

Diversifying the Stories We Tell

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Sam Mistry '19 discusses his Bennington experience and new internship at the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program.



“When I was going into college, I knew I wanted to do theatre, but I didn’t know what type. I didn’t want to throw myself into a conservatory program and limit what I’d get to explore,” said Sam Mistry ’19. “What Bennington offers that excited me was the chance to be interdisciplinary—to integrate my interests rather than have to pick a track from the get-go.”

While a student at Bennington, Mistry’s [Plan](#) in Drama explored how to expand “both the stories we tell on stage and the way we tell them.”

This reimagining of content and form put diversity at the forefront of his work, as exemplified by Mistry’s collaborative senior project, a play called *Around the Fire*, co-written with Ron Anahaw ’19. *Around the Fire* follows four students of color at a historically white private liberal arts college on their pre-orientation wilderness survival trip in the woods. The only requirement of the trip is that each student must write and share a story about their lives around the fire.

“We wrote this play to investigate our own questions regarding survival, solidarity, and storytelling as they pertain to students of color in a largely white

institution,” said Mistry. “What is the line between inclusion and tokenization? When is telling a story an act of being seen, versus when is it exploitative? The piece highlights the complexity of 'diversity and inclusion,' not only in the power dynamic between the white counselor and the students of color, but between the students of color themselves.”

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As Mistry’s work in Drama evolved, so did his interests in other fields, most notably Film.

“I grew up immersed in theatre,” said Mistry, whose parents Zaraawar Mistry ’88 and Leslye Orr founded [Dreamland Arts](#) in St. Paul, MN. “But as I grew older, I became more drawn to film’s accessibility: anybody can view a video anywhere in the world now, and that visibility can shape cultures. I became interested in diversifying what stories are represented and the sheer number of people that could be reached.”

Mistry cites *The Farewell*, the comedic drama about a Chinese family reuniting under the guise of a fake wedding to pay their last respects to an ailing grandmother, as one of his favorite recent releases.

“The release of *The Farewell* was monumental,” said Mistry. “It was one of the first films to be shown across major cinemas that is primarily in another language. *The Farewell* is culturally specific to the Asian American experience, but empathetically universal to audiences from all backgrounds.”

From studying with a Taiko drumming master at [Taiko Center of the Pacific](#) in Honolulu, HI, to interning at [Great Arizona Puppet Theater](#) in Phoenix, AZ, Mistry’s [Field Work Term](#) experiences have also broadened his artistic perspective.

Mistry spent his second Field Work Term in India, living with his grandmother and working with **Nishumbita Ballet and Theatre Group**, a social justice street theatre company. Nishumbita's mission lines up with Mistry's own beliefs in art as an avenue to address social issues, particularly LGBTQ+ and women's rights in India.

"Nishumbita was transformative for me," said Mistry. "I had the classic Bennington experience of ending up studying myself, in addition to reflecting on my studies. It was a big time of personal growth, as I explored my own identity and also learned and performed in another culture, another country."

Mistry's final Field Work Term, spent working with **Erik Holmberg '86** on FX's **Legion**, gave Mistry a direction for his future career.

"My Field Work Term at *Legion* was amazing; Erik set it up so I spent each week of my internship in a different department," said Mistry. "I moved from the production office to the art department to camera to working on set as a production assistant to finishing in post-production. I got to go through the entire process, start to finish, of a television episode."

While Mistry didn't leave *Legion* feeling "like I'd found the one thing I wanted to do more than anything else," he found his takeaway to be equally as useful.

"I discovered the interconnectedness of all the departments," said Mistry. "The show couldn't happen without every single person who was involved. The development is a collaboration, and feeling that interconnectedness was really exciting."

To further pursue his passion for Film, Mistry recently moved to Los Angeles, CA, where he is interning for the **Sundance Institute Feature Film Program**, which "advances original storytelling from distinctive voices" by supporting and assisting independent filmmakers as they development and complete their feature projects.

"I'm looking forward to immersing myself in the industry I want to work in, at a place that has a message I care about," said Mistry. "*The Farewell* originally came out of the Feature Film Program at Sundance, so it's exciting to see the type of work that I aspire to make coming out of the place I'm interning at."

To current Bennington students, Mistry touts the importance taking advantage of mentorship, such as he had with his advisor, **Kirk Jackson**, and also encourages students to explore outside their comfort zones.

“Looking back my different Field Work Terms, and the courses I took in Psychology with [Ella Ben Hagai](#)—on [The Psychology of Feelings](#), [Cross-cultural Psychology](#), and [Psychology of Gender and Sexuality](#)—these experiences ended up informing my art, but they were outside of what I thought was this black and white thing I thought I wanted to do. Bennington provides the space for you to find other passions that inform the work you’re doing.”

By Natalie Redmond, Associate Writer