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Miller Arts Scholar Program
Rising Third Year Grant Proposal
23 March 2021

Pilot Episode for Animated Series

Proposal Outline:

- **Introduction**
- **Project Description**
 - Project Proposal
 - Artist/aesthetic Inspirations
- **Preparation**
- **Schedule**
 - Outline
 - Explanation
 - Concept Development
 - Writing
 - Sound/Audio Development
 - Auditioning/Hiring voice actors
 - Recording voice audio
 - Storyboarding
 - Animating
 - Finalize Project
- **Budget**
 - Outline
 - Justification
 - Computer
 - Wacom Drawing Tablet
 - Zencast
 - Skill Share TM
 - Payment to voice actors
 - Graphics/Effects
 - Promotional Materials
- **Faculty Mentor**
 - Federico Cuatlacuatl
- **Participation in the Arts**
 - Arts at UVA
 - Arts outside of UVA
- **Conclusion**

Note: Please view this document online rather than on paper, as I have embedded several links into the following text. I hope these links enhance your understanding of my proposal in areas where my words may fail to justly encapsulate my ideas.

Introduction:

All my life, I've watched cartoons. I've always loved the fantasy aspect of these cartoons and the whimsical worlds they presented. However, as large a part of my life as animated TV shows and movies are, I've realized that most animated works are made by and for white men. As a young BIPOC woman and avid cartoon-lover, it is difficult to engage with a visual media culture that underrepresents those who are like me.

There are some female leaders in the animation industry, but they are scarce. In 2013, Rebecca Sugar created *Steven Universe*, a sci-fi-cartoon renowned for its representation of LGBTQ+ characters. Sugar is the first woman to create an animated series for Cartoon Network. Not only did women first emerge as leaders in the industry only a little under a decade ago, but there are still essentially no prominent women of color leaders in the animation industry. The industry is progressing, but it has a long way to go in achieving proper representation for all viewers. As both an aspiring animation show creator and woman of color, I want to use my creative abilities to diversify the animation landscape, inviting minority and underrepresented groups to join in.

Project Description:

I propose that I will create a short pilot for an animated series. Though the plot is discernible at this point, I have a simple idea for my pilot: a goofy and girl-friendly take on the sci-fi genre, a 16-year-old girl works ardently to become the next Evil Space Empress/Overlord of the galaxy (akin to Darth Vader). She does this all whilst navigating the ordinary perils of high school and personal struggles of her mixed-species (half-alien-half-human) identity.

I created a production plan that is organized and thorough: I will first brainstorm ideas for this pilot. Then, I will write the script for a 5-to-6 -minute-long animation. After, I will hire actors and record voice audio for my pilot's characters. Subsequently, I will storyboard the cartoon. Finally I will animate this pilot using a combination of programs such as Adobe After Effects, Photoshop, and Adobe Animate.

The finished product will emulate an animated television series pilot. It will include elements such as character design, line art, color, shading, voice acting, and animation. I will experiment and work with lighting, color temperature, character facial expressions, gesture, and video/sound manipulation. I will regularly update my progress of this project onto an instagram account.

Artists/Inspirations:

The illustrators/artists I will use as inspirations for this project are [Robin Eisenberg](#), [Lisa Hanawalt](#), [Rebecca Sugar](#), [Noelle Stevenson](#), [Tooty McNooty](#), [Alex Bahrawy](#), and [Alex Hirsch](#) (I have actually corresponded with Alex Bahrawy over email, and he has offered to provide me with detailed insight on how to start my own animated series). These artists' illustrations, character art, and animated works have inspired many of my past creations and will act as visual/conceptual guides while I develop this project. Additionally, I will use internet aesthetics such as [vaporwave](#), [afrofuturism](#), and [cyberpunk](#) as references for my pilot's art/style.

