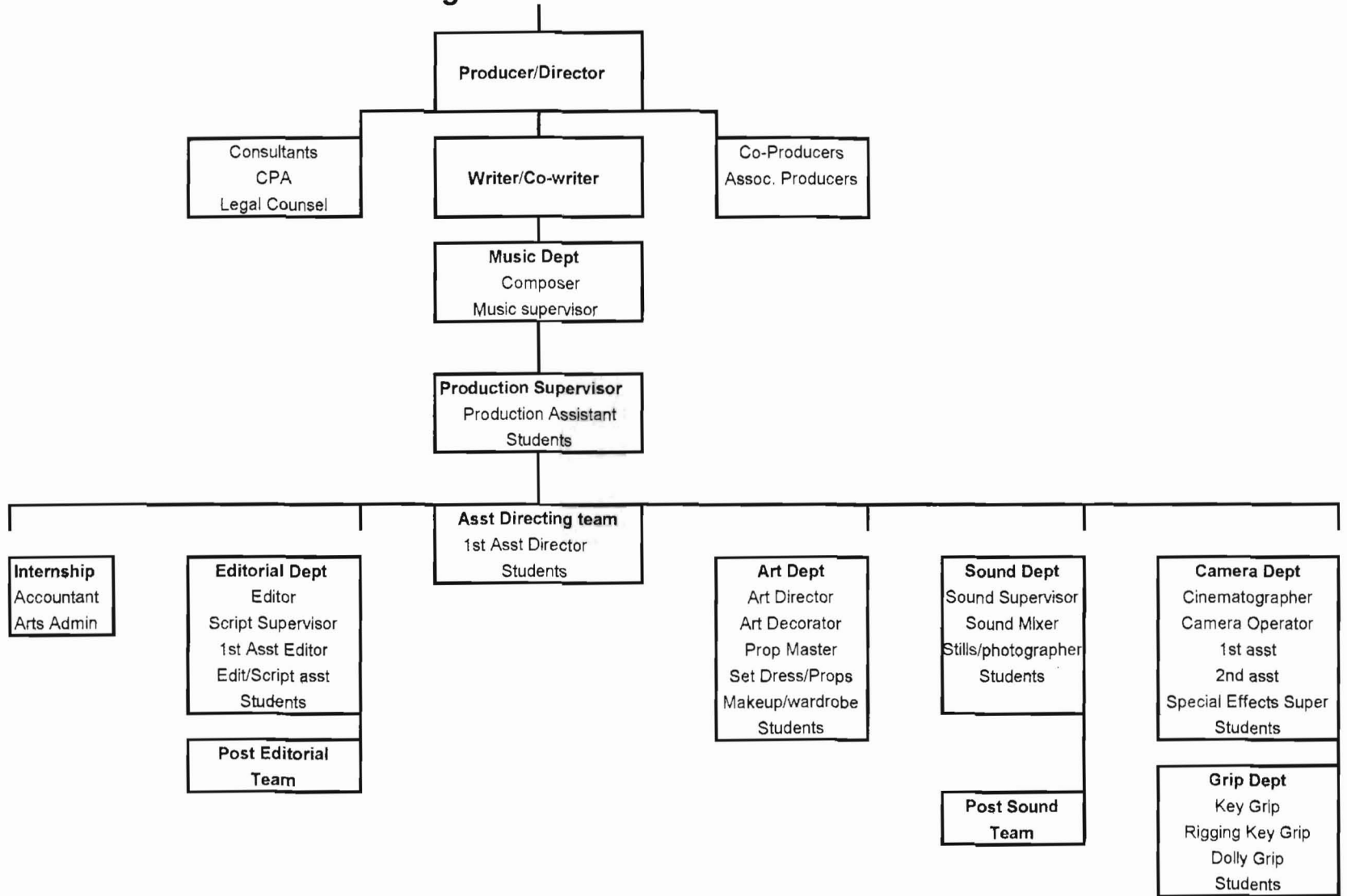
This report will analyze what was accomplished in meeting these goals and will make recommendations for the future.

Organizational Chart

The organizational chart for Tony Bravoland, LLC is illustrated on the next page. This chart is a good example of the fundamental positions and company hierarchy that is common to most independent film productions. The organizational chart can be a useful management tool for the production staff to understand the chain of command and the distribution of responsibility. Potential film crew and staff can view the organizational chart and know where they fit into the overall company structure. For each department there is typically a key crew member, but a person can help in other departments if needed.

A brief description of each position follows the organizational chart along with the names of the staff and crew who received production credit. Appendix H, the Internet website, has a photo gallery of some of the actors and crew in the film production.

Organizational Chart



Production Staff

Director/Producer: Francis James.

The producer is responsible for allocation of funds for the project. The producer coordinates the various parts of the project and makes the final decision on the economic elements. The producer can spend over a year, before and after, on a particular project.

Director: The creative force and decision maker with final approval on all aspects of the production, from performances to camera placements to choice of locations. The director also supervised the editing, sound and post production special effects.

Co-Producers: John Anderson, Diana Boylston, Jacky Morgan, Daniel Rector.

The production company hired co-producers throughout the production phase to assist the producer. Each co-producer had a particular skill to offer the company such as relationships with certain vendors. This title was also given to two people who believed they could provide or secure financing.

Associate Producers: Walter Cohen, and Antonino Paone.

Usually the associate producer will act as a supporting producer, although this credit can have different interpretations. This credit can be earned by a person who secured a key element such as a recognized actor, or materials for the production. The number of associate producers can vary with each project.

Writer/ Co-writer: Jan Densmore, Francis James.

The writer is the person who writes the screenplay or manuscript for the film. This includes the dialogue which is usually divided into sections called scenes. Sometimes, the camera direction are written into the screenplay.

Consultants: A production usually needs the expertise of consultants or specialist. For example, legal consultants are contacted at the beginning of a project to prevent unnecessary delays due to copyright or other issues. Specialist can also include tax attorneys, certified public accounts, or investment counselors. They may be retained for additional help as the film progresses.

Production Crew

Script Supervisor: Ada-maria Ichim.

Also called Continuity Clerk. This person takes notes on every scene including dialogues, lens, costumes and makeup. Films are usually shot out of sequence which makes the information detailed by the Script Supervisor very important.

1st Assistant Director: David McCarthy.

This person is a liaison between the director and production manager. Also, this position maintains order on the set and makes sure everyone and everything is in the right place.

Cinematographer: Diego Velasco.

Director of Photography is a contracted professional to supervise the filming and assist in the editing. This person is responsible for film lighting, framing and shooting.

Makeup/Wardrobe: Paige Reeves.

Usually performed by two different positions on larger productions. A makeup artist is a member of the production crew skilled at applying make-up on the actors. Wardrobe, also called costumer, is responsible for taking care of the wardrobes on the set and locations.

Sound Supervisor: John Scott.

The sound supervisor is in charge of the audio portion of the film.

Editor: Daniel Gutman.

Editor is responsible for editing the film. Editing is a process of arranging, selecting, and assembling a film including the sound track.

Composer: David Torkanowsky.

A person who writes the music for a film score.

Music Supervisor/ Contractor: Patricia Gorman.

Professional contracted to coordinate all financial and business activities pertaining to the music.

Special Effects Supervisor: David Nami.

Professional contracted to advise and supervise the special effects during filming and production. Effects are usually added in post production which can includes dissolves, fades, and other illusory techniques.

CGI: Atomic Imaging, David Stoy, Trey Deark, Loyola University Digital Arts Dept.

Miniatures: Robert Eckels.

Production Manager: Linda Novak.

Professional contracted to manage the production and devise a budget.

Accountant: Michael Tapie.(Intern)

Responsible for the production accounting and to provide financial information.

Main Cast

The following is a summary of the main actors and the character roles they played in the film production. Their photos are shown on Appendix H at the end of the report.

Tony Bravo - Antonino Paone, title character.

Mary Bravo - Shelly Poncy, wife of title character.

Architect Tony - Russell Hodgkinson, working crew in Tony's head.

Foreman Tony - Jack Radosta, working crew in Tony's head.

Tony Two Horns - John "Spud" McConnell, operator of dream Machine.

Dream Lover - Katherine Keberlei, temptation to married men.

Raven - Raven, the wrestler plays himself.

Mary's Father - Ed Nelson.

U.N.O. Partnership and Organizational Profile

The University of New Orleans and Tony Bravoland, LLC signed a collateral agreement on December 7, 1998 for a film production called *Tony Bravo: Scenes From a Forgotten Cinema*. The collateral agreement allowed U.N.O. the benefit of having an experienced director committed to teaching two film production classes. The students from the Department of Drama and Communication (DRCM) would receive on the job training by professionals and earn academic credits by participating on the production. The intern production company had full use of the facility and equipment at the U.N.O. Studio Center for a limited period.

