

Seniors' Spring Break Trip to LA



I was surprised at how welcoming and eager the Hollywood Hawks were from the moment we arrived. KU basketball watch parties were coincidentally scheduled twice during the time we were there which allowed us to see the entire KU alumni community [Hollywood Hawks]. It was a great relief in seeing such a large group of people with similar backgrounds; all uprooted to LA and becoming successful. The Welcoming Party/Mixer was also timed perfectly at the beginning of the week because we had the opportunity to mingle and meet people that pertained to our individual interests and others that we would potentially meet later in the week. — Kara McKinney

The amount of KU community that was so supportive, willing to help, and eager to meet us was overwhelming, and it was extremely reassuring. I want to throw out some major props to Maria Skeels, who not only helped arrange a ton of stuff for the group, but also was extremely nice and helpful whenever any questions were asked. — Morgan LaForge



The thing that surprised me most about the trip was just how dedicated the Jayhawk community is out there. It's such a strong, tight-knit group that is very welcoming and always available to assist the next person who chooses to move out there. The KU watch parties were a great chance to meet a ton of people who graduated from KU and are now working professionally in the film industry. I can't say how grateful I am to Maria Skeels, who helped organize and plan the event from the LA side. She is a wonderful person who is extremely welcoming to the newcomers. — Kurtis Myers



We all got a great balance of networking and leisurely touring on the trip, though, and I couldn't have asked for more generosity from Professor Jacobson and GTA Mike Van Esler. I want to say also that everyone who is a KU student, whether they are interested in Los Angeles or not, should personally thank Maria Skeels for being so amazingly helpful and for her involvement with the Hollywood Hawks group. — Trent Ubben

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I know for me, L.A. was at first extremely far off, a mystical land. I never thought there was as much work or as many friendly faces as there were. No longer does Los Angeles feel so far away. No longer will I hesitate to experience the industry there first hand. This trip opened my eyes to something great, and like so many others, with hard work and determination, I know I will succeed. This trip showed me a glimpse of my future, and I am pleased. — Derek Boettcher



Before going on this trip I was skeptical about L.A. My preconceived thoughts about Los Angeles (i.e., the town being too intimidating) were all put at ease through my experience. Also, I found that the filmmakers we met, along with residents, were very kind and helpful with an honest objective to help us newcomers find our place in the L.A. film industry. I am now strongly considering moving out to L.A. to pursue my filmmaking career at the end of this summer. If this trip wasn't available to me it would probably be years before I would even think about moving to Los Angeles. I am so grateful that I was able to attend this trip to gain a better understanding of the industry. — Jess Shuler



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I recommend this trip to anyone who wants to move to L.A. I would just say that when you are out there, be genuine and be yourself when talking to people but also be assertive and involved. It really is a blessing that there are so many people out there who are willing to help out. I do plan to move to Los Angeles shortly after graduating, and I know down the road when I am successful out there, I will always have this trip as an amazing memory and highlight in my life.

Do it. – Trent Ubben



The trip to LA was such an invaluable experience. Before the trip, I knew I wanted to move to LA but had no idea how I could make that happen. I've since learned from Grant Babbitt [BGS 2011] how to find apartments, how to talk to intimidating contacts and how to start looking for jobs. Since I've been back in Kansas, I've also connected with a writer from the show "The Client List." He promised to let me shadow him sometime after I move out, which is more than I could've hoped for.

– Laura Beason



We were exposed to great food, great places and great people. Twice we went to a KU watch party. Might I add, the people who showed up there were amazing; many people were there; many people we know and care about; many people new. The best part is, they all want you to succeed. You cannot get a better support system than that.

– Derek Boettcher



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Michele Winn



At Disney we got to see first hand how methodical (and difficult!) it is to record ADR.
— Laura Beason

Every day of the trip was packed with activities and productivity. We met some amazing KU alumni. There were literally probably 60 things we did and saw (from visiting Disney Studios and seeing the sound room where they record all the dialogue for Pixar movies to going to Jimmy Kimmel Live), but my highlight of the trip was our visit to a post-production company called Rock Paper Scissors. We met KU alum David Brodie who is an editor there and we saw some amazing work that I really felt I connected with personally. — Trent Ubben



We went to Disney Studios, toured their facilities, and was able to sit in on the sound designers working on folley; we were able to watch how the ADR was done next door, participating as 'actors.' We went to Nickelodeon and were able to see their great ideas and creativity pulsing through their building.
— Derek Boettcher

We couldn't have had a better guide than Matt Jacobson. It was a great experience and one that any student can only be lucky enough to have.
— Douglas CJ Cole



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The day of MTI and Titmouse was another favorite of mine. Scott Thomas has a dream job – who wouldn't want to sit around table with a think-tank of writers and laugh all day? MTI was especially rewarding because Bridgid O'Donnell was able to explain the company's advances in film restoration and explain some of the studios motives in spending the money to restore. – Kara McKinney

Throughout the course of a week, we visited and explored post-production houses, lighting companies, animation studios and even the American Society of Cinematographers.

