



**Suree Towfighnia**  
**Curriculum Vitae**

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## EDUCATION

**Columbia College Chicago, 2006**, MFA recipient (emphasis documentary/directing).

Studied under Michael Rabiger, Herb DiGioia, Russell Porter, Bruce Sheridan, Wen Hwa-Tsao, Paula Froehle.

**University of California, Santa Cruz, 1995**, BA History, BA Latin American Studies. Studied under David Sweet.

## HONORS / AWARDS

- 2019 Student Undergraduate Research Fellowship, Evergreen State College [*Café es vida / Coffee is Life*]
- 2018 The Evergreen State College, Professional Development Grant (First International Assembly for Community Development Across Borders, Oaxaca, Mexico, presentation)
- 2018 Student Undergraduate Research Fellowship, Evergreen State College [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2018 Faculty Foundation Grant Recipient, Evergreen State College [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2015 John Michaels Award at the Big Muddy Film Festival [*Crying Earth Rise Up*]
- 2014 Grant Recipient, American Endowment Fund [*Crying Earth Rise Up*]
- 2011 Grant Recipient, Honor the Earth [*Crying Earth Rise Up*]
- 2010 Grant Recipient, Seventh Generation Fund [*Crying Earth Rise Up*]
- 2010 Grant Recipient, Indigenous Environmental Network / WMAN [*Crying Earth Rise Up*]
- 2010 Grant Recipient, Vision Maker Media, Corporation for Public Broadcasting [*Crying Earth Rise Up*]
- 2008 Best Director, Red Nation Film Festival [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2008 Best Documentary, Red Nation Film Festival [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2008 Documentary Winner, University Film and Video Association Conference [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2008 Best Native American Documentary, Indie Spirit Film Festival [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2009 Programming Selection, Smithsonian, Museum of the American Indian [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2008 Audience award, Sedona International Film Festival [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2008 Audience award, Big Muddy Film Festival [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2007 Best Documentary, High Times' Stony Award [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2007 Honorable Mention, IDA Pare Lorentz for Best Documentary [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2007 Programming Selection, PBS' POV 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2007 Funding Award, POV: The American Documentary and CPB [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2006 Grant Recipient, Playboy Foundation [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2005 Grant Recipient, Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2004 Grant Recipient, Native American Public Telecommunications, CPB [*Standing Silent Nation*]
- 2004 Studs Terkel Award for Community Media, Student Scholarship, Community Media Workshop [*Tampico*]
- 2004 Scholarship Recipient, Judith Weston, Directing Actors Workshop
- 2003 Albert P. Wiseman Fund [*Tampico*]
- 2002 Columbia College Production Funds, multiple years [*Tampico*]
- 2001 Graduate Opportunity Award, Columbia College
- 2000 Student Representative Cinethics: 2000, North Carolina School of the Arts [Columbia College Chicago]
- 2000 Rosebud Award for Graduate Scholarship, Columbia College
- 1999 Follett Fellowship, Columbia College

## TEACHING / MASTER CLASSES / ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

**Adjunct Faculty, the Evergreen State College, 2017-present.** Co-teach media studies, geography, and native studies class *Catastrophes: Community Resilience in the Face of Natural Disaster*, with geography/native studies faculty. Co-taught media arts and studies foundational, interdisciplinary, yearlong program, *Mediaworks*. *Mediaworks* is an intensive program with 45+ students who stay with the program all year and learn theory, history, and practice. Iterations have included: *Mediaworks: Nonfiction and Experimental Approaches to the Moving Image*, with visual artist and photo faculty; *Mediaworks: Signifying Power and Difference on Screen(s)*, with community media faculty and queer studies/remix faculty; *Mediaworks: Animation, Documentary, and Experimental Approaches to the Moving Image*, with animation faculty. Developed and taught summer classes *Writing for Film/Video* and *Video Production Field Skills*.

**Instructor, Arizona State University, 2014-2017.** Developed and taught *Introduction to Documentary Writing* in the Film and Media Studies and English Departments (online).

**Part-time Faculty, Columbia College Chicago, 2003-2005, 2006, 2013.** Co-taught *Producing the Documentary*, developed and co-taught the course *Visualizing the Documentary*, a collaboration between the Documentary and Cinematography departments as an interdisciplinary approach to documentary composition. Developed survey course *The Music Documentary*. Taught courses in *Documentary I*, the introduction course in Documentary Theory and Practice. Students created a short, character-based documentary as their final project. Advised on internships, student groups and independent projects.