The agreement assigned all copyright claim of ownership to Tony Bravoland, LLC. In exchange for all rights, U.N.O. was entitled to net profits of 5% after investors received their initial investment. The U.N.O. Foundation did not request any qualifications or abridgments after reviewing the script, nor did the collateral agreement give U.N.O. ownership of any portion of the script.

The U.N.O. Foundation accepted donations on behalf of the independent film venture, but the financial obligations of the project depended solely on Tony Bravoland, LLC. Donors and investors were also aware that this project had applied for a 501 (c) (3) status as a nonprofit entity from the Internal Revenue Service. A nonprofit entity is a legally incorporated organization under state and federal law established to serve a public

purpose. The nonprofit organization can make a profit, but the funds and income must be administered toward the goal of the mission (Wolf, 1990).

Although the title “independent production” can have different connotations to the general public, in the film industry the classification usually implies that the production company is not affiliated with a major studio. “What studio affiliation means, simply, is that if there are disagreements between the filmmaker and the studio, the studio has the final say (Goodell, 1998, p.7).” The independent production will most likely operate outside a large studio system, and probably receive financial support from private investors or other funding sources. However, the independent film may be distributed by a major studio (Singleton, 1982). Unlike the major studios, small independent companies are not diversified conglomerates, and one unsuccessful film can exert tremendous pressure upon a company which depends on a hit to continue to survive (Biederman et al., 1996).

Tony Bravo was truly independent, but there are many independent producers financed in whole or in part by the large studios. Indies (independent films) projects usually raise production funds by a process of “pre-sale” of foreign rights, home video rights, or other rights, and by obtaining loans or equity investments from banks and other sources. Independent film productions, such as *Tony Bravo*, are produced through limited partnerships or limited liability companies. The investor contributes capital but will have limited control on the creative aspect of the film. The production company is generally responsible for all financial, production, and artistic decisions (Biederman et al., 1996).

The film industry has certain standards for the return on investments and calculating profits. Customarily, investors are first repaid in full, called “recoupment” (Singleton, 1990) and receive a premium for the use of their money from the net revenues derived from all sales of the film. After investors have recouped and received their profit, the revenue agreements will start for others involved, however, there is no set formula for these contracts (Biederman et al., 1996).

In order to film on location without interruptions, a production company must have direct communication with the city and state government. The City of New Orleans issued permits for street closures for filming *Tony Bravo*, and requested a one million-dollar general liability insurance policy. The State of Louisiana authorized the use of a jail cell for one particular scene in the movie. Permission to use the Orpheum Theatre and other locations required “Location Release Forms.”

The organizational context of an independent production company, like Tony Bravoland, LLC, functions differently from a large studio. One main operational difference between the large studio and the small independent organization is that the creative goal of the project can be the vision of just one individual, as opposed to a project determined by group consensus. The film script for *Tony Bravo*, for instance, was co-written by the director and he also made the creative choices and provided stylistic direction. Another difference is that the resourcefulness needed to operate the independent production company is not usually required in mainstream, more financially secured businesses.

A small production must be imaginative so it can work around all sorts of constraints due to limited funding and lack of expensive state of the art equipment that larger studios can afford. A large film studio with abundant resources can usually adhere to the original development plan without the need to explore new options. The smaller independent enterprise must be willing to take chances and search for alternatives to the roadblocks that constantly plague the project. A problem for *Tony Bravo* was the lack of financial resources to hire the necessary crew and rent a facility for the film production. The collaboration with the University of New Orleans allowed the project to overcome these roadblocks and pursue a high quality film.

The small production company contains organizationally defined positions with established standards similar to the large studios, but allows room for individual creativity to a greater extent. There is usually a chain of command, prescribed managerial procedures and routine documentation, but it does not always restrict personal innovation and ambition. For example, the *Tony Bravo* script defined a certain time and place, but the audio and visual interpretations reflected the creative influence of several individuals. The spaceship in *Tony Bravo* looked like it was recycled from various machines. It was small, cramped, and the captain wore a helmet with horns. The creative group decided against the usual uncluttered spaceship and the captain in a neat uniform that is so often portrayed in films. The script defined specific restrictions and there was a procedure to follow, but the imagination and cooperation of the group led to a clever interpretation of the spaceship and captain.

The organic structure of a company allows the project to respond quickly to unexpected changes due to a wide range of situations (Burns & Stalker, 1987).

This type of structure is needed when the company operates in a changing and unstable environment. The film production exhibited many of the characteristics of an organic organization. Standard rules in the independent film production are not as important as the process of compromises and coordination. In organic organizations, the company fosters decentralized decision making where employees use their judgement rather than rely on a central authority. Any number of events can influence the project and most of the crew had the authority to make technical decisions without prior consultations to avoid delays in a rigid schedule. When a certain type of equipment became unavailable at the last minute, the professional crew was trusted to make a decision on the best substitute or to find another source. Dependence on centralized decision-making was not necessary to insure the completion of the project.

Once a production schedule is drafted, it can be hard to change, especially dealing within time frames like semesters. The organization was flexible enough to counter any circumstances that could affect the production. However, two conditions which were not addressed could have dramatically affected the project. When a problem suddenly appeared that could limit student participation, it would leave the production without sufficient personnel to complete the task. Also, there was always the possibility that a large studio could contract the director or key personnel with promise of more money. These two situations were possible, although remote, but the U.N.O. agreement should have addressed them in a way that would be fair to the students and director.

The organizational structure and business climate of the independent film industry challenges the company to keep abreast of circumstances affecting the film trade. Technological advances can help the small independent film company function efficiently and produce a high quality product. A film company that quickly identifies cultural and social trends can create a marketable film that will attract a larger audience, while retaining its regular viewers.

Professional Crew and U.N.O. Students

The objective for the production of *Tony Bravo* was to fulfill the agreement with U.N.O. concerning student training and to produce a high quality film. To achieve these goals, the director was given full responsibility to assemble a work force and create the production structure. He was also required to raise funds for the project. In a larger production these responsibilities are usually divided among several people.

The director was sensible enough to realize that the project would probably have to deal with numerous budget compromises, and the selection of the crew will be narrowed to professionals who are willing to work on a low budget film. The final choice for the crew was ultimately based on film experience, availability and personal interest. The professional staff for *Tony Bravo* was placed under a contract for their services, and they were required by the agreement with U.N.O. to train students in technical positions. The students were selected by the aptitude they demonstrated and their individual reasons to be part of a film production (F. James, personal communication, 2000).

The small independent film company, such as Tony Bravoland, LLC, usually prospects for talent and professional crew on a limited employment basis, and the number of employees can fluctuate during production. Every film project can include a new cast, various locations and different completion schedules. These movie components are usually decided in the “breakdown” which is a detailed list of all the necessary requirements to make a particular film (Katz, 1982).

Unlike the conventional procedure practiced by the larger studios, there were no job announcements for positions with *Tony Bravo* in the trade publications or public employment sections. The exception pertained to the actors, who were members of the Screen Actors Guild, or SAG. The union classified the project as a modified low budget film, so it did not have the same requirements as a large, well-financed production. There are different SAG contracts for the most expensive production to the least expensive, which is usually the student film agreement. The union traditionally gives a break, with restrictions, to low-budget productions and student films. The low-budget classification is based on the financial resources of the company and the projected budget to complete the project. SAG will place some limits on a low-budget category, such as the requirement that the film must be shot entirely within the United States. SAG members can gain valuable experience from small productions and credit recognition if the film proves successful (SAG, 1999).

Some individuals had worked with the director, Francis James, on previous film projects and were familiar with his directing style. The prior working experience allowed them to respond to sudden changes in the project and to expect necessary adjustments to their scheduled as part of the changeable environment of the independent film industry. Distinctive to most production companies, the number of staff and crew fluctuated depending on the demands of a particular film scene. The Accounts Manager, Tracy Keller, who had worked on other projects with the director, decided to join this independent production because “I know that once he (Francis James) starts a project he will finish it” (T. Keller, personal communication, 1999). Other professionals who had

worked with Francis James on film ventures made similar comments about the Director's motivation and perseverance.

The work force included a veteran crew that had the necessary training and skill, yet could mentor and communicate technical information to the students. From an academic perspective the challenge in the production was to encourage, within the organizational framework, cooperation and creativity in a stressful working situation due to deadlines, inexperienced crew, and financial constraints. The objective of management in this film project, the director and production manager, was to deflect conflicts, maintain an environment for personal creativity and achieve a common goal. In other words, management provided the leadership and direction of the project (Wolf, 1990). The work force focused on their relative skill and maintained cooperation with each other under unstable conditions that are usually indicative to a film production.