Preparation:

There are certain skills/practices I will need expertise in to successfully execute this project; this includes character/figure drawing, screenwriting, storyboarding, video/audio editing, and animation. I am proficient in some of these practices, yet need more experience in others. First, I will address the skills needed for this project that I am already proficient in. I will follow this by my plan to learn the skills I don't know as well in order to successfully create this pilot:

I am very experienced in digital art/character art/design. I am a declared Studio Art major under the New Media concentration, so I have extensive experience working in programs such as Photoshop, Gimp, and Adobe Illustrator. I will continue to take courses in the New Media track and further grow in my digital art skills. Additionally, I have figure/gesture-drawing experience from ARTS 2600 (Drawing I), as well as from the character art I've created in my personal time. By the end of this semester, I will have introductory knowledge in animation and have completed a short animated film, 1-2 minutes in length. As I go further in the New Media concentration, I will master both frame-by-frame and puppet animation in programs such as Photoshop, Adobe After Effects, and Adobe Animate. I will continue to grow in these skills through my Studio Art courses and the work of this project.

I have some experience in screenwriting, storyboarding, and video/audio editing, but I need to grow in these skills to best produce my project. This summer I will be taking MDST 2710 during session I to learn how to screen write; I believe this class will give me enough proficiency in this skill to write my pilot. My New Media courses provide introductory experience in storyboarding and video/audio editing; these classes will be helpful, but I wish to have more experience outside the scope of UVA to work with these skills/practices and best produce a quality pilot. To remedy this issue, I plan to take classes through Skill Share™, an accredited online education website that offers a variety of courses in various creative endeavors.

Skill Share™ works in that you pay for a membership and then you have unlimited access to any number of classes. I plan to take [storyboarding](#) and [character animation classes](#) from storyboarders/animators such as [Siobhan Twomey](#). I will also take [Video and Audio Editing courses](#) from educators like filmmaker [Phil Ebner](#). These classes are relatively short (roughly 6-7 hours in length) and will fit easily into my academic course load and work for this project. As I take these courses, I will collect my certificates of completion and include them in

my outcome report of this project. Ultimately, I will combine my pre-existing knowledge/experience, courses at UVA, and the resources of Skill Share™ to best improve in these artistic practices. In doing this, I will maximize my abilities and create the highest-quality animated work that I am able to.

Schedule:

I have crafted a tentative schedule for this project spanning from May 2021 to April 2022. This schedule will ensure my success in my project's production from start to finish. I will present my schedule and then explain its components and my plans for them in detail:

Outline

- May 2021- June 15th, 2021: Concept Development
- June 15th 2021- August 1st 2021: Writing
- July 1st - August 24th: Auditioning/Hiring Voice Actors
- August 1st, 2021 - August 24th, 2021: Storyboarding (beginning)
- August 24th, 2021 - October 1st, 2021: Recording voice audio
- October 1st, 2021 - October 15th, 2021: Storyboarding (revisions)
- October 15th, 2021 - March 1st, 2021: Animating
- March 1st, 2021 - April 1st, 2021: Finalize Project

Concept Development:

_____ Upon being approved in May, I will develop and finalize the concept for this pilot. This will include principal concept/character art. I will do this between Early May to June 15th, 2021. The overall plot and direction of the pilot itself is yet to be determined, but I will work ardently during this time of my schedule to finalize this.

Writing:

Between June 15th and August 1st, I will be writing the pilot. I am aiming for it to be 11-16 pages long. I will began writing the script right after by Screenwriting class (MDST 2710) this summer. It will be perfect timing for me to start working on the script for my 5-to-6-minute-long pilot.

Auditioning/Hiring Voice Actors:

_____ While crafting my script over the summer, I will subsequently scout for, audition, and hire actors to voice my pilot. Due to COVID-19, I will be using a completely remote process of

auditioning/hiring/recording. To do this, I will adopt the remote auditioning/hiring model for voice actors of Alex Bahrawy's indie animated series [Wild Card](#). His series remotely auditioned voice actors just early last month; I plan to use Bahrawy's remote-voice-acting audition sheet as a template for my project. [Linked here is a google doc showing their process](#). I will pay specific attention to the "rules" section of this document, as it will provide me the most guidance in facilitating the remote-voice-acting aspect of this project.

