

John Barnes
Fourth-Year Arts Award Proposal
03/29/2024

Low Life: Making a High-Quality Short Film

Summary/Overview:

I am requesting funding to produce a coming-of-age short film loosely based on my experiences working at a movie theater chain at 14 years old. This story has been a passion project of mine for many years, as I have been working sporadically on a feature-length screenplay for this film since 2019. The funding would support film production expenses, professional post-production costs, and film festival submission fees for the 2024-2025 school year. Additionally, I am requesting that a small portion of my grant be used toward travel costs for the 2024 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in September 2024. I attended the festival in 2023 and it was greatly beneficial for networking and immersion in the film industry.

Detailed Project Objectives/Summary:

This project will consist of a short comedy-drama coming-of-age film titled *Low Life* that will range in length from 10-15 minutes. The film will follow the journey of 15-year-old Sam, an energetic new hire at the fictional Take Two Cinemas chain, as he navigates a rocky mentor-mentee dynamic with Jake, a chaotic divorcee in his 40s. The main storyline for the film involves a Take Two Cinemas employee competition to sell the most rewards memberships in exchange for a raise. Tensions quickly form between Sam and Jake due to their contrasting attitudes toward work and Jake's financial need for the raise. Overall, the film mainly takes place in one location.

I have been involved with filmmaking since I was 6 years old and it is one of my greatest passions. If awarded an arts grant, this film would be my first project with an official budget. Therefore, one of my goals for this project is to create a film with a higher production value compared to my previous endeavors. Additionally, my main goal is to use the budget to my advantage by hiring any necessary outside help. In recent years, I have found it more difficult to produce projects in university and Charlottesville because of my increased coursework and a lack of available collaborators. UVA has a fantastic film community, however, due to its smaller size, it can be hard to find available collaborators if multiple projects are shooting at the same time. For instance, my second year at UVA, I made the short film *Skipping a Generation* as part of the OverCranked film class. While I am proud of the final film, the production process was challenging due to the lack of available crew on certain shooting days and the expensive nature of professional post-production services. Because of the minimal crew, the production value in specific scenes were significantly decreased, particularly with sound and lighting. While my collaborators and I have experience with color grading and sound mixing, services from industry professionals can make a night and day difference on an overall film.

Additionally, as the sole editor on *Skipping a Generation*, I spent many late nights (often until 5 AM) working on the film, which was very harmful to my sleep schedule and overall health. While filmmaking is meant to be a challenging process that pushes one outside their comfort zone, I felt spread too thin due to the lack of available support. Therefore, I am hoping that arts award funds would help alleviate some of this stress in the filmmaking process for *Low Life*. For example, a small film budget would cover the cost of hiring non-UVA collaborators and professionals in the film industry when needed in the production process. The main limitation with this objective is the expensive nature of color grading and/or sound mixing services, which

is why I plan on collaborating with UVA community members for the main film production (if possible) and using funds to pay for post-production services. However, if not enough UVA students are available to work on the crew, then a small portion of the arts award could be used toward hiring 1-2 outside crew members, especially since potential crew members are more likely to help for a paid position.

Artistically, my main goal for this project is to craft a short film with a more straightforward plot. In the past, my short film endeavors have contained too many characters, locations, scenes, or storylines that were oversized for a short run time. Therefore, it is my hope that *Low Life's* minimal locations and focus on two main characters will improve my short film storytelling abilities. The main concern with this goal is my writing quality, so I plan on being diligent and workshoping the script with my past writing professors and peers, particularly some collaborators I met at a UCLA screenwriting class in 2022 that now write for network television. To accomplish my goals of improving my writing and ensuring a smooth production process, I plan on frequently meeting with my faculty mentor Kevin Everson. Kevin has previously supported me in my past artistic and career endeavors. For instance, he read my screenplay for *Skipping a Generation* and helped me cut scenes and improve dialogue, which greatly benefitted the final film. Additionally, his Introduction to Cinematography course improved my skills in shot framing and composition while also igniting my passion for shooting on physical film stock. When my team competed in the 2022 Adrenaline Film Competition, Kevin heavily workshoped our script to ensure we would be greenlit for production by the judges, and I ended up directing the winning acting performance at the competition that year. In addition to connecting me with his industry peers, Kevin also provided immense guidance when I attended Sundance and TIFF in 2023.