– Laura Beason



We visited Titmouse, an animation studio that produces everything from China, IL (a mature cartoon featured on Adult Swim) to boys' shows for Disney XD. And there Scott Thomas became my personal hero. He writes and produces for the upcoming show, "Randy Cunningham, 9th Grade Ninja." Scott introduced us to the animation team, but he also did something amazing: He let us sit in the writers' room. In the writers' room, Scott showed us all of the character sketches and mock-ups of the upcoming episodes. It was really interesting and absolutely encouraging to hear a writer talk about the ups and downs (and ultimate success) of moving to LA and working in the industry.

– Laura Beason



My favorite aspect of the entire trip was definitely our trip to the American Society of Cinematographer's clubhouse. I'm huge on cinematography, and when we got a chance to sit down and talk with some of the greatest cinematographers living today. It was an experience I will never forget. They are so humble about their profession, and have so much dedication to their work. – Kurtis Myers



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At Nickelodeon, the environment was fun, energetic and completely conducive for working creative minds. A few of us visited Rock, Paper, Scissors, a post-production house specializing in commercial clients. They showed us how they added visual effects to commercials. The working environment at RPS was relaxed and friendly, making me almost consider switching gears from pre to post-production.
— Laura Beason



My favorite part of the trip, in terms of touring different studios, was going to Mole Richardson. I am very much interested in lighting and cinematography, and it was a great, simple learning experience for me. Being on the set of *The Client List* was also really informative, interesting, and fun to watch; it was great to see how a professional set works. At almost every place we visited, I learned about opportunities with different jobs that I had no idea even existed.
— Morgan LaForge

We experienced such places as Mole-Richardson, a lighting gear company that has free workshops on the proper way to handle lights and lighting sets and subjects. We also moved to post production houses (my personal favorite) such as Rock Paper Scissors (A52 studios; online/offline editing) and Stargate (Computer Graphics). Some of us were able to play with a Phantom camera, experiencing 1,000 frames a second. — Derek Boettcher

As a writer, I was skeptical about meetings with professionals that worked in production and post-production, but when we visited Mole Richardson where we were all forced into a crash course training session in lighting, I realized how interesting and valuable these lessons would be to all of us, no matter where our interests lie.
— Laura Beason

Disney, Titmouse and the post-production studios were very informational. Visiting Larry Parker and his lighting school was beneficial. It will probably be one of my first stops once I move out there to further my knowledge of lighting. Overall, our schedules were somewhat grueling, but provided us with so much information and future possibilities that no time seem wasted. — Douglas CJ Cole

Our experience at Mole Richardson was probably one of my favorites; he was honestly such a good teacher and I loved his hands-on method which involved us getting up in front of the class and making mistakes to explain how to grip the proper way.
— Kara McKinney

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Mike Robe

With a loaded itinerary, we were given the opportunity to make multiple valuable contacts for future industry possibilities. Being interested in writing and directing, meeting with Mike Robe, Chris Ordal, Scott Thomas, Gordy Hoffman, Jared Stone and Rod Holcomb was very beneficial. Each took the time to offer their advice and how they went about breaking into the business.

– Douglas CJ Cole

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Being interested in producing, the tours brought light upon the vast positions within my field that I had not explored. For instance, meeting Dara Barton who is a producer at The Ant Farm, a post-production house, opened my eyes to producing trailers and title sequences for films which serve distribution and marketing purposes; something I think would be very rewarding.

– Kara McKinney

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The trip overall was phenomenal. We got a chance to see just about every aspect of film making on a professional level. This was great, because of how diverse the interests were of our group. Some people wanted to write, produce, direct, grip, gaff, or be a cinematographer, and we got a chance to meet a person in just about every one of those categories. – Kurtis Myers



Photos by Rebecca Basaure and Matt Jacobson

With my focus lying in both cinematography and assistant directing, I had two highlights during our visit: "The Client List" set visit and the question and answer session with the ASC. The set visit of "The Client List" allowed me to see how a DP works in a professional atmosphere. The most vital part of my visit was getting to talk at length to the 2nd AD who gave me a much better understanding of how the AD team operates. She also gave me insight into an AD training program through the DGA that I will be applying to this Fall. The ASC visit was a great learning experience being able to hear accomplished DP's talk about their side of the industry. Other memorable visits I would greatly encourage keeping in the itinerary include: Mole Richardson, MTI Studios, Disney Studios and of course watching KU basketball at the Parlor.
– Jess Shuler