The staff and crew contributed their special talents and advice, but were also expected to compromise in order to achieve a workable project in a narrow framework. They were fully aware that their positions, technical achievements or responsibilities could be subject to revision without prior notice or even deleted entirely from the project. The creative working environment, however, compelled most professionals to focus on their specific task and perform their best. Diego Velasco, the cinematographer, recalled a scene in another movie that took hours to film. In the editing room, however, it was deleted due to time constraints (D. Velasco, personal communication, 1999). Although the scene deletion was disappointing, film professionals understand that production decisions require a broader perspective.

The production of *Tony Bravo* also required the technical specialists to train students as part of the collaboration agreement with U.N.O. Student training was a non-negotiable part of their assignment. In turn, the students, were expected to have responsibility and autonomy in their positions. The students proved to be a valuable asset as they worked around their schedules of other classes.

Although training students was an undisputed part of the agreement, the production was sometimes forced to continue at a slower pace to accommodate the time needed for technical instructions. The slowdowns occurred more at the beginning of the production when students were becoming acquainted with their tasks. But such slowdowns were expected and did not significantly delay the project. A few of the students worked only one semester to receive credit from U.N.O. and could not be motivated to gain additional valuable experience by staying just a little longer. However, a number of the students worked past the semester and during Spring Break. They received a better understanding of the work required to complete a film production. The original development plan may have anticipated a reduction in the number of students at the end of the semester, but no arrangements or adjustments were noted to offset any unforeseen production difficulties. Ultimately, the production assembled a high quality product by the professionals and students within their time commitments and academic schedules.

Misunderstanding an individual's expectations could have jeopardized the project. The strenuous working conditions of this production resulted in many tired crewmembers when long hours became necessary to compete a scene. Time delays and

repetition occurred as a result of inexperience in certain technical positions, but the importance of achieving a quality film sometimes required precision that demanded additional time. An example was illustrated during an “outer space” scene being shot at the U.N.O. Studio Center facility. The set included various objects suspended by strings. Through the camera lens, the set generated an illusion of planets in space. The scene required a spaceship to travel through these objects and to achieve the proper effect multiple adjustments to the set and camera were necessary. This one scene required input and direction to the students from the set designer, cinematographer, director and art director. Some people who were not involved with the technical aspect of this scene and unacquainted with film making in general began talking about unrelated topics and several left the room. One person had to be located when he was needed to work on the set. Fortunately, the scene was not compromised by this display of impatience. The seasoned crew had acquired a degree of understanding concerning scene revisions from experience on other film projects and they maintained a professional attitude about the time involved.

Both the production supervisor and director mentioned several times that a small independent production company with limited financial backing can be plagued with personnel problems. The director complained that quite a few people are attracted to an independent production with a recognized creative director. Nevertheless, the appeal quickly fades once they realize the amount of time and commitment involved.

Disillusioned newcomers do not always complete what they see as boring and routine chores and the result is more work for everyone else associated with the production (F. James, personal communication, 1999). The accounts manager also complained that she knew some people would start working on a film project, suddenly vanish and then reappear when the film is almost completed and demand to be listed in the credits (T. Kelly personal communication, 1999).

The film project provided several ingredients for creating a positive work experience that was a benefit to the staff, students, and crew. Most important, there was the chance for students to work with an experienced crew in the film industry, and to expand their resumes. The students realized that the project provided a unique opportunity to combine classroom education with actual film participation. The experience was exciting for most of the students, prompting them to work long hours, and they expressed a feeling of accomplishment. The professional crew, in turn, voiced similar enjoyment at working on another creative project that had potential for national recognition. Some of the crew recognized that training the students provided a new perspective upon their profession and they enjoyed being in a mentor position. They learned to communicate technical information clearly and demonstrate the importance of their positions to the production.

Financial Resources

Two predominant obstacles to a successful independent production are the lack of availability of qualified staff and crew throughout the production and inadequate financial resources. The complications that can arise from these disadvantages were noticeable throughout the film production. The director understood that any recognition the film receives would be a direct reflection of the commitment displayed by the staff and crew. In turn, the project must be sufficiently financed to allow the staff and crew to apply their skills and experience. His on-going challenge in the organization was to find additional funding, and to keep the necessary staff and crew until the project was completed and ready for distribution.

Adequate financial strength could have minimized most of the problems, but the staff and crew were not always accessible. The few people that worked in the office eventually found other assignments outside the production. This situation inevitably created problems scheduling appointments, maintaining records and production control. With adequate start-up money or a secure source of funds, the production could have retained someone at each position and allowed the production to focus solely on the completion of the project. One co-producer added that many qualified professionals in New Orleans, while engaged on small projects, frequently find work with larger companies or leave for assignments in other cities. He stated that most of the professional crew admitted to him that they could give only a minimal amount of their

time to a small financially limited production (J Morgan, personal communication, 1999). Toward the end of my internship, I was the only person in the office while the production was wrapping up.

The director was aware that many independent film productions find it difficult to complete film projects due to lack of adequate funding. He knew that it is rare for a large studio or distributor to offer financing without a production package that includes the script, valid budget and name stars. However, the director was acquainted with a number of creative film projects that boasted very little start-up resources, yet the productions successfully completed a movie through perseverance and a reliable production staff. He reasoned that waiting for the total financial backing would waste precious time, and a high quality trailer would be a tremendous help in selling the film. The trailer is a short publicity film that consists of highlights of the movie. Ideally, it hopes to create excitement and reflect the distinctive production value of the film (Katz, 1982). A quality trailer can help convince a distributor or studio that the production company has a creative style and understands the film business. This kind of optimistic course of action by the director could probably work if the project engaged a nationally known cast of actors, or recognition from a prestigious film festival (Katz, 1991). The trailer which was produced did have exceptional production value, but according to the accounts manager its quality was not sufficient to attract the attention of distributors (T. Keller, personal communication, 1999).

The necessity for financial infusion to continue the film increased the time previously allocated toward acquiring crucial "completion grants" or finishing funds.

These funds or grants are designated solely for the completion of a film, as opposed to funds for the first part of the project development (Singleton, 1996). Some foundations or investors would rather wait until a production is almost finished, so that they can determine its marketability. This waiting period helps the grantor or investor to decide about the reliability of the management and better predict the time span for actual completion of the project. The situation where completion funds were needed earlier in the process than anticipated resulted in additional time spent constructing ongoing cost and budget estimates for potential investors. This added time could have compromised the production and reflected negatively on the financial stability of the company. A production company would remain focused on daily schedules and current scene requirements, when it is not forced to spend time seeking completion funds so early in a film production.

Another result of the lack of funds was the failure to have a permanent office location over a long period. While serving on my internship, the office location for *Tony Bravo* moved twice. Address changes can give the appearance of a lack of permanence, which may make potential investors nervous and suspicious. Time was wasted contacting vendors, actors and crew about the new locations. However, the rationale for moving the office was feasible. The administration of the project was now focused on fewer tasks related to actual filming. There were no more casting calls for actors, which was an activity that required room to operate. Moreover, the production facilities at the U.N.O. Studio Center were not necessary. The need for ample office space was less important now that the director attended all film negotiations at a co-producer's office. The final

editing was performed at a local business in New Orleans. The first move was to the director's home-office and was basically a cost saving decision. The production did not suffer. The second move was to the office of a co-producer, which was located closer to the editing business and provided a separate room for business meetings. Current administrative duties, such as creating financial reports, were not interrupted by the change in locations. However, a permanent address at the U.N.O. Studio Center could have placed the company in an ideal setting to network in the industry and attract businesses visiting the U.N.O. facility. Location plays a major role no matter how good the product or service that is offered. Facilities must be conveniently available (Wolf, 1990).

Distribution

A distribution company will employ a person just to search for products that will match its market venue (Goodell, 1998). The distributor coordinates the release of a film, including the development and marketing campaign. Most major studios have their own distribution companies which will track a particular movie or genre of films to make decisions about whether another similar film should be produced (Singleton, 1990).

