

2012

VM Refugee: Dallas Community

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Big iDeas at SMU

1. Title of Project:

VM Refugee; Dallas Community

2. List of Student Participants

Student name: Jose Ramon Campos

Major(s): Economics with Finance Applications and Political Science; Minor(s): French

Year of Study: Senior

Student name: Nick Bastoni

Major(s): Engineering; Minor(s): Film

Year of Study: Senior

3. Statement of the problem or issue, proposed methodology, and rationale.

The open and welcoming atmosphere that comprises SMU here in Dallas, Texas is something that the students, faculty, and administration can look forward to day in and day out, a comfort not vastly shared within the sprawling parts of the city. Diverse and growing, Dallas is home to a large refugee population. Due to the current and historically ongoing economic, political, cultural, and natural turmoil in East Africa, Dallas has become a home away from home for many East African peoples, mostly from Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. A large part end up being relocated in the nearby Vickery Meadows neighborhood, a diverse community comprising of 60% refugees and those seeking asylum, in which multiple SMU students and organizations constantly volunteer and serve in. Though this has definitely brought Vickery Meadows and its inhabitants to the attention of the SMU community, the stories and backgrounds behind the ethnically and culturally diverse community are not.

The idea to plan, produce, and present a documentary is behind this proposal. Stemming from a dedicated and fulfilling experience within the community, we have come to develop and build strong, lasting relationships with the families and children we have come to mentor, tutor, and love. We believe it would be in the mutual interest for

both communities if they were able to learn more about one another. In calling Vickery Meadows their home, these refugees have reached an end to their fleeing ordeal and started a new beginning. Having faced religious, political, economic, cultural, and ethnic persecution in their home countries, they were forced to seek asylum and flee their most cherished possessions, homes, and friends and families, an experience that the majority of us here at SMU and Dallas have never experienced and most likely will never experience. It is my understanding that these families have experienced very hard living conditions and that their flight from their homelands to Dallas must have been tough yet remarkable experience. In documenting their current lives here in Dallas, and the lives that they left behind in distant places will we come to realize what they have undergone. By providing insight and commentary on behalf of the Vickery Meadows community, we could achieve a deeper understanding as well as acquire a knowledge of that which is incomprehensible for us.

Through this production, the SMU and Dallas community would see a world that is starkly different from theirs, and yet only a short distance from campus. They would comprehend that these people do not have the leisure and luxury of what we take for granted on a daily basis, for the most part never having experience poverty, let alone the process of seeking refuge. Yet, one would see that these refugees, these families have the same worries and concerns as us, whether their children will grow up to respect them and succeed in school and life in general, whether they will be able to give their family the happiness and attention they deserve. At first sight, stark differences might be assumed and believed; the hope and goal of this documentary would be to relay the fact that we have much to learn from one another, maybe us so more than them, and that we are not so different in how we think, and what we desire.

The following is in regard to the implementation and production of our idea.

From a budgeting standpoint, the production's goal will be to develop the highest quality film at the lowest possible cost. For this reason, we will be shooting interviews and b-reel footage on two Canon 7D DSLR's.

These cameras, originally designed for professional digital-still photography, have become the go to capture technology for low budget filmmakers and industry professionals not only for documentaries, but also major commercials, television shows,

and feature films. This is largely because the 7D's small size and portability coupled with its great lens selection and high quality capturing in both low intensity and high intensity lighting environments make it a very valuable asset.

This ability to capture high quality footage in a variety of lighting environments will in turn help the overall quality of the production which will largely be utilizing natural lighting. It is likely however that we will be also be able to acquire a small Arri D-5 or a Kino-Flo interview Kit through various connections with the SMU Broadcast School in order to add subtle visual elements and depth to our interior and close-up one on one scenes with interviewees.

In terms of shot selection, this production will feature a majority of medium shots with a variety of close-ups. Only in a few select instances will the camera utilize a wide to help establish the setting or to convey a feeling of distance, alienation, or uncertainty. The purpose of this reliance on mediums and close ups though would be to help bring about a feeling of connection and intimacy between the audience and the subjects to really help viewers step into and understanding to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the refugees and therefore gravity of the situation at hand.

The real key to this film from a production standpoint however will be sound capture. While equipment is typically expensive to rent or purchase, this production will utilize several connections at SMU that will help provide the wireless lavalieres, boom poles, shotgun mics, and recording equipment needed to deliver crisp, clean, and high quality sound as well as needed environmental ambiance.