**Professor, International School of Cinema and Television (EICTV) in Cuba, January 2011, November 2012.**

*Introduction to Documentary Intensive, Aprender a Mirar (To Begin to See)*, for first-year advanced degree students, January 2011 and November 2012. Taught documentary aesthetics, theory and practice, as well as intensive group production to thirty inter-disciplinary students from all over the world in preparation for a director-led group practicum of films exploring a small community located off-campus. This 21-class workshop introduced students to documentary during their first year of the three-year program.

**Documentary / Media Trainer, Owe Aku, 2010-2012.** Created *Moccasins on the Ground* Non-Violent Direct Action trainings for the indigenous campaign to stop the Tar Sands Keystone XL Pipeline. Developed curriculum and training on “Creating Compelling Stories”, “Documenting Your Movement from Within” and “Working with Mainstream Media”. Taught intensive training workshops on storytelling techniques and technical skills to effectively document a targeted message: stopping the Keystone XL Pipeline.

**Facilitator and Consultant with the Lakota Media Project, a Prairie Dust Films and Owe Aku initiative, 2003-2018.** Mentors youth and women in filmmaking and social activism on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The Lakota Media Project creates original non-fiction media from their own perspective, 2003-present.

**Professor, International School of Cinema and Television (EICTV) in Cuba, Sept 2008.** *Documentary Directing Intensive* for second-year advanced degree students in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba. Introduced thirty-two multi-disciplinary film students from twelve countries to documentary form, theory and practice. Students created individual documentary films (that turned into an impromptu production during an evacuation and refuge during Hurricane Ike). This course prepared students for a six-week group practicum.

**Teaching Artist with Project AIM and the Center for Community Arts Partnership.** Collaborated with classroom teachers in Chicago Public Schools to integrate filmmaking into everyday curriculum. Created films with elementary classrooms on student-driven topics, including: immigration, water, social concerns, war, gangs, peace, water and other student interests. Chicago, 2004-2010.

**Documentary Workshop Curriculum Development, Trainer and Consultant, See 3 Communications.** Worked on National Council on Aging's Older Americans Act Campaign; Create and taught a three-part training series to representatives from dozens of national organizations, who returned to their home communities to document stories of Older Americans. These short videos were used to invoke local representatives to support reauthorizing the Older Americans Act, 2010-2011.

**Master Class Instructor, Cinema/Chicago.** Media literacy, documentary storytelling and educational integration to create classroom approaches using media for Chicago Public School teachers at the Chicago International Film Festival Teacher's Institute.

**Master Class documentary instruction, See 3 Communications.** Storytelling and production techniques for community, non-profits and faith-based organizations, 2004-2012.

**Guest Lecturer, Columbia College Chicago.** Taught documentary classes on fundraising, production, cinematography, documentary aesthetics and documentary career options to Narrative Film Production, Producing the Documentary and Documentary 1 courses, 2004-2012.

**Instructor and Presenter, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.** Created teacher and artist workshop "Deciphering Otherness: A Celebration of Contemporary Identity". Explored strategies that teachers and artists can utilize with regard to issues around contemporary identity, representation and who gets to tell the story. Presented ideas of inclusion and creating an equal classroom through the film process, Chicago, 2009.

**Artist-in-Residence, Snow City Arts Foundation.** Taught hospitalized, pediatric patients filmmaking concepts and produced documentary, experimental and animated shorts, 1999-2002.

**Artist facilitator, Latino Art Beat.** *Mind the Gap* documentary exchange project. Collaboration between teens in Chicago and the Isle of Wight, England, in response to post-September 11th international relations, 2002.

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- ***Café es vida / Coffee is Life*** (working title), Director/Producer/DP, Prairie Dust Films, documentary feature, work in progress, 2018-present

A feature documentary and animation project about cooperative farmers in Oaxaca, Mexico, who grow specialty coffee on their traditional lands.

- ***Standing Silent Nation***, Director/DP/Editor, Prairie Dust Films, short, work in progress, 2018-present

An update to the 2007 feature documentary that chronicles the first three years of White Plume Hemp growing.