Besides marketing and promotion, the distribution plan is one of the most overlooked aspects of the filmmaking process. Without product distribution, a film may never be seen by the public, even if it is outstanding. The biggest disappointment and frustration for an independent company is to finish a creative project that they put their “heart and soul” into and then learn that most distribution companies are just not interested. The *Tony Bravo* production supervisor, an individual who had worked on numerous projects for larger companies, believed that the major studios are only interested in a “sure bet” (L. Novak, personal communication, 1999). Movies that are action packed, exhibiting acceptable special effects, and including one known actor will usually bring a return on their investment (Goodell, 1998). Unfortunately, the cost for recognized actors and current special effects technology usually excludes many small independent film companies from serious investment consideration. The wrestler *Raven* was the only member of the cast in *Tony Bravo* with current media exposure, but even his appeal was limited to a specific segment of the population. Before the production was

completed he was not even in the wrestling limelight, which probably hurt the marketability of the film. Association with the Loyola University Digital Arts Department provided some very impressive imaging in *Tony Bravo* for the major scenes and gave the film superb visuals. Still, an independent film project will probably fare better with distributors if it receives recognition at a film festival. Until the director provides proof that he is capable of making a quality commercial film, he will not be taken too seriously in the industry. Even if a film is accepted, distributors are in the business to make money and they will market the film as they see fit (Lipton, 1972).

It was clear during the internship that finding the right distributor was a major organizational challenge. An independent company with previous distribution experience would have spent time researching the system as part of the marketing plan before commencing a project. *Tony Bravo*, unfortunately, did not fit into any specific type of category, and to fit into a category is an important factor most distributors consider necessary to market successfully. “You may be wasting your time sending a film to a commercial distributor if you haven’t found out what kinds of films it seeks (Lipton 1972 p.381).”

Tony Bravo was not really an art film, a social statement or a film of any particular genre. The director was aware of the category problem and anticipated reluctance on the part of some distributors, but he did not fully appreciate the complexity of the distribution system. It would have been better to have contacted various distribution organizations during the development stage where options could be explored to deal with this classification disadvantage. It became apparent that an arts administrator

with an independent film company should view a distributor as a long-term business relationship in order to have future successful distribution of films. A distributor knows his particular market, what will sell and what doesn't have a chance (Singleton, 1990).

A distributor for the film did not materialize before my internship was completed. The director was mainly focused on completing the film, but he did develop a strategy to overcome the distribution challenge. Besides applying to various film festivals, he enlisted a producer's representative whose main job is to find a distributor or to sell the project to cable stations.

The global film market is down and this is another factor which can affect small production distribution. Even under these circumstances, however, the recent screening of the *Tony Bravo: Scenes From a Forgotten Cinema* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of the 37th Annual Brooklyn Arts Council Film Festival has generated considerable interest (F. James, personal communication 2003). The two previews at the Palace Theatre were very well attended, and the director of *Tony Bravo* could brag about a large audience viewing at a major theatre, besides its acceptance in an international film festival.

Marketing and Fundraising

Marketing is basically the creation of an image for the organization. A strong image is a critical element in gaining community support and donors, besides capturing an audience for the product (Wolf, 1990). The production of *Tony Bravo* essentially had two images to develop: for U.N.O. the image of a professional organization that will give the students quality training, and for the independent movie audience the image of a unique and intriguing film.

Smaller productions are typically made on lower budgets and lack the financial resources to mount the kind of promotional and marketing campaigns made by the larger studios (Biederman et al., 1996). To prevent complications while in production, management should address these two areas, marketing and fundraising, and establish a strategy before the project begins (Hopkins & Friedman, 1997). If both issues are not tackled beforehand, the company can spend critical time administering to the concerns of marketing and fundraising while in production, and probably long after the film is completed, in order to have a marketable product.

The marketing plan is directly related to fundraising, since it will define the audience and the product. A written marketing plan will establish funding and marketing guidelines for the production company and serve as a basis for analyzing its success. A plan can also maximize the effectiveness of available resources, and identify

potential problems and how to deal with them. A marketing plan allows a company to get the most from their promotional activities, regardless of the budget (Eichen, 1995).

Unfortunately, at the *Tony Bravo* office, the production supervisor could not produce a comprehensive marketing plan for referral or even provide a mission statement. The staff felt that the director should determine who would receive a copy of the marketing plan and left the decision exclusively to him. The director had developed a production plan that included his vision of the film and the crew and staff needed to complete the project, and included a few grants sources. Technical issues were addressed, a few focus groups arranged, but no comprehensive marketing plan was prepared that reflected in-depth research about the target audience, publicity and distribution.

The first step toward developing an effective marketing and fundraising plan is to prepare a mission statement. A mission statement gives pertinent information, like why the company exists and what is its ultimate goal. It does not have to be long, nor reveal in detail how it will accomplish its objectives (Klein, 1994). It should show what group of people it is trying to reach, and be broad enough to cover all the activities with which it might be involved (Wolf, 1990). The director felt the mission was clearly expressed in the collateral agreement with the U.N.O. Foundation. The students would receive training on a professional production and the project would have use of the U.N.O. Studio Center and its equipment. However, the U.N.O. collateral agreement did not address the issues concerning the target audience the finished project hoped to attract and the criteria that would determine if it was successful.

One strategy for fundraising by Tony Bravoland, LLC was successfully applying for two grants prior to the start of the film project, but the search for additional grants and financial assistance during the production proved frustrating. The accounts manager warned about deadlines, restrictive application standards and the slow allocation process (T. Keller, personal communication, 1999). This part of the fundraising landscape will probably not change in the near future, but a research plan showing potential grantors could have narrowed the pursuit. A written plan before the production started with a list of possible grants with their criteria and other possible funding sources would have allowed several people to work on this fundraising assignment throughout the project. A list of possible grants, for example, from the Foundation Grant Index, Foundations Directory or the Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance could be a source for funds for the production to review over a period of time.

The Accounts Manager, Tracy Keller, who had grant writing experience mentioned that various companies are concerned that their product will be associated with a controversial film. These companies will not even consider a small independent production as a probable recipient of their sponsorship just to be safe from possible adverse publicity (T. Keller personal communication, 1999). A clear understanding about corporate support would have determined which businesses would be potential donors and which business would not consider the project. Companies that depend on a large consumer base usually support a wide range of highly visible organizations. A wholesaler for a specific industry, for example, may provide very little support if its product is not entertainment related. A company's policy toward support and underwriting the arts is a

reflection of its market image and earnings support. Most businesses will provide some type of informational brochure explaining their policies concerning donations (Hopkins & Friedman, 1997). Research into a company's history regarding support of the arts can be time consuming. However, a serious fundraising plan that identifies the policies concerning donations and funding by various companies could be beneficial for the production and any future projects.

The co-producer added that many application guidelines would exempt a production that displays nudity, diverse sexual orientation or politics (J. Morgan, personal communication 1999). The film project provided no nudity; although one scene was clear about some sexual activity behind a shower curtain. One male character was in drag toward the end of film, but the scenes did not center on a particular lifestyle. The film focused on problems within a marriage and the results of indecision, but the movie did not make a political statement. Given the criteria for no nudity and sexual behavior in many guidelines, the project should have been able to approach a number of businesses for support and applied to more granting sources.

Fortunately, the director had grant writing experience and possessed a certain amount of familiarity concerning available funding sources. The production received grants from *The American Film Institute* and *Louisiana Division of the Arts*. These two grant sources had previously helped the director complete two other independent short film productions that are currently in worldwide distribution. One film, *The Key*, was the first film in American Sign Language.

Another strategy used by the production to raise funds and create a positive image was its aggressive campaign in obtaining support from local businesses. Several small businesses donated between \$25 and \$1000 in cash, while other enterprises like hardware stores donated supplies and equipment. Even the U.N.O. Studio donated a limited use of their copy machines. The community-based fund raising created interest in the local film production of *Tony Bravo*, and the successful outreach was reflected in the large attendance for the two previews at the Palace Theatre on February 28, 2002.

Credit cards have become a source for needed cash. A development plan can help provide a basis for a reasonable budget, but when unexpected problems suddenly appear, the use of credit cards can be tempting. The director was not naive about the downside to credit cards, especially concerning the change in rates noted in the fine print that will be higher within a certain period time. Still, hidden costs and unsuspecting events during production prompted the need to use credit cards to avoid delays. The director believed that the film would be a future success and that the credit cards debt would be quickly eliminated. Fortunately, the company was able to take control of the situation as the post production expenses were decreasing and credit cards were no longer necessary.

Private investments provided support for the film without a need to wait for final decisions on specific grants. The investments were usually in larger amounts than the grants provided, so special attention was paid to questions about the film's progress from the investor as a key staff activity in maintaining the business relationship.

The process of fundraising nevertheless required time, and the idea of hiring a consultant or a development director was considered. A development plan would have

addressed the pros and cons for this position, which should not have been an issue when the production was already in progress. The main challenge was the availability of an experienced professional on short notice, and the expense involved for this particular position. The underlying concern by most small non-profits, with limited resources, is that this position is a gamble. The dominant concern was whether the investment for this position would generate more capital than the production is currently finding by themselves (Klein, 1994). The hope of the director was to find an individual who would care about the success of the project and who had the necessary skill and experience in fundraising. Ideally, the person would be distant enough from the project to analyze the prospects realistically and to improve the funding changes for the organization.

