Regional winners – two USU students bring home Student Production Awards

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Avonlea Woodward holding her award

PHOENIX, AZ – Two media production students from the Department of Communication were awarded first place in the region for their work.

Avonlea Woodward and River Rock won in the Arts / Entertainment / Cultural Affairs and Solo Storyteller categories.

"My jaw literally dropped!! I'm not kidding," Woodward said. "It was such a surreal moment!"

Woodward's story "Healing Through Dancing" highlighted Utah State's longstanding POWWOW celebration.

"I decided to focus my story on the dancers and explore what and whom they are dancing for. I interviewed several dancers from different tribes, as well as event coordinators," Woodward said. "One of my favorite interviews was with my friend's mom, who has attended almost every POWWOW."

This was Woodward's first time attending a POWWOW. Growing up in Austria, Woodward had never seen the celebration and wanted to learn about the cultural significance.

"While interviewing the dancers, I realized how special and meaningful each dance is and how much significance is carried in the traditional clothing and regalia," Woodward said. "I was really inspired to do my best to show viewers just how special and meaningful a POWWOW is."

Her work captured that significance, and judges noticed.

The Rocky Mountain Southwest National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Chapter nominates college students every year for its regional competition spanning Arizona, Utah, Southeastern California, and New Mexico.

After students submit their work, a panel of professional journalists judges and then nominates exceptional stories.

"Interesting story on culture. Good job using natural sound," wrote one judge about Woodward's story. "Nice work on the writing."

Another judge agreed about Woodward's writing and use of natural sound.

"Good framing and lighting on your subjects," wrote a second judge.

Woodward had no previous experience with a camera but enrolled in Intro to Video with Associate Professor Chris Garff and Pressroom with Assistant Professor Erin Cox.



River Rock. Headshot. Photo cred: Erin Cox

"They gave me a strong foundation that I was able to build on while creating my own stories," Woodward said. "I was lucky to have amazing professors and classmates who were always willing to give me advice and help me make my stories better. Without their support, I would not have learned nearly as much as I did."

Cox was impressed with Woodward from the beginning.

"She was eager to learn, ask questions and put in the work to tell excellent stories," Cox said. "Not only is she an incredibly gifted storyteller, but Avonlea is kind and caring. She will go far in her pursuits."

Rock won first place for his story on a new Olympic sport, ski mountaineering, or "SKIMO."

"It's nice to be recognized," Rock said. "It means a lot that people can look at something I've created and think it's good, think it's worthwhile and think it's worthy of attention."

The story was a quick turnaround for Rock.

As a solo storyteller, he pulled together a story with short interviews, a limited window to film the ski mountaineers, while navigating three separate cameras – a drone, ENG camera, and phone.

Challenges he not only overcame but excelled at.

"River is meticulous with his editing. I am so impressed with his natural talent and his willingness to work hard," Cox said.

Judges were impressed with Rock's work as well.

"Wow! That was very well done! The shooting, editing and composition of the story is amazing!" wrote one judge.

Another complimented Rock's content and creativity.

"Very good execution that was complemented by visuals," wrote a second judge. "Excellent action footage. Great clarity."

Both Rock and Woodward were recognized at an award ceremony on September 19 in Phoenix, Arizona.

Woodward flew from Austria to attend.

"Being able to attend the ceremony in person also gave me a great opportunity to meet new people and network," Woodward said. "It was really special!"

Woodward is hoping to work as a journalist in Europe, where she returned to wrap up her final year of school.

Rock hopes to work in audio production once he finishes his degree with Utah State.

Five Utah State University students were nominated for their work.



Avonlea Woodward stands on the red carpet at the Student Production Awards in Phoenix, AZ.
Photo cred: Rocky Mountain Southwest Chapter NATAS