**INDIE MAJOR PODCAST**

**2/19/24 Erin O’Neill**
**Individualized Major: Visual Media**

Ken:

This is Indie Major, a show devoted to the wide ranging stories and visions of individualized majors at the University of Connecticut. I'm your host, Ken Cormier.

Ken:

I'm here with Erin O'Neill. Hi Erin.

Erin:

Hi.

Ken:

Thanks so much for coming in.

Erin:

Thank you for having me.

Ken:

So why don't you tell us what your major is and maybe a little bit about what it's all about.

Erin:

Okay, so my major is called visual media. Basically, I like to think of it as kind of just a combination of everything that I like to do. So the main aspects of it are photography, film, cinematography, production, music, digital art, web design, just kind of anything under that general visual media umbrella.

Ken:

So you study visual media. In all these different forms?

Erin:

Yes.

Ken:

Do you find that when you hop from like say cinematography to, you said social media? So, do you find that when you hop from one to another, are you always encountering similarities or you were able to integrate stuff you did in one into the other form in ways that you might not have even expected?

Erin:

Yes, definitely. Like I think even when I first started, it was like mostly photography and art and now it's kind of blossomed into like all of these other things because like I could explain the connection between, you know, like film connects to photography obviously through like the cinematography of it. Production relates to editing, which relates to art. And it's all about how things are visually and auditorily pleasing to people. I guess, I guess like the general idea

is just figuring out what the general public likes to see. Like what they want to see. Yeah.

Ken:

And now you work at the radio station here?

Erin:

Yes.

Ken:

We're recording in studio B at WHUS on the campus of UConn. And so obviously you're also engaged with audio?

Erin:

Yeah.

Ken:

So when you're doing a visual media major, have you had opportunities to work with audio in conjunction with visual? Does that come in in some of these courses or is that more like stuff that you do on your own?

Erin:

Yeah. I think it's definitely not as prevalent as other factors. But I definitely think like in the production classes I've taken, like especially with cinematography stuff we do talk about sound a lot. Like I know I took, I think it was like a communications class. It

was like digital production. And we actually talked a lot about audio because it's one of those things that you don't really think about that much when you're like watching a movie. You're not really thinking about how much effort they're putting into like making sound effects, like we talk about like Foley a lot and like how people go into studios and make like fake sound effects. Pretty much a lot of it's like about like background music and like when to have background music. What that adds to like a certain scene or like what the certain vibe of the music is giving, how loud it should be, when it should be there, when it shouldn't. I think that whole idea of there being sound and then there being a lack of sound in media is like a big thing, because you can use either of those to your advantage to like prove whatever point you're trying to make.

Ken:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. I do think that this culture looks at film even though we know it's an audio visual media medium. We think of it as a visual medium.

Erin:

Yeah, right.

Ken:

But I think sometimes you know that it's all about sound when you try to watch a film or a video where the sound is really bad. And then you're like, you can't watch it. Yeah. It's like, oh no. And it's interesting too, because silent film was kind of one thing that was happening. Mm hm. Right. And then the phonograph and audio recording was also happening, and radio, right? And then when they came together, it seemed like all the radio actors moved over to

film. And they took the radio play format and just threw it on to film. And a lot of what was interesting about silent film, some of it kind of went away because it just changed into this sound medium.

Erin:

Yeah, I actually took a class that was about Hollywood, and we talked a lot about that time when they discovered that you can put sound over moving pictures. And we talked a lot about that, about how like it was just turned it into a completely different thing. Like people got really excited when movies were first thing. So they would like go to the theater and then you would just kind of be sitting there. And a lot of times they would have like a live orchestra there, just playing background music during the movie. So it's not just like you're in a silent room with a bunch of people, right? But it was also like that whole like you have to take all of the things like class into account. You know, only some people could go to these theaters. And then once they figured out how to put sound onto it, it kind of just like opened this door into like a ton of things. Like it turned into like a thing for advertising, like media, radio, music, like it. Instead of focusing on storylines and actors and like, I guess dialogue, even though you can't talk like they usually have like the text slides. Yeah. It kind of became more of like a general aesthetic. Thing. I guess like you're taking so much more into account when you can actually like hear sounds and like hear people talking instead of just having to assume what they're saying by their facial expressions.

Ken:

You said you were still wondering about what to do career wise and all that, but it seems like you already knew it was something to do with media. Where did that come from?

Erin:

It's actually hard to say. I actually didn't take any art classes in high school. I didn't take like a real art class until I was in college. It was I guess just like luck of the draw, really. I came to Uconn with no idea what I was doing, was an undecided major. For a while I was like, okay, I think I really like fashion and so I kind of looked into that and I was like, okay, well I don't really like the fashion industry, but I feel like I could do something with fashion media. So that kind of opened the media door. And so I became a journalism major. But the issue with the journalism major was I liked it. And a lot of the stuff we did felt very accurate to what I wanted to do. And it felt general enough that I felt like safe there. But at the same time, there were also a lot of like requirements for the major that I felt we're just not necessary for me. Like the big thing that really started to stress me out, I think this was like sophomore year when I started doing this, was when I sat down with my advisor and they were like, okay, so you need to take journalism law and you need to take journalism ethics and like newsroom classes and things like that. And I was like, okay, I like journalism. I don't want to be in a newsroom. I don't want to have anything to do with law or ethics. That's just not what I want to do. So I was like, maybe I should just make up a major so that I can just like take the classes that I think will actually provide like, useful information to me. Because that was kind of the thing is like even if I did want to be a journalist, I didn't want to be lacking in those areas of like law and ethics because you do need those things to be a journalist. But I was like, I just think that that would take too much time away from energy that I could be putting towards things that I feel like I actually like a lot more. So once I just like kind of, you know, jumped into the deep end and took an art class. Even though I was like kind of iffy about it. Because there's this whole idea of doing art in college is kind of like you're not going to go

anywhere, you're not going to make money after college. It's this whole thing about it. But then once I did it and I actually like started just taking the classes that looked interesting to me. I was like, oh, I get it. Like I get college now. Like I get liking what you're doing in class, enjoying the stuff that you're talking about, actually learning things that you are like excited to use in your life. Just kind of that whole thing kind of opened that door.