To attain voice actors, I plan to advertise to acting groups in Charlottesville such Drama programs within the Charlottesville Public School System and Local theaters. I will also advertise to local schools/theater programs in the Dumfries-Manassas area (my home town). I will advertise to both Charlottesville and my hometown area because if for some reason I needed to meet up with a voice actor, I'd be able to easily do that in either Charlottesville or Dumfries/Manassas.

Once the actors audition and I select the cast, I will ask them to sign [this actor contract for a low budget student film](#), in which I will agree to pay them \$2 per line. This number is suggested by [The Voice Acting Club](#) for [rates to pay voice actors in low budget, independent productions](#). They will be paid by direct deposit after the recording process is finished.

Though this plan may seem a bit ambitious, I believe I have the networking skills, leadership abilities, tenacity, and drive to successfully complete all the aspects of this part of the project. I have already contacted some voice actors and received interest from them in doing this pilot; for example, [Samantha Davis](#). A Seattle-based model, singer, actress, student, and Go-go dancer, Samantha has performed at institutions such as Pierce College in Tacoma, Washington and Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Washington. Samantha is noted for her performances as Farrah in *She Kills Monster* (2018), Maya Angelou in *Movement* (2019), and as Python Healer/ Moon Goddess in *Lore Project* (2020). Samantha and I have been in contact about this project since mid-March, as I've seen her work before and believe she would be a perfect fit for my protagonist. She has given me permission to include her in this proposal as a potential voice actor for the project. I will not hesitate to create similar connections with other actors such as Ms. Davis. As someone who wants to create their own animated series in their professional career, I believe it would be beneficial for me to gain networking/producing experience that I can include in my resume and portfolio.

Storyboarding (Beginning):

Between August 1st to August 24th, I will begin the storyboarding process. I will use my knowledge of storyboarding from Intro to New Media I and Skill Share™ to execute this. The storyboard will accompany my completed script to give actors some visual representation of the scenes. I have allotted this time as the beginning of Storyboarding and will do revisions after recording; this is so the storyboard and voice audio can best match each other.

Recording Voice Audio:

_____ From the beginning of the fall term (August 24th, 2021) to October 1st, 2021, I will collect the principle voice recordings. Recording remotely may be one of the most challenging aspects of this project, but I believe with the research I've done that it will be accomplishable with all parties involved. I will use [Zencastr](#) to virtually connect with the voice actors to record audio. More than one person can meet with me on Zencastr at the same time, which will be especially helpful for dialogue scenes. It will be a part of the contract that they have quality microphone to record (also mentioned in the [audition sheet](#) template I'll be using). I will contact actors and allot different times for them to record between August 24th and October 1st. Payment will occur after recording is finished, which will also be addressed in the contract.

Storyboarding (revisions):

For two weeks between October 1st and October 15th, I will revise the original storyboard to best fit the recorded audio. This will be my last step before diving into animation.

Animation:

Between October 15th to March 1st, I will have 4 and a half months to animate my pilot. During this time, I will work through the animation itself, utilizing both frame-by-frame and puppet techniques. Animating the pilot will be my main focus during this time, but I will also begin to find audio and other effects needed for this project. I will use a combination of my New Media classes at UVA and Skill Share™ courses to complete this part of the project. This will be the most labor-intensive aspect of my entire project; hence why I am allotting so much time for it. The animation is the bedrock of the project, so it essential that I create the highest-quality work of art that I can. I will dedicate all the time necessary between October 15th to March 1st to produce this project and create a well-made and artful animated pilot.

Finalize Project

_____ I will spend the last month between March 1st to April 1st doing the video/audio editing as well as any last minute changes to specific frames, voice recording, sound effects, etc. I will also complete my outcome report during this time so by April 1st the entire project is complete.

