

Arts Scholars Arts Award Application
Ava Lonergan

Project Overview

Returning to Woodberry: A Photographic Exploration

I grew up at Woodberry Forest School, an all-male boarding high school tucked away in rural Madison County, Virginia. In addition to living on campus from the age of four, I became the only female student there for my final three years of high school. I'm interested in returning to Woodberry to explore, for a year, its unique culture through photography. After this academic year, Woodberry will not be the same school I've known since I was a child—the headmaster will be stepping down after over fifteen years of leadership and development, my brother will be graduating (and with him the last students I know personally), and my parents will leave Woodberry to begin new lives in Charlottesville. I see this as the last year I will have such unusual inside access to what I know is a fascinating world of its own—a tiny community of teachers, staff, and four hundred teenage boys. It's primarily the people that I'm interested in photographing—the senior prefect; the cheerleaders; the art and drama students who make up the underground subculture; Mr. Reimers, the “crazy” English teacher; the gawky freshman with an inflated ego; Dr. Campbell, the soon-to-be-retired headmaster; Joe, the charismatic maintenance man. Not only does the school abound with characters, it is steeped in traditions like the new boy tie-cutting ceremony, the bonfire pep rally and football rivalry with Episcopal, weekend mixers, the Christmas candlelight service, Saturday morning classes, seated dinners four nights a week with white-coated student waiters, the Spring formal dance, forts at the river, and the revered Honor Code. These people and traditions have been part of my life as long as I can remember, but I realize they seem foreign to people unfamiliar with the school.

To outsiders, Woodberry appears as an incredibly polished and gleaming utopia. The glossy brochures and state of the art website are packed with images and videos of smiling, clean-cut boys in khakis and polo shirts curiously bent over science experiments or seated at a mahogany table in the library, surrounded by books and notes and pencils. These are the images that define Woodberry, but I'd like to create images that reflect the not-so-squeaky-clean situation I encountered as a student there. I really enjoyed my time attending Woodberry, but it also gave me insight into the dichotomy of the school—the mission is to turn “boys of promise into men of honor,” but the actuality of the situation is slightly different. Single-sex education has its benefits, but I'm not sure that isolating four hundred teenage boys together in the middle of Virginia helps them mature into men. It's a society of boys pretending to be men. Not only am I interested in sharing and revealing the Woodberry that I know to those who would not otherwise get to experience it, I'm interested in what it means to the students to be at Woodberry and their struggles to fit in, make sense of the situation, and figure out who they are in an environment that does not exactly resemble reality. I'm interested in the teachers, many of whom have been there for years and years, trying to inspire boys who, for the most part, are dispirited by the rigor and rules of Woodberry. This grant will make possible an opportunity to capture a culture unbeknownst to most. It will also give me a chance to revisit and examine my own experience at Woodberry, an experience which I highly value but which I have not yet been able to articulate. I hope this project will help me to understand the place I grew up in and the people I've been surrounded by for almost my entire life.

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I'm also interested in keeping a journal of the project, serving as both a photographic "sketchbook" and a collection of the things I learn and discover about Woodberry during my time there. I see it as a useful way to keep track of my evolution and progress as a photographer—I hope to refine and expand my technical knowledge and ability, and, most importantly, develop my "eye" and depth of content. For the presentation at the Center for Undergraduate Excellence's spring showcase, I'd like to have a minimum of 15 final matted prints and selections from my journal that provide a written source of information about the project.

Time Line

I can begin shooting as soon as possible, as Woodberry is only 45 minutes away and is accessible to me at any time. As I mentioned in my project overview, I'd like to photograph for a full year so as to capture all the major traditions and seasonal activity. I'd like to finish shooting in October of 2014 and have all final images selected, printed, and matted by November 2014. For the Center for Undergraduate Excellence showcase in April, I'd like to have 15 prints finished and ready to present. It will be important to me to consistently check in with Dave Woody, my advisor for the project, to evaluate my work. I think meeting with him for two critiques before April will help me stay on track and push me to continue seeking out new ways of looking at Woodberry and the project as a whole.

Budget

If received, this award will cover the cost of film, film processing, photographic paper, chemicals and inks, presentation material, and gas for travel to and from Woodberry. The budget below is based on my plan to return to Woodberry about 2 times a month for 10 months total (October 2013-May 2014 and September-October 2014), shooting about 2 rolls per visit. The award would be enough to accomplish my project from start to finish.

ITEM	ESTIMATE
Film	\$500
Photographic Paper	\$400
Travel	\$200
Other Supplies (chemicals, inks, presentation material)	\$100
TOTAL	\$1200

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Evidence of Participation in the Arts

My involvement in the arts at UVa has been primarily academic, especially since I declared a major in studio art. I've taken Drawing I, Drawing II, Photo I, and a handful of art history classes, and I'm currently taking Photo II and Arts Administration: Principles and Practices. I was a member of the Art Students Society the first semester of my first year and was involved in UVa's Fashion Design Club my first and second semesters of first year. I always make an effort to go to the wide variety of performances and exhibitions happening on Grounds at any given time, which has exposed me to a lot of different art in the past two years. Most recently, I went to Patrick Dougherty's talk and hope to help with the Stickwork project in the coming week.

Arts Scholars is my most important extracurricular time commitment at UVa, and I've been invested in shaping the program from the very beginning. Last spring I was elected to be an Arts Scholars Historian (along with Keith Wilson) for this fall semester, tasked with documenting Arts Scholars activities and events and maintaining the blog. In addition, Keith and I are creating video segments about Arts Scholars to be part of the Lab Series showcase in November. I attended the seminar/discussion section in fall 2011, spring 2013, and this fall 2013. I was unable to attend the seminar in spring and fall 2012 due to scheduling conflicts with classes fulfilling general and major requirements. I'm looking forward to being a part of the Lab Series showcase this fall and continuing to develop the program in the next few semesters.

Portfolio Image Guide

- Image 1. *Impressions*, silver gelatin print, April 2013.
- Image 2. *Cellular Generation*, silver gelatin print, April 2013.
- Image 3. *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, March 2013.
- Image 4. *Becca in Bed*, silver gelatin print, March 2013.
- Image 5. *My Mother and Rudy*, silver gelatin print, February 2013.

The images I've selected for this portfolio were all shot and printed in the spring of 2013 for Dave Woody's Photo I class. I think they most exemplify the kind of photographs I'm interested in pursuing for this project.