Pre-production and planning will take place over the next few months of this spring. A rough script will be written during this time to help ensure essential elements are covered during production with wiggle room for unplanned and new leads. Equipment will be lined up, families and individuals contacted, and proper permit and talent release forms documented and signed.

To streamline the production process as well as limit food and transportation costs, the production crew will be small consisting only of the director, two cameramen, and a boom operator/sound technician. The actual production process will take place over a two week time frame with the potential of adding an extra two days for potential pick-ups and additional coverage. A number of face-to-face interviews will be conducted, but

a large portion of time will be devoted to chronicling the every day lives of these extraordinary people.

Post production will utilize a full suite of visual, sound, and color correction software tools the team already has ready access to and available to be used as needed. A time frame for completion will be dependent upon the amount of footage captured, but should not exceed three weeks. It is certain though a finished film will be available no later than Mid-June.

Based off what we learn from this production experience in Dallas, the production team will discuss the possibility of expanding the expanse of this documentary to include interviews and coverage of the Somali refugee situation on the ground in East Africa. Funds for this would come out of pocket, from family, investors, and through a variety of unique artistic fund-raising websites such as kickstarter.com. The benefit of this would be to further trace the roots of the refugees in Dallas and to contrast the problems they face with the problems of other refugees in an entirely different corner of the globe.

We believe that there is a vast wealth of knowledge that can be obtained and observed from a community that is very diverse, and for the most part has experienced tumultuous lives up to the day they arrived in the United States and in Dallas. Having come in search for a better future for themselves, they now simply focus on the betterment of their children, in hopes of increasing their chances for better opportunities and a better life. An insight and commentary into such a motivating people and community, and their transition from abroad to here would be worth telling and viewing. We simply wish to take the opportunity that we have now to relay their stories, for they are ones that, whether due to a language barrier, the lack of perceived interest, or a bit of shyness and reserve, have yet to be told, or worse, listened to.

4. Proposed Timeline

February, 2012

³⁵₁₇ Formulate basic, overarching structural and procedural plan

³⁵₁₇ Establish guidelines and begin logistics planning

³⁵₁₇ Ascertain relationship and generate trust and friendly beneficial cooperation

³⁵₁₇ Seek SMU Broadcasting department partnership

March, 2012

- ³⁵/₁₇ Continue working within the Vickery Meadows community and build contacts and gage interest for participating in documentary.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Continue logistics planning as well as recruit for production team

April, 2012

- ³⁵/₁₇ Stay in contact with refugee families
- ³⁵/₁₇ Begin reserving production equipment for near future rent

May, 2012

- ³⁵/₁₇ Rent out necessary production equipment as well as SMU van
- ³⁵/₁₇ Begin shooting
- ³⁵/₁₇ Wrap up production process and work on editing
- ³⁵/₁₇ Present and market documentary to SMU and Dallas community

5. Anticipated Budget

	Item Cost	Quantity	Sub Total
Rental Equipment ¹	\$3,500.00	N/A	\$3,500.00
Shooting Permits ²	\$200.00	3	\$200.00
Crew Cost ³	\$450.00	3	\$450.00
SMU Van Rental ⁴	\$500.00	1	\$500.00
Food ⁵	\$500.00	N/A	\$500.00
Transportation ⁶	\$270.00	N/A	\$270.00
Total Cost			\$5,420.00

Person in charge of funds: Jose Campos

¹ This will consist of the various parts and aspects of both the lighting and sound equipment as well as camera accessories. Lighting would comprise of lighting kits, grips, moslins, light filters, and light stands. Sound would include mics, recording devices, a tripod, a boom pole shotgun. Camera accessories would be lenses and ND filters. All this equipment is extremely expensive and would need to be rented.

² Legal aspects and requirements necessitate the purchase of permits and licenses to film and shoot in various locations within Vickery Meadows.

³ Two cameramen and a boom operator/sound technician would be required to effectively produce a solid documentary at an efficient cost. We would offer a maximum of \$150 for the duration per crewmember in the hopes that the experience itself would make up for the low compensation.

⁴ Lacking a modom of transportation and needing a reliable means of getting to Vickery Meadows and back on a daily basis, as well as a necessity for a larger vehicle in order to effectively and efficiently transport the film equipment, we would rent an SMU van.

⁵ We would have to provide meals and snacks to all those participating in the production, spanning from crew and production team to talent and other personnel on set.

⁶ The mileage estimate for gas and depreciation is based upon daily trips of approximately 15 miles one way for the duration of 2 ½ weeks.