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# RocketFest Process Paper

For my capstone, me and Jave Kelman collaborated to create and host RocketFest, a film festival dedicated to putting a spotlight on films made by Philadelphia high schoolers.

Throughout my 3 years in the Digital Video program despite how much I have learned about established filmmakers and their techniques, my greatest takeaway has been how talented and innovative high schoolers can be when provided with the right opportunities. Art, in all its forms, is constantly evolving, and that evolution is often led by the youth. Unfortunately, art created by people in high school often struggles to get the respect that it deserves and is rarely ever promoted by larger platforms. Simply being a highschooler in Philadelphia for four years has been enough to show me that while obviously, not all art created by teenagers is groundbreaking or a masterpiece, if you sift through all of the art that is being put out there by kids, there are a lot of hidden gems. RocketFest was created to do what few established platforms do and be a space for these films made by high schoolers to be promoted and appreciated.

A Capstone project seemed to be a perfect opportunity to create something like this because with the backing of the school and funding from Braskem, a festival like this was able to automatically be a more respected platform than it would be otherwise. In addition to this, it seemed to fit the core values perfectly. Collaboration is the most obvious one, not only because this project was large enough for me to split the work with a partner, but because of the amount

of networking, phone calls, and emails that had to happen over the past few months in order to bring organizations like SLA and The Bourse together to make Rocketfest happen. While in the beginning there was some digital research done on what works and what doesn't when hosting a film festival, the most helpful research was through conversation and Ms. Ustaris's guidance, as she has hosted a film festival in the past. RocketFest fits SLA's core value of inquiry because it serves as an answer to a problem that we saw, the lack of recognition of the talent within Philadelphia's youth. There was lots of time and thought that went into the presentation of RocketFest, as the entire point was to promote these films on a platform that was reputable, and well the reflection is what you're reading right now.

When me and Jave first decided to take this on as our Capstone Ms. Ustaris made sure to properly warn me and Jave that even with her help, and splitting the project between the two of us, making RocketFest happen would take a lot of work. She was absolutely correct, but with her helping out and making sure Jave and U made a plan with specific steps and consistently stuck to it, we were able to stay on top of it at first. Long before May 23rd when RocketFest was scheduled to happen, we reached out to several venues, and eventually after figuring out that The Bourse was our best option we used our funding from Braskem to lock in a day at The Bourse theater. Once we had a theater secured and the officiality that came with it, we were able to start promoting RocketFest. We emailed as many Philadelphia Highschools as we could to make sure that the students knew about RocketFest and were able to submit their films, and Jet Mangual Corchado designed a poster on which we put a QR code leading to a submission form and sent out. Once we received all of the films me, Jave, and several other kids in the Digital Video program who volunteered to help, watched and ranked all of the submitted films. After days of both watching and reviewing, we were able to narrow it down to a list of short films that would

play out for a total of one hour and thirty minutes. The next step was the most tedious one, editing together all of the films into a professional compilation to play on screen at the theatre. Despite how unpleasant it can be to sit in a chair for hours editing, the experience definitely forced me to become more fluent using Premiere Pro, which I am grateful for.

That is the last step I was able to get to before the problems started rolling in. I'm not sure who's reading and grading this but if you know you know, if you don't I won't explain in depth simply because it would double the length of this paper, but essentially I was faced with issues more pressing than school. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to be present in school for the week of RocketFest which was intended to be a very busy week between other school events and taking the last steps towards making sure RocketFest happened perfectly. The biggest problem we endured because of this was that only a few days prior to RocketFest we had to scratch our whole deal with The Bourse for safety reasons, and re-invent RocketFest into a digital festival at the last minute.

The last week leading up to RocketFest was filled with problems and frustration, but in a way that makes me more proud that regardless of that we were still able to accomplish exactly what we set out to do. We lifted up both these films and the kids who made them and gave them the opportunity to reach an audience closer to the size that they deserve.