Furthermore, Professor Everson has made multiple award-winning short films on grounds as part of his *Black Fire* series with Professor Claudrena Harold. Thus, his expertise in filmmaking around the Charlottesville area will guide me throughout my pre-production, production, and post-production processes as I figure out locations and my film crew. I plan to check in with Professor Everson frequently in person throughout each of these planning stages for his guidance and advice, especially for pre-production and production. Last, Professor Everson can potentially reach out to new students in the “gutter” (Art Department) during the fall semester about joining with my film crew, which would decrease the need for hiring outside crew for the main film production.

I am also requesting that a small portion of the arts award be used toward my travel costs for attending the 2024 Toronto International Film Festival. When I attended in 2023 through my personal savings, I met dozens of future collaborators my age who I still communicate with today (and plan on assisting with their productions this summer). As a filmmaker, I also believe it is essential to see the new work other artists are putting out to further fuel my personal inspiration. Since TIFF occurs in early September during the pre-production process for this film, I am sure I will return more confident and inspired in the filmmaking process for *Low Life*. During the outcome presentation in April 2024, I envision screening the whole film if it is possible. However, if the film is too long, I would like to make a poster board showcasing still frames from the film and images from my time at TIFF. I would also bring a speaker and play the film's instrumental score with my poster board presentation. I have envisioned making this film for quite a long time. While my proposal for a short musical film was rejected last year, I believe the simpler scope of *Low Life* and my goal of improving my filmmaking production values are clearly attainable.

Timeline:

<u>Month</u>	<u>Goals/Objectives</u>
<i>Summer 2024</i>	
May/June/July 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Revise screenplay with feedback from peers and film professors● Finalize shooting script
<i>Fall Semester 2024</i>	
August - September 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Assemble crew for the film, including: Post-production help (such as assistant editors) Producer, Assistant Director, Cinematographer, Assistant Camera, Boom Operator/Sound Recorder, Production Assistants, Lighting/Gaffers, Composer● Begin and finalize casting● Location scouting● Begin production planning and securing any non-UVA or Charlottesville filming locations
Early October	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Finalize filming schedule, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Final locations○ Equipment○ Call sheets and actor availability○ Meals and snacks for each day
Mid-October - Early December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Begin production with actors and crew!● Assistant editors and I organize existing footage
December 2024 - January 2025 (Winter Break)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Edit any footage already shot, including specific scenes● Plan the rest of production (if necessary) or any potential reshoots for the Spring semester● Check-in with the composer about potential first-draft compositions● Research specific short film festival deadlines
<i>Spring Semester 2025</i>	
January - early February 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Conduct reshoots, pickups, or any remaining production if necessary● Editing continues● Follow up with the composer on score progress
Mid-February 2025 - March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue and finish editing with final score by March 15th● Professional color grading and sound mixing process

	<p>on completed film begins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Final picture lock goal: March 31st ● Release the final film online or hold an in-person premiere at UVA, possibly as a showcase with other short films from Media Studies, Studio Art Department, or FMS ● Submit to festivals on FilmFreeway
April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Arts Awards Outcome Presentation

Budget:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>
<i>Pre-Production</i>		
Purchase Adobe Premiere Pro subscription	1	\$159.92 (8 months x \$19.99 per month student rate)
Roundtrip DC to Toronto Flight (For TIFF)	1	\$300
<i>Film Production</i>		
Location Use Fees Budget* (such as renting out a movie theater for filming)	TBD	\$500
Outside Crew Budget (If hiring a non-UVA student for a specific role such as cinematographer, gaffer, etc.)		\$300
Meals/Food/Water for Cast and Crew Budget	1	\$415
Prop Budget	1	\$100
Costume Budget	1	\$100
128 GB SD Card SanDisk Extreme	1	\$29
FilmFreeway Festival Entrance Fees Budget (Potential Festivals: Hollyshorts, Austin Film Festival, Yale Student Film Festival)	1	\$200
<i>Post-Production</i>		
Professional Color Grading Service Budget	1	\$500
Professional Sound Mixing Budget	1	\$200

Composer Fee Budget	1	\$200
<i>Free Equipment/Resources</i>		
UVA Art Department Equipment <i>(BlackMagic Camera, Boom Mic, Boom Pole, ARRI Lights, Tripod, Etc.)</i>	1	\$0
Personal Film Equipment <i>(Canon Rebel T7i, Shotgun Mic, Zoom Recorder)</i>	1	\$0
TOTAL COST		\$3003.92 <i>(I will pay the \$3.92 out of pocket)</i>

*Rate estimates come from online service estimates. I can provide updated details during film production. I will pay any out-of-pocket expenses for food/props/location/post-production fees that go over budget estimates.