Budget:

Expenditure	Cost
Apple - 21.5" iMac® with Retina 4K display (Latest Model) - Intel Core i3 (3.6GHz) - 8GB Memory - 256GB SSD - Silver	\$1300

Wacom Screen Tablet	\$400
Zencastr (1 year)	\$216
Skill Share™ (1 year)	\$99
Payment to voice actors/production members	\$600
Sound Effects/Music/Stock Images/Stock Animations/Fonts	\$250
Promotional expenses (flyers, online ads, etc.)	\$50
Total	\$2915

I will now speak on my budget. The iMac Computer and Wacom Tablet are to accommodate not only the large technological demand of my project, but to address the safety concerns I have with using public technology during the Pandemic. My laptop can process very small animations, but is not powerful enough to run the animation programs and render the frames necessary in order to produce my pilot. I believe an iMac and Wacom Screen Tablet would be best to produce this project, as they will allow me to draw directly into the animation programs with a machine that will be able to handle the power of the programs and pilot.

Additionally, it is important that I have these resources available to me in my home as the COVID-19 Pandemic is still unpredictable. Using public supplies from the university may not be available to me if, for example, we are put on a COVID-related lock down. There are computers available for student use, but the fact that they are communal tools can provide a health risk. In my effort to make this project as efficient and COVID-friendly as possible, I believe having a computer and drawing tablet for my own using are essential.

Zencastr will be the platform I use to do remote auditions and recording sessions. Originally, I wanted to purchase recording equipment to record in-person, however this is not feasible given the pandemic. Therefore, it is essential that I have a quality audio-recording service for the remoteness of my project. Zencastr is a yearly subscription service (\$18/month) that will accommodate all members involved with my project. The cost for one year will cover all of my uses with the platform for the duration of the project. I believe that with access to this service, my project will not be hindered amidst the ongoing-COVID-19 Pandemic.

Skill Share™ is the educational website I will be using to become proficient in the various skills needed to successfully execute this project (character art animation, storyboarding, visual/audio editing, etc.). I chose this website over other educational tools such as CG Master Academy and Khan Academy because, through research, I've determined that Skill Share™ has the best quality education for the most reasonable price. It is a yearly subscription service (\$8.25/month) that will cover all of my needs for the entire project.

I propose that I will need \$600 to pay my actors. This number is based on that I will hire a maximum of 6 voice actors, each with a maximum of 50 lines, paid at a rate of \$2 per line. I calculated this number after extensive research on paying low-to-mid-tier voice actors for low budget films. I believe providing payment to pay actors will be beneficial to my project, not only will it incentivise actors to commit fullheartedly to this endeavour, but produce better quality audio that make for a higher-quality pilot.

I ask for \$250 to purchase any stock images, sounds, animation, fonts, or other stylized elements for my pilot. This is so I can have the broadest range of high-quality effects/stylizations to implement in my production and produce an, overall, higher-quality animation.

Last, I ask for a mere \$50 for promotional materials. This will include flyers to put around my hometown in local restaurants/bulletin boards to encourage voice actors to audition, online promotions for voice actors to join my project, and any other advertisements necessary for the project. This will not be a large aspect of the project and is why I ask for only \$50. I believe it could be useful though in gaining attention toward my project to prospective voice actors, animation connoisseurs, and hopefully individuals within the animation industry.

Through extensive research and much consideration, I find that all items on my budget list and their expenses are essential to my production. They will allow me to produce the best-quality animated pilot and combat the additional hardships placed onto this project by COVID-19.

Mentor:

My mentor will be [Federico Cuatlacuatl](#). Federico is an accomplished digital artist with an MFA from Bowling State University (2015). He has extensive background in digital art and animation, receiving praise for his independent films screened in various national and international film festivals including Mexico, Canada, Finland, Athens, Greece, Delph, England, Lucknow, India, Paris, France, and the Azores Islands off of Portugal. Federico is currently my Intro to New Media I instructor and will likely teach the later courses I take in the New Media concentration.

I believe there is no better UVA Faculty member than Federico to guide me through the this project. Not only will his extensive background in digital art and animation allow him to provide me thorough feedback and sufficient guidance through the video/animation aspect of this project, but his multimedia experiences in traditional art, storyboarding, and visual/audio effects will only be of additional help.