The final decision not to hire a professional for this position was based on financial concerns. The budget prevented the production company from hiring a professional for fundraising. The organization was fully aware that a specialist could provide an extremely beneficial service to the project. The director felt that existing contacts would be sufficient in the short term and current publicity would attract more investors. A position devoted to fundraising should have been seriously considered in the original development plan, even allowing a commission appointment if a set salary was prohibitive (Klein, 1994).

A charismatic director can employ press coverage as a general promotional strategy. Media reviews can publicize the movie and attract a distributor as well as an audience. A film with unknown actors and little financial backing can gain media attention with the personal story of the director. This cost-free marketing strategy allows

the director to control the image of the film, instead of having someone else provide a personal opinion. The director of *Tony Bravo* frequently used this strategy. Francis James created hype for the film before, during and after production, through interviews in magazines and appearances on television and radio.

The staff believed they had a unique and marketable project, which provided the stimulus and determination to persevere for financial support. However, a comprehensive marketing plan would have provided guidelines and direction. It would have allowed the company to develop strategies based on their limited resources and a framework to analyze their progress.

Legal Issues

A small production company may not appear to have the same degree of legal concerns as large studios, but filmmaking involves contracts and agreements with everyone that participates on the production. A contract even for the smallest acting part is considered important. Agreements and clearances protect the film from claims of copyright infringement after the production is completed. If one actor or key professional inadvertently does not sign a contract, the distribution of the film will probably be delayed. Every distributor requires proof that all rights in the film have been cleared before accepting the project.

Another important consideration for the small independent organization is that scripts can be copyrighted, but ideas are not copyrightable, therefore, care should be taken about sharing ideas. Hiring an entertainment lawyer may be an expense that a small independent cannot afford, but a lawyer can avert legal situations that would be even more expensive and possibly derail the project.

The entertainment industry contributes more to the economy of the United States than any single manufacturing sector, and technology has allowed property piracy to increase across the world (Biederman et al., 1996). Legal issues are being challenged as the industry grows, creating an unstable environment in some areas. The U.S. Supreme Court, for example, announced that it would decide whether the period for copyright protection is too long. If the court reverses the *Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension*

Act then early films can become public domain. If this 1998 stature is declared unconstitutional, then exclusive rights will be limited for older properties. More songs could then be available at no cost for future projects. Since my internship with the production started, the extension act has been resolved, but the decision was not considered a benefit to many small production companies. No copyrighted works will enter into public domain until January 1, 2019 due to term expiration. The act retroactively extended the period from life of the author plus fifty years, to life of the author plus seventy years in the case of individual work. For corporate works the extension was from seventy-five years to ninety-five years. Although he had some degree of knowledge concerning copyright issues, the director decided to avoid copyright problems and consulted with a knowledgeable professional in this field.

Music rights are very difficult to secure. Previously recorded music involves a signed release from the artist, composer, record company and publishing company. The music consultant for *Tony Bravo*, Patricia Goreman, had previously negotiated deals for other studios, and was knowledgeable about music in the public domain. Her knowledge allowed the production to avoid copyright problems, and guided the director in choosing recordings.

Michael Arata, a lawyer and board member of the Le Petite Theatre, underscored the importance and necessity of contracts when he was consulted about agreements with actors. Contracts can help prevent the misunderstanding of employees' responsibilities and compensation. Some members of the staff had experienced communication problems on other film projects and understood the necessity of clear written agreements. A few

arguments during production were quickly settled once the contracts were consulted. The disputes were not significant enough to jeopardize the project, but contracts were useful tools to prevent mistrust or misconceptions concerning position responsibilities. Michael Arata reminded the staff several times to get a new signature on any revised agreement as soon as possible.

My internship responsibilities did not include legal issues, however, I did collect signed agreements from cast and crew during the production. This was a requirement before the person started working on the production, and when an agreement was amended, a new set of signatures was compulsory and everyone connected with the production was required to sign.

Legal issues can be difficult for the arts administrator. The best strategy is to have a general understanding of the issues concerning trademarks and copyrights laws and to keep abreast of current court decisions. It is important to consult a qualified lawyer before the project is completed and ready for distribution.

Internship Responsibilities and Tasks

The internship involved administrative and managerial responsibilities that kept the project moving and on schedule. On a typical day I worked alone, since no other staff member had an accounting background. The first few weeks I met with the production manager to obtain needed documentation and provide financial information. Soon, I conferred directly with the director on a daily basis to discuss the financial situation and production issues. These meetings were usually held in the staff office, but on many occasions I visited the sets while the film was being shot. After the filming was completed, I spent the rest of my internship in the office, but occasionally I attended meetings involving financial information at the business office of an investor. At this time I worked with the accounts manager when she was available to analyze certain accounts. By the end of the production I was the only staff person in the office working with the director.

On the first day of my internship it was very noticeable that the organization lacked anyone with accounting experience. The bank accounts were not reconciled, and there were no financial statements that could provide information about current expenses or estimated costs. Whenever a cost analysis or budget was required, there would be a rush to find all receipts, checks, and invoices, to create a current financial statement. The director and production manager were experienced enough to know that this “mad rush” was ineffective, usually yielded incorrect information, and was time-consuming. They

were very happy when I chose their production for my internship, and relied on my experience and advice.

The first step was to establish the cash position of the project. This allowed the office staff to ascertain the amount of cash flow available, so decisions could be made regarding outstanding bills, or when to order certain materials and supplies. Prior to my arrival as an intern, the production supervisor would call the bank for daily balances. Daily balances, unfortunately, do not give a complete detail about what funds are actually available for the project. It is vitally important for cash flow analysis to know which checks have not cleared the account, as well as which checks have already cleared the bank. Reconciled bank accounts provided the company with the basis for cash flow analysis, and allowed for a reliable examination concerning the accuracy of the budget plan (O'Donnell, 1981).

Cash policies and procedures were established during the first week of my internship. It is good accounting practice, for example, that the person who reconciles the bank accounts should not be the same person who signs the checks. The production manager and director were surprised by this procedure, but soon understood the concept. This policy discourages possible irregularities that could not be easily detected if only one person had the responsibility of writing checks and reconciling bank accounts. For a company with limited resources, sound accounting procedures can actually save money by preventing needless mistakes.

The following are three financial reports that helped establish the viability of the production company, and provided information on its progress:

- Cash Flow Report - This report reflects the amount of money coming into the company, and the amount that is going out.
- Project Budget Report - A plan that summarizes income and expenditures over a period of time.
- Balance Sheet - This report shows the status of the financial position at a particular point in time, unlike the Project Budget Report, which covers a certain time frame. The Balance Sheet analyzes the current economic position of the company and its progress.

Financial Management is an important aspect of administering any organization. Prudent internal financial policies protect the organization and the public, and also offer assurances to donors that their investments are used wisely and lawfully (Wolf, 1990).

List of Responsibilities:

1. I immediately appraised the accounting situation and established cash policies and procedures. While this often brought attention to the financial limitations placed on the project, it was important for management to have a clear understanding of the financial situation on a daily basis. I created financial statements, analyzed the daily cash position, and addressed the overall accounting situation. The most frequent office issues were related to petty cash. I suggested a written guideline to eliminate questions and to provide

an explanation of procedures. This process prevented the crew from assuming that these rules had been arbitrarily created and could be changed. Most of all, it provided a sense of fairness.

2. There are very clear responsibilities that any production company has to honor regarding working with contract actors who are SAG members. It became my responsibility to help provide information for the necessary forms to be filed with the union in a timely manner. Failure to do so could have resulted in fines or legal problems with the union. A Casting Data Report was required within a certain time period to avoid fines. A *Final Cast List* showed all performers in postproduction. Any particular role that was deleted from the film was noted to the union, so overpayment of residuals would not be required or made by accident. Another report reflected the sex and ethnicity of all union members. There was a special application to enlist professional actors with a stipulation that they would be reimbursed if the project made a profit. Time schedules were established to keep track of hours, shifts, and daily activities for the union members.

3. I administered time management procedures to ensure production stability, and positive employee relationships. I became involved with making sure that actors and crewmembers were kept up to date in regards to any scheduling changes. Failure to do so could have caused expensive delays in filming and loss of morale. Adherence to schedules, and clear communication of position expectations were important. Timely notification of schedule changes and production adjustments allowed the production to move forward smoothly.