- ***Crying Earth Rise Up***, Director/Producer/DP, Prairie Dust Films, documentary feature, 2015

A feature documentary and multi-platform engagement project that intimately examines the human cost of uranium mining on the Great Plains and its impact on sacred water. Distributed by NETA and Public Television. Currently broadcast on television and in universities and festivals. Raised over \$140,000 from Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT) / Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Seventh Generation Fund, Western Mining Action Network / Indigenous Environmental Network, Kickstarter and individual donations.

- ***Four Days in Chicago***, Producer/Camera, feature documentary directed by Academy Award Winner, Haskell Wexler, 2013

A feature exploring Haskell Wexler's return to his hometown of Chicago to document the populist protest against the 2012 NATO Summit. Select screenings include: Chicago International Social Justice Film Festival, the Nation tour, Woodstock Film Festival, Gene Siskel Film Center, Columbia College Chicago.

- ***Standing Silent Nation***, Director/DP, Prairie Dust Films, documentary feature, 2007

A broadcast-length documentary chronicling a Lakota family's struggle to grow industrial hemp on sovereign tribal land and the DEA's refusal to allow it. Nationally broadcast on PBS's POV: The American Documentary and distributed by Documentary Educational Resources, Vision Maker Video, and Prairie Dust Films. Raised over \$130,000 from the Playboy Foundation, NAPT / CPB, The Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media, POV: The American Documentary/ CPB and donations and events. Selected film festival highlights and awards include: Sedona International Film Festival, Audience Award; Red Nation Film Festival, Best Documentary, Best Producer, Best Director; Indie Spirit Film Festival, Best Native American Documentary; Big Muddy Film Festival, Audience Award; IDA Pare Lorentz nomination for Best Documentary; and High Times Magazine Documentary of the Year.

- ***Tampico***, MFA Thesis, Director/DP/Co-Editor, Columbia College Chicago, 2006

A short documentary about a woman's struggle to support herself and her 50-year old mentally challenged brother by playing their family's traditional music in the subways of Chicago. Festival, funding and award highlights include: winner of the Studs Terkel Award from the Community Media Workshop; screened at the Chicago International Documentary, Milwaukee International, Sacramento Music festivals; raised over \$6000 in grants and scholarships.

- **Peoples Media Project, Select Shorts**, Director/DP/Editor, Community Media Collective, 2006-present

A collective of documentary filmmakers, writers, musicians, photographers, and journalists who travel and document stories of resistance and empowerment across the lands. Selected works include: from the Standing Rock campaign, *We Do This With Love for the People*, *We Are All One Warrior- Why We Wear a Mask*, *Water Protectors Accosted on Public Roads*, *From the No DAPL Frontlines*; from southwest water protection work, *Pii Paash Nation Fight to Protect Water and Land*, *What Do You Think About Sewer Water?* *Kids of the World Unite*, *Louise Benally Questions Tribal Leaders About Bad Water Deals*, *Why Do You Exist*; from anti-war and immigrant rights work, *Voices Against SB1070*, *Cindy Sheehan Tour De Peace*, *Snowstorm Activists*, *Wounded Vets Ball on Inauguration Eve*, *Kirtan Chant for Change*. Distributed online, on social media and in community events.

## **DOCUMENTARY EXPERIENCE / DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY / DIRECTOR / PRODUCER**

### **Feature Documentaries, Prairie Dust Films, Director, Producer, Director of Photography (2001-present)**

- *Café es vida / Coffee is Life* (working title, work-in-progress) collaboration with female, Oaxacan coffee cooperative about sustainable coffee production in indigenous communities.
- *Crying Earth Rise Up*, (Corporation for Public Broadcasting/ Vision Maker Media funded, 2015) about the impact of contemporary uranium mining on the water supply.
- *Standing Silent Nation* (POV, CPB/ Vision Maker Media funded, documentary feature, 2007) about a Lakota family's battle to grow industrial hemp on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

### **Feature Documentaries, Producer (2013)**

- *Four Days in Chicago*, (Haskell Wexler Directed) exploring public dissent and popular protest against the NATO conference that took place in Chicago in 2012.