Participation in the Arts:

At UVA, I am currently in a declared Studio Art Major working towards a New Media concentration. In the New Media track, I will be working diligently with a host of faculty to hone my animation/digital art skills. I am currently enrolled in Intro to New Media I and will only gain

experience in my project's principal media as I take more advanced courses. I am in the University Programs Council Arts and Enrichment committee, where we host arts-related events for the UVA community. Additionally, I've been honorably mentioned by CIOs such as The Mixed Race Student Coalition at UVA. In my free time, I work at the Fine Arts Library, supporting the education of other students who frequent the library for its Arts-related materials.

Outside of UVA, I maintain an active art instagram account and redbubble shop under the handle [@Oliviashepardcreates](#). Here, I post primarily digital art and have been commissioned to create several designs for groups such as Good Shepherd United Methodist Church in Dale City, Virginia and My Bella Beauty Salon in Dumfries, Virginia. My participation with the arts in and out of UVA should speak for my passion for art and how my involvement within the arts will contribute well to this project.

Conclusion:

This project is important to me not only for both personal and professional reasons. My pilot will star a primarily-bipoc cast and work toward proper representation of the bipoc community in animation/television media. It will not only contribute to diversity in the animation/art field, but also specifically to UVA Arts. Promoting a bipoc-centered animation/story will create a more diverse array of student exhibitions and works presented by the University. For many minority students, this will encourage them and perhaps even invite them to engage with UVA Arts in a way they may not have wanted to or felt comfortable before. It's important for minority perspectives to be heard, and my pilot will provide that voice.

Not only will this project provide me a platform to address personal concerns, but it will be beneficial for my professional artistic growth as well. It is my highest aspiration to be hired by a major network such as Cartoon Network, Disney, Hulu, Netflix, etc. The animation industry is incredibly hard to break into as is, especially for someone like me with essentially zero connection to the industry or anyone within it. I plan to use this project to enhance my portfolio. This way, I'll have experience in animation production when pursuing future opportunities such as film festivals submissions, grad school admissions, internship applications, and job interviews. Being afforded the opportunity to create this pilot will provide me with animation and art experience integral to my intended career path.

I know I am a new member of the program and have yet to enroll in CASS 1010 and CASS 1011. However, I am enrolling in these courses as soon as possible next semester. This program is one of my highest priorities, as the projects I may be permitted to do through this program can set me up for success in my professional career I do not believe I could be outside of the program. For this reason, I am and will take the requirements of this program seriously. Overall, I believe my proposed project may contribute well to my personal and professional interests, as well as the Miller Arts Scholar program and UVA Arts in general. Permitting my grant and proposal is a decision you will not regret; my work ethic and ambition to create art will make sure of it. Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing my proposal.

Inspired Works

Here are works from the illustrators/artists who will inspire my work in this project:



Robin Eisenberg, Vevo™ and Vans™ collaborator



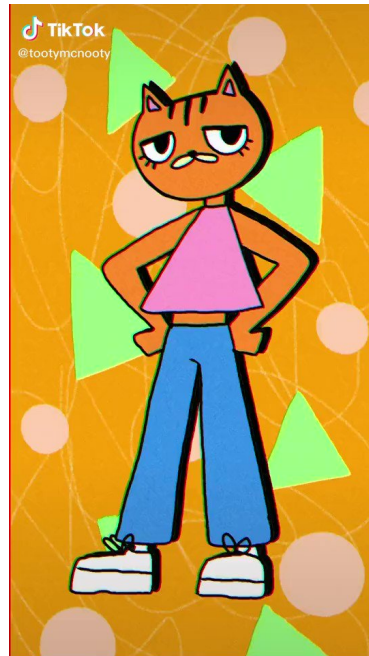
Lisa Hanawalt, *Bojack Horseman* and *Tuca and Bertie*



Rebecca Sugar, *Steven Universe* Franchise, *Adventure Time*



Noelle Stevenson, *Nimona* and *Lumberjanes*



[Tooty McNooty](#), Freelance Tik Tok animator