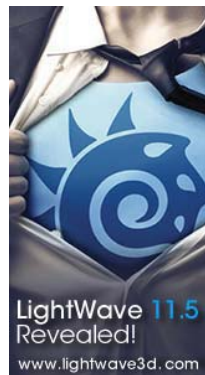
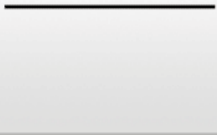


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Going Pro: One student's early success



For Heather Burky, the transition from student to pro came quickly. Within a few months of graduating The Art Institute of Jacksonville's Digital Film & Video program, Burky's capstone film project, *Lost Country*, garnered a Student Academy Award. In the film, Burky focuses on the misinformation and plight experienced by the Cuban culture during Fidel Castro's rise to power.

During the production process she uncovered many invaluable lessons about making the transition from student to pro. She explains, "One major difference between student and pro is that a pro thinks ahead. Too often students are not prepared for anything other than their initial plan. During the pre-production process I realized that my original idea for the story was not going to work, so I had to shift gears and find another story."

She also feels that students tend to easily give up when people tell them no, or if they encounter obstacles that take more effort to overcome. For Burky, the realization became concrete once she concluded that the majority of external help could not adhere to her timeline for the film. "A pro figures out new ways around those obstacles and doesn't let it stop them from achieving their ultimate goal," she states.



Heather Burky (seated) with Dr. Nadia Ramoutar and engineer/producer, Mike Swittel.

Another key factor that she understands is the ability to accept criticism. "My professors were wonderful throughout the whole process of making the film. They each sat down with me personally, helping me to decide what to edit, how to fix some of the audio issues, and discuss things I could do to make the project more powerful."

To do this, they concentrated initially on finding the story. One of the professors assisting her with this critical pre-production issue was Dr. Nadia Ramoutar. "There is a tried and true way of storytelling, and if you follow the formula it will serve you well," says Ramoutar.

Next, they recognized the importance of pacing. "If the pacing is off, the whole film will not feel right," states Burky.

Finally, while preparing for post production, she spent time with Grammy engineer & producer, Mike Swittel. "Professor Swittel and I wanted to focus on eliminating common audio issues that plague typical student films. We also wanted to focus on making the biggest impact with a limited timeline and no budget by addressing the role of sound design and music. I spent as much time on finding the right music as I did on acquiring the archival footage," explains Burky.

Burky offers three suggestions for making the transition from student to pro. First, know who you are. She feels that by knowing yourself, decisions will become easier when having to face the difficult task of choosing ideas to act on and ideas to discard. Second, do not settle for mediocrity. She explains, "Finishing was not the goal. I wanted it to be good." Finally, she advises networking. "It's just as

important to make yourself memorable," claims Burky.

Of course, winning a Student Academy Award is one way to do this.

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