### **Documentary Director of Photography (2000-present)**

- *The Calling* documentary feature, Mexico segment [The Kindling Group]
- *Woke Up Black* [Mary Morten],
- *Rock Mamas* (Dandy Warhols European Tour), feature doc about the rock and roll moms [Jackie Weisman]
- *The Hands of Ricci*, feature on violin prodigy [Stradivari Society, Geoffrey Fushi]

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE / DIRECTOR / PRODUCER / EDITOR / DP**

### **Prairie Dust Films, 2002-present**

Co-founder of independent documentary production company. In distribution on Crying Earth Rise Up and Standing Silent Nation. Provides documentary and video services to non-profits, organizations and commercial businesses. Develops and executes marketing plans, social justice and environmental campaigns, outreach efforts and distribution strategies. Offers master classes, training and consulting on documentary projects, storytelling and production. Trains and mentors the Lakota Media Project, a youth and women documentary organization on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

### **State of Arizona, Department of Economic Security, 2015-2017**

Producer of short documentary success stories for state agency that services economically disenfranchised, elderly and special needs individuals. Completed over 25 short videos that are distributed on social media and the state's YouTube channel. Collaborative videos between many state agencies, interagency divisions and community partners. Subjects included: a community organization that provides housing for homeless youth; a couple with developmental disabilities celebrating twenty-five years of marriage; a young woman with Down Syndrome who runs her own bakery; a reentry training program for prisoners about to be released.

### **Online Media, 2008-present**

- **Al Jazeera Plus, Director/DP.** "Copper Miners Vs. Apache People- Fighting for Sacred Land", May 2015 for AJ+ story with over 3 million views on Facebook; "Remembering James Foley", October 18, 2014; "Apache Tribe is Taking on a Copper Mine (One Year Occupation)", March 2, 2016 [AJ+].
- **Peoples Media Project, Director/DP/Editor.** Independent media collective that produces street journalism from contemporary frontlines. Shorts from Standing Rock include: "We Do This with Love for the People", "We Are Here to Protect Water and Sacred Sites", "We Are All One Warrior- Why We Wear a Mask", "Frontline Water Protectors Accosted" and "Why Do You Exist?" Previous shorts: "A Graveyard for Water", "NDN R.A.P. (Rebels Against Pipelines)", "Protect Sacred Water, No Pipelines", "Cindy Sheehan's Tour De Peace", "Voices Against SB1070: Dolores Huerta", among others.

### **Photojournalism, Corporate, and Advertising Agency Work, 1999-2016**

- Photojournalist, freelance news camera and live-truck operator, Chicago 2004-2005 and Sacramento, CA 1997-99 [Univision Channel 66 & 19]
- Camera/Editor Ethnography [Black Raspberry Consumer Insights, Buchanan Group, Portico Research]
- Director / DP / Producer /Editor, commercials and short videos, Chicago [Coil, Counts, Ford, and Cheney]
- Multi-camera video recording of Strataveria Society violin performances [Bein and Fushi].

### **Select Community Media, Non-Profit Videos and Short Non-Fictions, 2004-present**

- Field Producer, Sound Recordist, *Who Needs Sleep?* Chicago Unit [Haskell Wexler]
- Director/DP, *Weight of A Nation Documentary* [Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children / Dell]
- Director / Producer, *Railroaders Exhibit*, five media installations for Chicago History Museum [Media Monster]
- Director/ Editor, *Women for Obama*, Obama for America campaign video for first presidency
- Director/DP/Editor, *Project AIM Is*, documentary on the importance of arts integration in public schools [CCAP]
- Director/DP/Editor, *KIPP: Chicago*, video on the strength of a KIPP education in at-risk communities [KIPP]
- Director/DP/Editor, *National Hellenic Museum*, short video on new Greek museum in Chicago [NHM]
- Media Producer / DP / Editor, *What's Your Calling?* transmedia companion for PBS' *The Calling* [Kindling Group]
- DP/ Editor, *State Fair Healthcare Stories*, shot, edited and co-directed five videos profiling personal stories from state fairs as part of the healthcare reform campaign, summer 2009 [Center For Community Change]

