

Andrew Repasky McElhinney '93

Film director-producer

By any definition, Andrew Repasky McElhinney '93 is creative. Not only is he a film director and producer, professor, author, theater director, and video editor, but he is able to be successful in all of these roles, in part, because he is a self-proclaimed iconoclast who sees the world uniquely.

Andrew is a film director-producer who primarily makes a living as a writer, but in between directorial assignments, he feeds his creativity in many other ways. "I teach writing, cinema studies, or American Studies at Rutgers University," he said. "I've also done uncredited rewrites and dialogue polishes on screenplays, written ad copy for a company that released public domain movies on DVDs, directed some theater, and constructed some video installations."

Andrew credits his time at Benchmark for helping him first learn how to engage his creativity. "What I think was going on [in school] was that I wasn't listening or engaging, and therefore, not successfully communicating," he said. "However, Benchmark was instrumental for me in its rigorous writing program. Learning to write well, and revise, I learned to communicate and socialize on

a higher level."

Andrew's love of visual media began at a young age, but he did not tie his polished writing skills into his love of film until high school. "I did a ton of creative writing at Benchmark, but by early high school, I realized I was not—at that time—a novelist," he said. "Cinema, however, offered a potential for a synthesis of forms (and mediums) that I could focus using my—then precocious—verbal communications skills."

In 1994, while at Abington Friends School, he formed *ARMcinema25.com*, a company devoted to producing movies. That year was also when Andrew made his first movie. "The fact that Benchmark stressed the process of organization, writing, revision, and re-writing really gave me a leg up on mastering the creative process," Andrew said. "After all, good writing happens in the organization and re-writing, not unlike directing something."

Knowing that he was following his passion, Andrew continued to work hard and released his first feature film, *Magdalen*, in 1998. Since then, he has been the proud director-producer of four other feature films, a number of short subjects, and video installations.



"During my time at Benchmark, the demands on the students really illustrated by example that you personally had to commit to achieving in order to be successful," he said. "From there, Benchmark suggested that we be 'life-long learners' and make increasing demands on ourselves (without regard to external factors). Chances are that anyone who demands a lot of themselves and is lucky enough to be gifted will be successful. And, of course, experience is what really builds confidence."

Some of Andrew's other accomplishments include earning an undergraduate degree from The New School for Social Research (NYC) and a Ph.D. from The European Graduate School (EGS) in Switzerland, as well as publishing a scholarly book on 20th century cinema titled *Second Takes: Remaking Film, Remaking America* (McFarland, 2013).

His advice to Benchmark students is: "Be self-focused and self-disciplined. Read and research as much as possible. Excel at school as quickly as possible, go to grad school, get a Ph.D. and, while you do that, explore personal, creative ambitions. The best time to break into anything is when you are under 20 years of age. Work backwards from what you want your obituary to read." 

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