4. Responsibilities included keeping abreast of festivals, events, and the status of other production companies filming in the area. I appraised the competition, and detected any changes in the industry that **could** influence the project. I noted new technology that could possibly provide **less expensive** or methods for visual imaging, and still retain good production value. Knowledge of marketing strategies, and **publicity techniques** by another production could potentially provide new ideas for the marketing plan.

Recommendations and Personal Impact

My personal impact on the production was mainly in my position as the accountant. Accounting is the process of identifying, measuring, and communicating information to allow informed judgment in making business decisions (Carmichael, 1981). Timely financial reporting can provide valuable information for a small production company, permitting them to make pragmatic choices with scarce resources. “More importantly, the financial statements are the planning tools with which the organization can control its new business on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis (Landy, 1989, p.87).”

Besides becoming more familiar with financial reporting, film producers find it useful to incorporate an accountant position either full-time or on a per project basis. A working relationship with an accountant that is familiar with media/film accounting procedures would be even more advantageous, since there would be less need to explain film terminology and practices. The director of *Tony Bravo* agreed that to engage an accountant during the initial development plan was a good suggestion of mine.

Francis James acknowledged that guidelines in some grant applications, over the last few years, increasingly required applicants to demonstrate familiarity with fiscal management and accountability. Grants and funds for non-profits usually have binding restrictions that prohibit or limit the use of the awards in that the funds can be used only for the purpose for which they were obtained. The recipient must provide documentation

concerning relevant expenditures (Warshauer, Gross, & Meyerson, 1981). Financial statements present an accurate representation of the organization's economic health, and provide evidence that the project is complying with guidelines authorized by the funding sources.

I noticed that the director spent a lot of time with some individuals on production issues. One recommendation suggested by many managers to avoid problems is to have work-related issues addressed in a weekly meeting before a major disagreement that could jeopardize the entire project occurred (Cropanzano, Kacmar, & Bozeman, 1995). Feedback has been identified as a critical element in the workplace and ideas that could improve morale or add to the quality of the project could be presented. This idea of weekly meetings was too difficult to consider at the time, since schedules were already tight and most of the staff could not find the opportunity to meet at the same time every week. Occasional office staff meetings provided information sharing and feedback critical to the success of the project. Nevertheless, I felt that the importance of regularly scheduled meetings to allow for critical information exchange and clear understanding of responsibilities cannot be over emphasized. Weekly meetings from the very start of project would have encouraged the staff to incorporate the sessions into their schedules as a key production activity.

A valuable resource to explore was the relationship of the production company with the local entertainment industry. Volunteering to be a guest speaker for a film class, or hosting focus groups for issues affecting the film industry could enhance the organization's reputation, and give the impression that the company is an important part

of the community. Francis James' congenial personality and experience could potentially have provided the media with a local representative concerning issues of the film industry. The director mentioned that this suggestion was worthwhile considering, but during production there is very little time for anything besides the project.

I proposed, toward the end of my internship, that the production company should pursue an on-going relationship with the Department of Drama and Communications at the University of New Orleans. The University of New Orleans Studio located in the Elmwood Industrial Park area of Harahan was acquired only a few years ago. The large building was convenient for casting calls, conferences, and rehearsals. The set construction room, editing room and stages were self-contained and spacious. The center also has three large sound stages. Each stage is 10,000 square feet and two of the stages can be combined, generating a 20,000 square foot area for larger projects. After improvements, this facility will have one of the largest sound stages in the New Orleans area. A production company that maintains an ongoing relationship with the media center will be able to draft efficient development plans for future projects. The location is also relatively traffic free with plenty of parking. The only drawback to this facility was that very few people in the industry knew the area, but that has changed with the increase use of the building.

Most of the office staff was already familiar with the Internet as a good source for project exposure and promotion. The Internet offers a comparatively inexpensive method to spread the word and attract potential distributors. I encouraged the staff to consider this area more aggressively while the company was still in production. The director was

originally hesitant, because the film was not actually completed. He feared that the website could create the wrong impression that the film was currently in distribution. After a little research, my assignment was to acquire the domain name for the website “TonyBravo.Com” with a link to U.N.O. This recommendation to proceed with the website required continual contact with a knowledgeable person to keep the information current. The company that helped design the original website donated space to the U.N.O. Foundation for a two-year period. The current website was designed by a graduate student at U.N.O., and it has improved in visual format and evolved over the last few years.

The impact of my contribution was mainly in the financial area. I joined the production when it was already in progress, so I was not able to influence the initial development plan. However, I encouraged and provided a framework to build financial accountability as a priority. A small independent production company will find written cash policies as a cost effective guide to eliminate confusion for the staff. Accounting tasks may appear just a small part of a film production, but the fiscal responsibility is the foundation of every successful enterprise. By the end of my internship, accounting received new appreciation as a valuable tool for reflecting the current financial position and assessing the success of the project.

Evaluation of Internship Experience

The internship and the Arts Administration Graduate Program provided complimentary preparation and training. The challenges I encountered during my internship reflected the typical occurrences confronted by most administrators in a small independent production. The professional staff assured me that almost everyone in the film industry confronts the same obstacles and day-to-day experiences. Most importantly, the internship furnished a realistic understanding of the work required in film production. While the less glamorous side of film production was exposed, the internship provided the excitement of being part of a creative process. The other U.N.O. students who worked on *Tony Bravo* agreed that the production adequately reflected the fundamental components of successful filmmaking and demonstrated how the process can be overwhelming and complex.

The main strength I brought to the production centered on my financial background. However, I grew to appreciate communication as a key skill to cultivate as an arts administrator. Clearly stating the responsibilities and expectations for each individual on the production, as well as the goals of the project to granting agencies and potential investors are critical to a successful production. Every decision, large or small, made by the arts administrator will influence the budget. Personnel management is vital, especially in a production with limited funding and utilizing students performing on the job training. Understanding personal motivation and expectation proved tantamount to

product achievement, especially in an environment where individual and organizational goals can conflict at various times.

Research and development allow the project to move forward efficiently, and the actual planning process does not usually cost very much. A low budget production cannot afford name actors or elaborate special effects, but research and development can provide ideas for theatrically exploitable elements that are known to draw a target audience.

The independent film industry will never be routine for the arts administrator. The popularity of independent films has dramatically increased over the last decade. New technological advances have allowed equipment to become accessible and to permit smaller production companies to create high quality visuals and images. Acceptance of diversity by the public toward social issues, art and culture has permitted the independent industry to be active in a wide range of venues. It appears that independent films may be in the forefront of the film industry for a long time and to bring a willingness to experiment and to take chances.

The major drawback, inadequate funding, was a significant roadblock to this local production. Still, the reputation of the director and perseverance of the professional staff ultimately created a marketable product, and a film that may receive international recognition. "As long as the independents remember to retain their independence, and as long as audiences continue to seek an alternative to the mind-numbing Hollywood Blockbuster Machine, indie films will remain a vital and necessary part of the modern film industry (Bolton, 1998, II p 3)."

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Appendix

- Appendix A Industry Resume for Francis James
- Appendix B *Christian Science Monitor* article
- Appendix C *New Orleans* magazine article
- Appendix D Service contract sample
- Appendix E Sample of a location release form
- Appendix F Sample page of the production checklist
- Appendix G Internet Website

Francis James

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AFFILIATIONS/AWARDS

Local 600, International Cinematographers Guild,
Hollywood Roster Eligible(application submitted)
Sundance Film Festival, Best Cinematography (2nd Unit DP)
New York, Cadiz, Ann Arbor, Sinking Creek...
Kodak Vision Award, American Society of Cinematographers

UNION FEATURES

"Crazy in Alabama" Hatbox Prod. - Operator (Dir: Antonio Banderos)
"Out of Sight" Universal Studios, - Operator (Dir: Steven Soderbergh)

UNION TELEVISION SERIES

"Black Jaq" ABC Network, Second Unit DP/ -Operator (Dir: Forest Whitaker)
"Orleans" Paramount Pictures & ABC, -Second Unit DP/Operator
"The Big Easy" USA Network, -Operator A & B (April- Aug.)
"The Big Easy" USA Network, -Second Unit DP

INDEPENDENT FILMS AND FEATURES

"Mutiny" (1998) Jive Ass Films, Operator/DP (Entry: Sundance '99)
"Scenes From A Forgotten Cinema" (in prod.) Perception Films, - Operator/DP
"Dreamkeeper" (1996) Key Films, LLC
"The Key" (1996) Key Films, LLC
"The Wedding" (1995) Primal Pictures, INC
"The Ticket" (1994) Orchesis Productions, INC
"Jazz Child" (1994) Asala Productions
"Looking for Some One" (1994) Perception Productions
"The Transparent Object" (1993) Perception Productions
"Opening Windows" (1992) Perception Productions
"Moon Blue Traces" (1989) Perception Productions

DOCUMENTARIES

"Cuttin' Loose" (1995) Archipelago Films, Additional DP
Winner Sundance Best Documentary
Winner Sundance Best Documentary Photography
National Geographic, Various Projects/Segments, Directory of Photography
"The Second Battle of New Orleans" First Light Films, Additional DP

MUSIC VIDEOS/COMMERCIALS:

America On-line (1996) Key Films
Trojans (1996) Key Films
Pete Droge (1995) Zeitgeist Productions
Numerous others (available upon request)

Desperately Seeking Funding in Hollywood

BY GLORIA GOODALE
ARTS AND CULTURE CORRESPONDENT OF
THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

Francis James has a vision, and he's got it on film.