- Director/DP/Editor, *Chicago Magazine Green Awards*, short video showcasing honorees [Chicago Magazine]
- Director/DP/Editor, *Chicago Run: Fast Track to a Healthy Life*, fundraising and educational video [Chicago Run]
- Director, *Oh the Places You'll Go*, short about professional artists who work with hospitalized children, 2008 [Snow City Arts Foundation]
- Director/DP, PBS "My Source" spots highlighting public television's youth impact, 2008 [ITVS]
- Producer/Director/DP, *A Return to Wholeness: A Breast Cancer Recovery DVD Toolkit* [Media Monster]
- Director/DP, *UCAN: Triumph Over Tragedy*, documentary on youth overcoming trauma [See 3 and UCAN]
- Director/DP *Healthy Co-Parenting for Teens* [Illinois Dept. of Human Services]
- Director/DP, *Project AIM: Artists Mentoring Teachers*, video on arts integration in Chicago [See 3 and CCAP]
- Director, *Diabetes and You*, webisodes on healthy living with diabetes [See 3 and One Economy]
- Producer/Director, *Charting the Course*, organizational video [Society for the Arts in Healthcare]
- Director/DP/ Editor, Snow City Arts Foundation video [Snow City Arts]
- Producer *Silent Crisis: Financial Elderly Abuse* [Illinois Dept. on Aging]

### **Technical Coordinator of the Michael Rabiger Center for Documentary, 2000-2004**

Responsible for running the Documentary Center; equipment budget, purchase and maintenance; programming and educational events for students, faculty and staff; student competitions and screenings; organized and ran professional development opportunities for students; supervised student workers; trained all documentary students on equipment; mentored the student documentary group, Viva Doc.

### **PUBLISHED WORKS**

- "Lakota Women and Ranchers Lead Charge to Break Silence against Uranium Mine", article published in *Waging Non-Violence*, October 5, 2015.
- "Developing a Short Film: From a Humble Concept to the Big Screen", *AIMprint, New Relationships in the Arts and Learning*, 2008.

### **PRESENTATIONS AND HOSTED EVENTS**

- *Nurturing Roots: Culture, Sustainability, Land Use* Symposium and Teach-in at the Evergreen State College, to listen to indigenous community members from Oaxaca, the great plains, and the Pacific Northwest share testimonies about land use, migration, and cultural protection, November 21, 2019. Organizer/Host
- *Mediaworks* Alumni Panel, featuring 5-6 notable and diverse media arts alumni who returned to share stories and advice with students, May 2018 and May 2019. Organizer/Host
- *The Waters Connect Us*, Symposium at the Evergreen State College, in support of water protection and restoration work from the southwest to the Pacific Northwest, November 13-14, 2018. Organizer/Host
- Presentation on *Water Protection Work in Indigenous Communities* and screened *Crying Earth Rise Up* at the First International Assembly for Community Development across Borders, in Oaxaca, Mexico, August 2018.
- *Unite to Fight, Lakota School of Liberation*: Developed and teach workshops in "Documenting a Movement from Within the Movement", "Media Literacy" and "The Role of Media in Social Activism", 2008-present.

- *The Waters Connect Us: A Gathering on the Gila River Indian Community*, in support of water protection work being done from Canada to Ecuador, Spring 2016. Organizer/Host
- Environmental Film Forums: A screening and event series in New York, Chicago, the Pine Ridge Reservation, and in the southwest to use films to encourage community dialogue and action, 2009-2017. Organizer
- Sister Cities: Presenter of film section on diversity, for Lahore / Chicago Sister Cities event
- *From Pine Ridge to Chicago: A Celebration of Environmental Activists and Their Work*, Chicago, 2011. Organizer/Host/Trainer/Youth Media
- Niles North High School: Regular Guest Lecturer to American Studies, Environmental Science classes, and social justice club. 2008-2016.
- *Silent Nation Project*: Three events to support positive social change, 2008. Organizer/Host
- “Lost in Translation” workshop developer to Teaching Artists with Center for Community Arts Partnership. Interactive workshop self-reflective exploration of things that are lost when we don’t speak our language.

## **SPECIAL SKILLS/EQUIPMENT / SOFTWARE PROFICIENCY**

• Spanish fluency • Journalism and media ethics • Archival research, interviewing, writing, directing, assistant directing, producing, fundraising • Cameras: HD, 16mm, HDV, EX3, FS5, Digital SLR, DVC Pro, Betacam, DVCAMs, 8mm • Field production, multi-camera shoots, technical directing in studio and field, drone directing, familiarity with VR • Sound recording: Shure Mixer/boards/lavs/stereo mics • Editing: Adobe Creative Suites (Premiere and some AfterFX), Avid, Final Cut Pro and X • Lighting: Studio, Interview, Green Screen, Infinity • Audio Software: ProTools and Audition • Campaign development and management, community engagement, outreach • Basic helicopter shooting

REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST