

FILM INTERNS

# Film students get hands-on experience at Santa Fe Studios

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By Adele Oliveira

In the cavernous sound stages at **Santa Fe Studios** — filled with enormous green screens, half-built sets and clusters of unplugged lights, as well as the occasional prop for *A Million Ways to Die in the West* — students from Santa Fe Community College are getting hands-on experience in film production.



*From left, intern Dan Hodges of Albuquerque and Santa Fe Studios employee Max Sinclair remove an air-conditioning duct at the studio on Wednesday. Hodges is a student in the film technician training program at Santa Fe Community College, which requires a hands-on internship in the film industry. Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican*

**Santa Fe Studios** is one of several sites where students from six New Mexico schools, including the community college, can complete an internship through a film technician training program. The program began in 2004, under Gov. Bill Richardson's administration, through a

partnership involving the Santa Fe Community College, the New Mexico Film Office and the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees.

This summer, seven students from Milton Riess' Film Crew I class at the community college participated in an eight-week internship with **Santa Fe Studios**, while others interned with independent film productions, student productions and local businesses affiliated with the film industry, such as sound engineers.

"Film Crew I is a film boot camp," Riess said. "It's a training ground to introduce students to every aspect of film production and get them OSHA-certified so they can work on any shoot on the state. On day one, we start with getting the students prepped for being production assistants. We train them on electrics with the help of a local grip house, and we go over safety aspects. By the end of the semester, students won't have learned everything about film production, but they'll have been exposed to it."

This summer's **Santa Fe Studios** interns vary widely in age and background. Katarina Pittis is a rising senior at New Mexico School for the Arts. Incoming community college freshman Zach Heller arrived from Michigan. Retiree Dan Hodges worked for Intel for 37 years. Because of his

professional background in site and facilities work, Hodges' internship focused equipment and maintenance.

"The experience has been invaluable," Hodges said. "We shadowed staff, and I learned about lighting, rigging and moving cameras."



*Katarina Pittis, 17, of Santa Fe, a senior at the New Mexico School for the Arts, works with Santa Fe Studios controller Stan Hulse on Wednesday on a spreadsheet showing electrical meter readings that will be used to bill film productions using the facility. Pittis recently completed an internship at the studio through a program at Santa Fe Community College and is now working there part-time. Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican*

Interns also work in stage coordination, helping to make sure everything runs smoothly on the set, acting as a liaison between operations and productions staff, and ensuring the production follows safety and legal standards.

Some interns gain experience in operations, which includes answering phone calls and emails, delivering mail, making cold calls to production companies and other marketing and administrative tasks.

It is "stressful in the best way possible," said intern Barbie Robertson. The New Mexico School for the Arts graduate returned to Santa Fe in March after spending a year at Chapman University in Orange, Calif.

She described the film community in New Mexico as "friendlier" than what she encountered in California. "Hollywood's a small community with locked doors," she said.

Since its opening a year and a half ago, **Santa Fe Studios** has hosted between 30 and 40 interns, many of them from the community college. It also has had interns from the Santa Fe University of Art and Design and the Institute of American Indian Arts. The internships are unpaid, but some students are invited to return as contract employees, on a production-by-production basis. Starting employees are paid Santa Fe's minimum wage, \$10.51 an hour.

Pittis, who completed her internship last week, has already started working part-time at the studio, even though she's still in high school.

"I want to try stage coordinating because I haven't tried it yet, and I'm really excited to be on set," she said. "It sounds harder, but to be 17 and be able to do something like that? That's crazy."

Pittis hopes her experience over the next year will help her decide where she wants to apply to college and what she'd like to study.

Jonathan Mugford was an intern at **Santa Fe Studios** in early 2012, when he was enrolled in Film Crew I. Today, Mugford is an associate professor of film at Santa Fe Community College. He also does freelance post-production work, and has worked as a contract employee for **Santa Fe Studios**.

Though Mugford would like to see a wider variety of post-production and editing courses offered at the college, he credits the small size of the film program as the reason he was able to advance quickly. "I went to a large university in Arizona, and there wasn't the intimacy or hands-on work with a variety of equipment," he said.

"We learned set etiquette, too. When we were done [with Film Crew I and the internship] we were ready to work on a larger production."

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