Twenty percent of it, that is.

Like many young, independent filmmakers just starting out, he's got a small group of believers, private investors who've gotten him out of the starting gate with initial seed money.

But film, cameras, crews, and talent are expensive, and so Mr. James has come from his home in Louisiana to Hollywood to find his fortune — specifically the approximately \$1.8 million he needs to finish his film, "Scenes From a Forgotten Cinema."

His first stop: the American Film Market (AFM), the industry's largest annual trade show. Minus the splashy film festival, it's a sort of green-eye-shade version of the high-profile, celebrity-studded Cannes Film Festival in southern France.

Nonstop networking

He arrives in the lobby, head full of story pitches, pockets brimming with scraps of paper, noting potential contacts. He struggles with the small and large realities of doing business in Hollywood ("I don't need a big car to



BUSINESS SAVVY: In search of a buyer for his movie, independent filmmaker Francis James traveled from Louisiana to the American Film Market in Hollywood, the industry's largest annual trade show.

the contacts that will lead the way.

Next to the last day of the market, he catches a break. The independent producer he's been tracking, a friend of a friend, stands up at a seminar to ask a question and identifies herself. When the session is over, James waits patiently as she conducts her own business, and then they talk. Her name is Pat Russell.

James leads with his strongest card. His first film, a micro-budget (\$40,000) educational movie that was funded with four grants and three television distribution deals, is being screened at the Los Angeles office of the

Directors Guild of America (DGA) March 29.

Ms. Russell jumps right in. "You need a visual from the film. Send out the postcards to all the agents in town. Follow up with a phone call and get them to see your movie. Then you can talk about this next one."

A discussion of the particulars ensues. "How do I get all those names?" queries James. "Go to the DGA," instructs Russell. "You can get a list there."

New talent welcome

In the few short hours that remain of the AFM, James continues phoning contacts who were too busy to see him during the busiest opening days.

Although new to Hollywood, James has more business savvy than most young filmmakers, being a triple threat writer/director/director of photography with his own camera. He also negotiated all three distribution deals

for his first film. Now, he knows just what he wants — a co-producer.

Lars Björck, president of Tradewinds Entertainment Corp. in Calabasas, Calif., which both markets and develops films, muses that James looks promis-

ing after perusing the sales material that James has personally created on his home computer. "We look for high-quality independent films that we would like to watch ourselves," he explains. "We're always looking for new talent."

Although he is too busy readying his current crop of films for the coming festival in Cannes, Mr. Björck says that if he were to work with a newcomer like James, the financial structure needed to finish the film would be fairly simple, given the small size of the budget: roughly 30 percent in equity (private investment), 40 percent in presales (to either or both of the domestic and international film or television markets), and gap financing for the rest through a bank (money provided by a bank against predicted future earnings).

The soft-spoken Southerner is heartened by this response and vows to follow through when Björck has more time.

Is James discouraged by the current wisdom coming out of AFM that the market for independents is contracting due to the glut of movies being churned out both in the US and abroad?

"I make movies because that's all I can see my life is for," he nods with a radiant confidence, as he studies a city map. "Los Angeles is very big and confusing. But don't worry, I'll find my place."

He leaves the hotel, his map folded away, but his direction clear.

Francis James has a vision.

'Men With Guns' Hits the Target

BY DAVID STERRITT
STAFF WRITER OF THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

NEW YORK

American independent filmmaker John Sayles does something so bold in his new movie, "Men With Guns," that it deserves to be underscored as vividly as possible: He presents a story about Spanish-speaking people in which the characters actually speak Spanish!

This may sound like a minor point, but its implications are important. For many years now, United States audiences have been shying away from foreign-language films; theaters have been increasingly reluctant to show them; and journalists have been sluggish about covering them.

It's scandalous that such patterns should persist at a time when our world continues to shrink every day, making international interests more vital than ever. Where better than the movies to let our horizons grow?

In this atmosphere, it's an act of courage for Sayles to tackle a Latin American story and insist on its characters speaking the language of their own lives (with English subtitles) rather than translated "Movie-speak."

"Men With Guns," also known as "Hombres Armados," is praiseworthy in other respects, including the

sensitive humanism of its story.

The hero is an aging Latin American physician who has never paid much attention to political events in his (unidentified) country but prides himself on his longtime career of training doctors to help poverty-stricken rural families.

Learning that many of his former students have abandoned their posts or disappeared, he begins an arduous voyage of discovery into the region's interior. There he encounters a series of new enigmas, accompanied by accounts of "men with guns" pursuing a frightful agenda of their own. This brings him to a new awareness of how

political forces affect ordinary lives whether we want them to or not.

Sayles has never been a natural-born filmmaker, and "Men With Guns" often feels more like a photographed screenplay than a truly cinematic work. But its acting is admirable — stand-

outs include Federico Luppi as the physician and Mandy Patinkin as a US tourist — and its mood only grows more engrossing as the story proceeds.

Most important, its integrity as a socially responsible drama is unimpeachable. Excelente!

■ **Rated R.** Contains violence and vulgar language.



'MEN WITH GUNS': Federico Luppi (l.) plays Dr. Fuentes, a physician, who gets embroiled in political intrigue.

'I want to tell stories that haven't been told before ... with the heart and quality that will make people see the vision that I see.'

— Francis James, filmmaker

impress people ... do I?" "I've been trying to reach this producer for a week. She never returns my calls....") He reviews the personal feelings that must now flow forth with the glib ease of a Fuller Brush salesman, forestalling a door being shut in his face.

"I want to tell stories that haven't been told before," he grimaces as he practices these words, feeling their overfamiliarity as he says them. "I mean, I know there's no such thing, but what I want to do is make the world fresh, tell about it with the heart and quality that will make people see the vision that I see."

His movie, a Walter Mitty-esque black-and-white/color comedy, is about a middle-aged man who "has to wake up to what he has. I call it a story of redemption."

The market lasts only 10 short days. James has no illusions that he will fund his movie during that time, but he does hope to make

By Renae Battaglia

Soon to Be Scene & Not Forgotten



Tony Paone as Tony Bravo

Francis James is about 1/3 of the way finished with his latest project. Having done several shorts, *Scenes from a Forgotten Cinema* will be his first feature film. The film chronicles the emotional ups and downs of a lower class New Orleans couple but - from what they create in their minds and their everyday realism. Each point of view is valid.

"It's a story about a day in the life, well actually about two or three days in a life, of a husband and wife, and it chronicles their marital crisis. He has some issues, and she has some issues, and they deal with them and get back together."

Even though it's another story about relationships, James believes that what makes his film different is the way in which he deals with his characters' relationships to one another and with themselves. The film opens with the main character, Tony, "talking about how people don't live their lives anymore. They live films they create mentally of themselves. The roles we play, mugging in an imaginary camera."

"My life," Tony says as the film opens, "my movie, is some old, gritty, grainy, black and white film. Like some old Italian movie left in a movie studio. It's just forgotten." James uses both color and black and white film as he shifts from one perspective to another. The film begins in black and white, and, as the character's view grows, James shifts into color film. He also

accomplishes an interesting shift in perspective by using three different actors to play the main characters.

True filmmakers work at many levels, and James is no exception as the writer, director, and cinematographer. "The idea

[for the film] just came into my head. I got the idea for the title of the film, wrote a few pages, and showed them to director Isaac Webb who said, 'This takes that leap.' ...I guess for the first time I was really writing about characters that were not me at all, and they were just sort of creating themselves, and they started to take shape. You have to be in the story before you can bring others inside."

James is accomplishing this evolution by shooting in sequence and working and rehearsing with the actors. "The way films are typically made is really structured by the studio system...the whole idea of backers putting in a lot of money and wanting it out fast, and the idea of filming all at once and trying to get it all done and then editing it and getting it to the market as soon as possible..."

