

Documenting the Legacy and Revival of the Washington Society

I am requesting \$3,000 from to purchase my own on-the-go filmmaking kit and to aid in travel costs in order to create a historical documentary of the Washington Literary Society and Debating Union, or more affectionately known as “the Wash”. For this project, I was awarded and accepted a \$5,000 summer research stipend from the Undergraduate Arts Research grant in the Office of Citizen Scholar Development, which I hope to combine with this award money in order to realize the vision of the documentary. This project does not require IRB-SBS approval per the Office of the Vice President for Research’s recommendation.

Introduction

The Washington Society has always been a place of spontaneity, vulnerability, and connection. From raw, unfiltered stories about growing up on food stamps to passionate humorous debates on whether or not you should “put a ring on it,” our meetings showcase a wide array of personality and passion. In turn, this fosters the perfect environment to embrace and enhance the art of oratory—our main mission as a Society. Personally, I have developed as a creative in the Wash through presentations that have challenged me to write, choreograph, and perform a musical parody number; construct a rebuttal for US Military involvement in the South China Sea; and present a 50-slide multimedia game competition consisting solely of bear puns. I have been deeply involved in the Wash since the spring of my first year, serving on the History Committee, as Secretary, and now as Historian.

In this role and beyond, I aim to document the Wash’s intangible spirit—one that has endured through centuries of change at UVA. Through archival research both in the Special Collections Library and our digital databases, interviews with alumni, and creative storytelling, I hope to reconstruct the Wash’s legacy in a way that feels as alive and human as its meetings. The Society’s historical ties to Washington Hall, or Hotel B, are central to this story. Although the Wash now meets in Hotel C, commonly known as Jefferson Hall, the meeting space of the Jefferson Society, Washington Hall remains our symbolic home. It is a space whose walls have witnessed just a handful of students sitting beneath the “*Washington Literary Society 1869*” plaque on its steps in the cold winter of 1979, determined to realize their vision of a Society that was welcoming to all—a testament to our resolute ties to the hall. By creating a documentary along with written records, I hope to preserve not only the Wash’s history but its essence: a legacy of voices, ideas, and the extraordinary vulnerability that makes us human.

Project

Through a combination of interviews, historical reenactments, and observational cinematography, I seek to capture the essence of the Washington Society while showcasing the history that has shaped it. To provide context and enrich the narrative, I intend to incorporate

several key elements. First, in-person interviews with the Refounders (circa 1979) of the Society—many of whom are still alive—will document firsthand accounts of the Society's revival and the stories from that time. Next, a stop-motion component or similar graphic medium will creatively depict the chronological history of the Washington Society, visually illustrating its evolution from its founding in the 1830s to the present day. Finally, this fall semester, I plan to capture "fly-on-the-wall" footage of regular meetings, providing an intimate, unfiltered glimpse into the functioning and dynamics of the Society today.

By the end of this summer, I aim to produce a detailed and accurate chronology of the Washington Society's history, a fully developed script accompanied by some footage for the documentary, and a deep personal understanding of the Wash's historical significance. To achieve this, I will spend extensive time in the Special Collections library, combing through our archive. In my research this past semester, I have already uncovered materials such as 35mm film photography of Society meetings from the 1980s, sorrowful emails following the passing of one of the Refounders (the Wash's first female president), and minutes books from the 1830s—written in nearly unreadable cursive but containing rich histories of the Society and UVA. These materials form compelling narratives about one of UVA's oldest student organizations. To enhance these narratives, I will also conduct in-person interviews with the four surviving Refounders of the Washington Society. This past semester, I had the opportunity to plan, film, and edit the Wash's annual Banquet Film, which featured exit interviews with graduating members. This experience gave me the confidence, skills, and technical expertise necessary to conduct professionally recorded interviews.

From my experience working on group film projects, I know that a solid team is vital—this project is no exception. To effectively capture the Wash at its core, I am seeking to create a subcommittee under the Reporter role of the Wash, consisting of a few members who will serve as camera operators, production assistants, and editors. I will work closely with this team to establish a visual style, create a realistic production schedule, and ensure a cohesive final edit.

