



2007

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Recommended Citation

Block, Jessica, "9x9 Plans Fifth Film Festival" (2007). *News and Events*. Paper 196.
<http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/196>

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November 30, 2007

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9x9 Plans Fifth Film Festival

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Entering its sixth year of making films, Illinois Wesleyan University’s student film club 9x9 debuted its fifth group film, *Double Blind*, earlier this month for an enthusiastic audience in the Hansen Student Center.

Other IWU students will have the opportunity to show their independent films in 9x9’s Film Festival on Wednesday, Dec. 5 at 8 p.m. in Hansen (300 E. Beecher St., Bloomington).

The event is free and open to the public.

“9x9 accepts any films for the short film festival,” said Morello. “It doesn’t matter if you’ve made them on campus or even while you were a student.”

The festival usually includes five to eight films, which are judged in several categories including “best film” and “best actor.” In past years, all audience members were given a ballot so that they could vote for their favorite films.

This year, Sethi and Morello decided to change the judging method. “We’re going to ask a panel of faculty judges to decide the winners of most of the categories, but we will also have an audience favorite category,” said Morello.

Named for its original nine members and the nine-foot by nine-foot film screen in Hansen, 9x9 was officially founded in 2003 and headed by alumnus Mike Gabriele who graduated in 2007. Senior Sehaj Sethi and junior Paul Morello, both English majors, currently co-head the group, which is sponsored by Kevin Clark, assistant dean of students.

When Sethi joined the group in 2004, she dove in to all aspects of filmmaking, becoming integral in establishing 9x9’s technical foundations.

“When we were just starting out, none of us really knew anything about filmmaking or the equipment involved. I took the initiative to learn everything I could about lighting and sound, what we needed, how to use the items we had purchased,” said Sethi.

With funding from IWU’s Student Senate, Gabriele and Sethi purchased two new computers, which they equipped with the professional editing software Final Cut Pro and Adobe Premiere Pro. “It was so great that IWU allowed us to get these tools because they are standard in the film industry,” said Sethi.

As film directors, Sethi, Morello, and others have edited 9x9's films as well as their own projects and have assisted other 9x9 members with independent projects.

"There are students here who want to be involved in filmmaking and 9x9 brings them together," said Morello, who has co-directed two of 9x9's films and has made two independent films. Sethi and Morello agree that 9x9 caters to students who have diverse interests but a common passion for film.

"We definitely try to emphasize that 9x9 is an outlet for those actors on our campus who are not able to be involved in the theatre program," said Sethi.

Senior economics major Chris Davis has been acting in 9x9 films since his first year at IWU, when Sethi recruited him as an extra for *Night of the Living Dead Dolls*. Davis most recently played the lead role in *Double Blind*.

"9x9 gives me the opportunity to act, which I have always had a passion for, in an environment that is extraordinarily friendly," said Davis. "The privilege to work with three really great directors, Sethi, Morello, and Gabriele, is such that I feel I got back more than I could ever give."

Davis believes that 9x9 gives back to the IWU campus by hosting its annual film festival, which any student can enter, and by holding public screenings of its films.

"The IWU community provides the impetus to realize a vision, and then benefits from the consequences," said Davis of the mutual relationship between 9x9 and the University. "The quality of 9x9 films is a testament to the diversity of extracurricular pursuits in what is a relatively small community," added Davis.

For additional information about 9x9 or the Film Festival, contact 9x9 co-heads Sehaj Sethi (ssethi@iwu.edu) or Paul Morello (pmorello@iwu.edu).