This is the normal procedure, but "for a

have it ready for a market...but not to hinder the creative process nor to...try to film all at once. It doesn't make sense for this film to be done that way. Also, I really like when I work with my actors to rehearse it to the point where we really develop the script. I rehearse it once, and then rehearse it again and I record the last two takes because often times something will come out of someone's mouth, and they'll forget it immediately. It may be so simple that you wouldn't think to write it..."

James adds that film is "so expensive and so time consuming and so technical, the trick is to keep it fresh and to let spontaneity come into it. And that's the kind of filming that I'm talking about. ...even big budget films are often changing scripts at the last minute... You have the film that you write, you have the film that you shoot, and you have the film that you edit."

The crew is mainly local, and James has about 20 to 30 minutes of the movie filmed, hoping to be finished by the end of the year. He is going to develop a market plan and approach distribution companies before the film is complete. He says his market is "anyone who's ever been in a relationship," which is a pretty large market.

James, who has been making films since 1989, released *The Key* in 1996, a half-hour adaptation of the Eudora Welty short

story of the same name. This was a pioneer film that bridged the gap between the deaf and hearing population and is currently in world-wide distribution. Anyone interested in supporting this fine local project, contact Perception Films at (504) 861-1291. ✕



Tony Paone and Shelly Ponsey as Tony and Mary Bravo

low budget film," James continues, "which is often raising money as it goes, it's important to stick to a schedule, and I plan to stick to a schedule. This is important not only to the filmmaker but to everyone involved. The idea is to make the film and

November 30, 1998

Roger Benechek (sp)
Dept. of Drama & Communications
University of New Orleans
280-6345 ph (comp room)

VIA FAX

Dear Roger,

This letter is regarding the Service Contract for Editing Facilities from University of New Orleans for the period Dec. 1, 1998 through May 1, 1999. Specifically for the Media 100 editing system with _____ hard drive, BetaCam Sp & VHS (is 3/4" and or Hi8 available ?) decks, Photoshop, a Layout Program for generating shot lists and AfterEffects for previewing special effects composites. The equipment will be rented in a secured room with a secured cabinet for master tapes ect., the latter of which will be under the sole control of the Company.

For the purpose of this agreement, the Company will be Perception Films LLC at the local address and info listed below.

This Service Contract shall be between the Lessor, University of New Orleans Dept. of Drama and Communications through Roger _____, herein referred to as the Lessor UNO, and Perception Films LLC, herein referred to as the Lessee Company.

The purpose of this Contract is to provide a professional Editing Facility for the Lessee Company to edit a feature film and related material. In addition, this arrangement will create an educational opportunity for students of the Lessor UNO to work on this film which is a sanctioned project of the Drama and Communications Dept. The Lessee Company is entirely separate and independent of the UNO however the film constitutes a film is being produced entirely independently of the

Sincerely,

Francis James
Producer/Director
Manager, Perception Films LLC

EXHIBIT C

LOCATION RELEASE

Date: _____

TO: _____

RE: _____

Reference is made to the Location Agreement dated _____ between you and Plenary Indulgence, Inc. ("Lessee") with respect to Lessee's use, as described in the aforesaid Location Agreement, of the property located at _____, ("Property") in connection with the above referenced motion picture.

1. You agree that you inspected the Property upon the completion of Lessee's use thereof. You further agree that said Property has been satisfactorily restored to its prior condition in accordance with the terms and conditions of the aforesaid Location Agreement.
2. You hereby release Lessee of and from any and all duties and obligations and from any and all claims, demands and/or causes of action of any kind or nature whatsoever that you may have against Lessee either in connection with the Property, the subject matter of the Location Contract, or otherwise.
3. This agreement shall be binding upon and shall insure to the benefit of Lessee and its respective successors, licensees and assigns and cannot be modified or amended except in writing signed by Lessee.
4. This agreement shall be construed and enforced in accordance with the laws of the State of New York applicable to agreements of this nature.
5. This release shall in no way be deemed to limit or otherwise affect the rights granted to Lessee by you under the Location Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned have executed this agreement as of the _____ day of _____, 19____.

BY: _____
Plenary Indulgence, Inc. (Lessee)

Unit Production Manager (signature required)

ACCEPTED AND AGREED:

Signature - Print Name

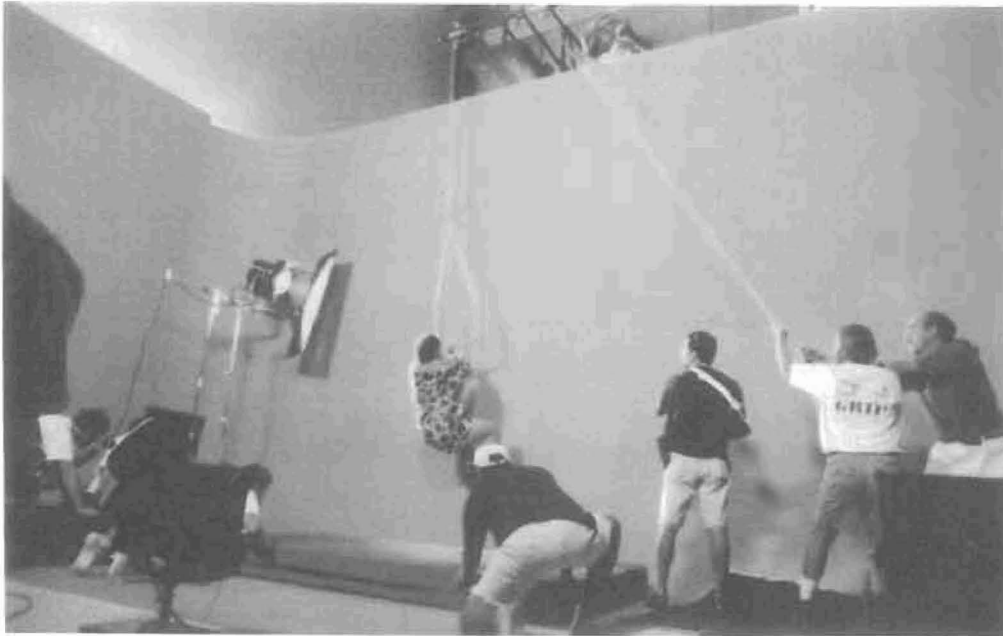
CHECKLIST

WHEN REQUIRED:

1	Actors Time Reports	Daily
2	Day-Out-Of-Days	As Updated
3	One-Liners	As Updated/Final
4	Call Sheets	Daily
5	Production Reports	Daily
6	Script	As Updated/Final
7	Shooting Schedule	As Updated
8	DGA Quarterly Reports	As Filed
9	Final SAG Report	Wrap
10	Minority List	Wrap
11	Copies of All Contracts	During Production
12	Laboratory Access Letter	During Production
13	Publicity Material	Wrap
14	Post-Production Schedule	As Updated
15	Detailed "Outstanding Situations" Memo from the Producer	Wrap
16	Crew Deal Memos & I-9 Certificates	During Production
17	Actors Contracts	During Production
18	Product Placement Agreements	Wrap
19	Personal Releases	During Production
20	Vendor Agreements	Wrap

[Home](#) - [Photo Gallery](#) - [Cast](#) - [Crew](#) - [SFX](#) - [UNO](#) - [About the Filmmaker](#)

UNO Film Collaboration



TONY BRAVO was shot in collaboration with the University of New Orleans Dept. of Drama and Communications giving students the unique opportunity to work as crew on an independent film. The students held specific technical positions mentored by professionals in everything from set building and camera assisting to booming location sound.

This partnership with the UNO allowed the production to utilize university resources, such as the recently acquired 10,000-ft. studio, lighting equipment, and large cyclorama green screen for the amazing special effects. Info on the digital compositing and 3-D.

In addition, the entire space sequence was shot live action using a 40 foot piece of linoleum with holes poked in to create the star field where miniatures fly past space debris.

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Cast



Shelley Poncy
"Mary"
 (low res) _ (high res)



Antonino Paone
"Tony "
 (low res) _ (high res)



Katherine Keberlei
"Dream Lover"
 (low res) - (high res)



Jack Radosta



Antonino Paone



Russell Hodgkinson (I

"Tony the Foreman"
(low res) _ (high res)

"Tony the Director"
(low res) _ (high res)

"Tony the Architect"
(low res) _ (high res)



JOHN "Spud" MC CONNELL
"Two Horn Tony" (bio)
(low res) (high res)



Raven
"Raven"
(low res) (high res)



Ed Nelson
"Mary's dead Father"
(low res) (high res)

Home - Photo Gallery - Cast - Crew - SFX - UNO -About the Filmmaker

VITA

Michael Tapie graduated from West Georgia College in 1973 with a Bachelors of Arts degree. He received a certification in Human Resource Management from California, State University, Hayward in 1988.