Ken:

Well, that's so exciting because that's what interdisciplinarity is all about, right? I mean, so the individualized major is sort of nontraditional, right? You kind of make it up yourself. It's interdisciplinary, it sort of has to be. So you're mixing up disciplines. And from what I'm hearing, what you're saying is that there's certain journalism courses that were really exciting and interesting to take for you. But that the entire field of journalism ended up not being something that a direction that you wanted to go in, right? And so, but still, there were those few courses that were appealing to you, especially when you then went into art. And so when you took an art course, now suddenly that handful of journalism courses that you took, maybe you started to feel like they were part of a larger theme maybe, right?

Erin:

Yeah.

Ken:

So you have journalism, you have art. What other departments or disciplines do you have in your major communications?

Erin:

Mm hmm. Film and photography. And I think that's it. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ken:

Do you remember back to when you were a kid where there are things that you thought like, oh, this is what I want to be when I grow up?

Erin:

Yeah. I mean, it's kind of funny 'cause like, I was one of those kids where it felt like every year was a different career that I really wanted. And they were just like vastly different. Like for a while I really wanted to go to culinary school and be a chef. And then for a while I wanted to be a cop, and then I was like, no, I don't. And then it was just, it was really like, I don't know, once I stepped out of that like imaginative space that you're in as like a really little kid, it just kind of became this big blank space. Like I knew so many kids in like middle school and high school that like even if they didn't pursue it later on they had some idea of like where they were going to go. Like at least like this university in this state I really like and for me it was always just kind of like, well, like I live here like my parents work at Ukon. I'll probably go to UConn And then like I went to UConn and I was like, okay, well, I've had a lot of time to think about this and I've had a lot of time to research the majors at UConn because I knew I was going to be going here and it still was just like. I have no idea. Like it was like truly terrifying, honestly. Like my freshman year of college was just like, what am I doing? It it became that debate of like, should I even be in school right now? Am I just like wasting my time if I don't know what I'm going to do? It was scary.

Ken:

But you know it's funny. 'cause you landed in such to me, media studies or visual media. It seems to me like there's so many different directions you could go. Media is such a huge deal in the world, right? In our lives, everywhere. In every direction that you turn, you're faced with some form of media, in education, and pop culture and entertainment. So in that way as you're heading toward graduation, which again I know is another, can be another form of stress. Do you feel like you're excited to see what direction this all goes? Do you feel like you're open to a number of different directions or do you feel like you're starting to get an idea for where you want to take this?

Erin:

I don't know. I didn't necessarily make this major so that it would bring me to like a specific career as soon as I graduated because I'm so young. Like I have so much life to live. I've lived in the same town my whole life. Like if I commit to a career now, what if I changed my mind? What if I hit like 40? And I'm like, I hate this now I feel like with this major, it kind of allowed me to make this space so that when I graduated I would have multiple opportunities for careers. Like it wouldn't be so specific. Like the whole idea was not to narrow it down to like one very specific major, which I know you can do in college really easily. It was to give myself a lot of general knowledge in one area so that I could be prepared to have multiple opportunities in my life. Like I didn't want to just focus on photography because then I would be limited to photography, right? Versus like with this major, now I can start with photography and then if I get tired of that, I'll still have the knowledge for social media or cinematography. You know, like

I'll have that general knowledge for kind of all of those areas that melt into each other so well that it kind of just gives me this general block of knowledge in that area that lets me have like as much freedom as I want, I think in picking a career.

Ken:

Yeah, yeah. And you know, we don't want to fall too far into that trap of only thinking about your college experience as that kind of like job training, career operation. Obviously, it does situate you for hopefully like a really rich experience in whatever it is that you decide to do. So maybe we should end on the note of, was there a particular course that you took within this visual media major or a project that you did that you feel especially excited about or proud of?

Erin:

Honestly, the project that I'm working on right now for my senior project I think is what's most exciting to me, which is I'm writing about like the punk scene in the '80s and how photography influenced that whole scene. I'm setting up a project where I'm having a bunch of people who used to be in the punk scene in Connecticut come and they're going to get into their old like punk looks and I'm going to do like studio portraits of them. And at first I was kind of like nervous about it that it wasn't going to work out, but like everyone that I've heard from is like really excited to participate and I just think it's going to be really fun. I think like apart from it providing to my senior project, obviously, I'm really excited to have it on like my portfolio. Just as like a personal project too.

Ken:

So you'll graduate with this whole, that project and all sorts of other projects. I imagine of just all sorts of examples of work you've done in media which is so exciting.

Erin:

Yeah, it is excellent.

Ken:

All right. Well, thank you so much for coming in. This was a pleasure.

Erin:

Yes, thank you for having me.

Ken:

Thanks for listening to Indie Major. If you'd like more information about individualized and interdisciplinary studies at the University of Connecticut, please visit our website at iisp.uconn.edu. That's iisp.uconn.edu. We'd also like to thank UConn Enrichment Programs and WHUS UConn Radio for their support of this show.