To lessen the strain on the Studio Art department's resources, I am requesting funding for an on-the-go filmmaking kit. This will allow me to conduct interviews, capture footage from our dynamic meetings, and film necessary B-roll at any time. I will work closely with my faculty mentor, Kevin Everson, as well as the professor for Advanced Filmmaking I (which I plan to enroll in this fall), to receive feedback, critiques, and guidance on the documentary. Professor Everson, who has completed numerous documentary film projects in his professional career, is an ideal mentor. I will also have the support of my peers and cinematography cohort, a community I have been part of and cherished since the beginning of my second year at UVA.

The formal presentation of the project will take place either at the annual Banquet meeting or the Final Celebration—typically held in the Rotunda—in the spring of 2026.

Timeline

Spring 2025: finalize research on the exact camera/camcorder I intend to purchase and acquire all the necessary auxiliary equipment listed in the budget. Create a pre-production schedule to be followed throughout the Summer in accordance with recommendations from Kevin Everson.

Summer 2025: conduct all interviews with interested Refounders per their schedule. Hold weekly sessions in the Special Collections library in order to acquire relevant materials for the historical narrative. Create a production schedule to be followed throughout the Fall semester with the assistance of the Society's Reporter and their committee.

Fall 2025: begin filming as early as late August, and be proactive about acquiring footage, reviewing, and editing on the go. Start putting together a final cut of the fly-on-the-wall footage at the end of the semester.

Spring 2026: begin the final cut of the entire film. I will then start the color grading and editing process to be finalized by early April where it will be complete and ready to present. Also, create promotional materials

Budget

Miller Arts Award: Documenting the Legacy and Revival of the Washington Society		
Equipment	Expected	Notes
Used, Excellent (Canon XA50 Camcorder)	\$ 1,300.00	MPB link
SD cards (2x 128 GB)	\$ 40.00	for the camera
Deity V-Mic D3 Pro Shotgun Mic	\$ 140.00	will mount on top of the camera
Rode Wireless GO II Wireless Lav Mic	\$ 250.00	for on-the-go interviews/impromptu footage
Windscreens	\$ 50.00	for outdoor filming
Manfrotto Compact Action Tripod	\$ 80.00	to set up static shots
Sirui P-326 Monopod	\$ 68.00	for grip and stabilization
Backup storage hard drive 1TB	\$ 50.00	to store all the footage
Cloud storage pricing for the year 2TB	\$ 100.00	back-up storage
Equipment Total	\$ 2,078.00	
Per Diem in North Carolina x 2 days	\$ 262.00	interviews with two Refounders
Per Diem in D.C. x 2	\$ 366.00	interviews with two Refounders
Gas Cost for Travel along East Coast	\$ 150.00	
Meals and Incidentals x 4 days	\$ 200.00	standard rates per GSA
Travel Total	\$ 978.00	
Total Budget	\$ 3,056.00	

Note: Travel costs are for conducting in-person interviews with the Refounders in their respective state(s) of residence.

Participation in the Arts

Classes:

ARCH 1020: Lessons in Making

ENCW 2600: Fiction Writing

MDST 2200: Intro to Film

MDST 4106: Media and the Kennedy Era

ARTS 2000: Intro to Studio Art

ARTS 2370: Intro to Cinematography I

ARTS 2372: Intro to Cinematography II

ARTS 3370: Intermediate Cinematography I

CASS 1010 & 1011: Miller Arts Seminar

DRAM 4020: Comedy as Protest

DRAM 2620: Sound Design

Since my first semester, I have been involved with the Studio Art department and have been immersed in filmmaking and cinematography courses at UVA. During this time, I have completed eight short film projects and contributed to two larger group productions (*Mondo*). Each of these projects were shot on 16mm film, demanding thorough planning, time, and editing. The completion timelines for these projects varied from a few hours to several weeks. This semester, I am enrolled in Sound Design which has given me the skills to create realistic soundscapes, music, and other audio projects. Additionally, though not directly related to visual arts, I have been actively involved as a student DJ with WXTJ Student Radio since my first semester at UVA where I have served as the Social Chair and Programming Director.

In terms of participation and involvement with the Arts Scholars program, I have taken both semesters of CASS 1010/1011. In the second part of the class, I have been working with other Arts Scholars on our initiative: the Great Big Arts Calendar (GBAC) which seeks to centralize UVA's student group arts events.

Reel Link:

<https://vimeo.com/911674485>

Banquet Film Link (as mentioned above):

https://youtu.be/mBa_H5VMDJA?si=Ezm9yWpu5Ymur4Op