

Buffett Undergraduate Research Fellowship Opportunity

Crossing the Kalunga Line: A Film about Religion, Mourning, and Power in Jamaica

Faculty Mentor: KB Dennis Meade, Assistant Professor, Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences

Project Synopsis: This project seeks to take a documentary film about grief, mourning and community amongst Revivalists, a marginalized indigenous Afro-Christian tradition in Jamaica, to the next phase of production. The film explores the tradition in the aftermath of the death of a religious leader. In over 15 hours of footage filmed in December 2023 and August 2024, family and community members reflect on his legacy through ritual celebrations and personal anecdotes. The film is also intended as a teaching tool wherein scholar-practitioners describe the intricacies and central tenets of the tradition through demonstrations and the varied spiritual technologies that believers draw upon to shape their life-worlds. This project is best suited for undergraduate scholars interested in the intersection of race and religion in the African diaspora who have basic skills with social media, basic film editing software, using Canva or similar design applications, and Notion for project management.

The undergraduate research assistant will collaborate with the project team to bring the film to the next stage of production. This includes reviewing footage, developing a social media presence for the project, and transcribing interviews. Students will be mentored on storymapping and project management to develop educational resources for a public audience.

Project Term: Summer and Academic Year

Project Location: Hybrid with travel to Kingston, Jamaica

Job Description: The undergraduate researcher will be considered a collaborator on the project and should be a self-starter, highly motivated, organized, and open to working on a team consisting of scholars and industry creatives. They will be tasked with --

1. Reading and discussing materials related to Revivalism with the project supervisor
2. Support the project director in developing a system to organize existing footage
3. Creating short clips of interviews using film editing software
4. Transcribing interviews
5. Contributing to a "paper edit" that includes detailed notes on existing footage

6. Organizing existing photographs by theme and place
7. Managing meeting dates and note-taking using Notion

Time Commitment: Beginning in June 2025, it is expected that the undergraduate research assistant will dedicate 4-5 hours a week on the project based on a mutually agreed upon schedule. In addition, we will meet bi-weekly to establish goals and discuss steps towards completion. The project team anticipates making a week-long trip to Jamaica in August to conduct follow-up interviews and site visits. During the 2025-2026 academic year, the undergraduate researcher will dedicate 5 hours a week to sustaining progress on the project which includes support with grant writing to raise funds to hire a film editor.

Number of available positions: One, preselected

