

Daniel Bernardi from San Francisco State University, USA – Semester 1 2017



Daniel and his partner Helen enjoying a Cantabrian summer

Where you have come from and what do you teach?

I am a professor in the School of Cinema at San Francisco State University. I typically teach one class a semester either on critical race studies or filmmaking. I also run a documentary file centre. We are making 100 short documentaries on veterans from around the world; each film tells the story of a single veteran and is made by a professional director. We are also making a feature one on the 'American War' as it is called in Vietnam and are now heading into editing and sound design. A short feature on the film can be found [here](#)

What interested you in the Erskine Programme/Why did you want to come to UC?

I visited UC in 1999 and again in 2013, and thus saw the impact of the earthquake on the campus, students and staff. During the 2013 trip I reviewed the status of film education on campus, writing a report for the Pro-Vice Chancellor. I met many

wonderful people. I saw the energy of the students and the commitment and passion of the staff, as well as an understandable amount of post-Earthquake anxiety. So when Cinema Studies staff asked if I'd be interested in the fellowship, having just ended a tour of duty as a Dean of a big College in the US, my partner, Helen and I jumped at the opportunity. Helen has always wanted to visit New Zealand. My two older boys, Sojin and Suhunny, were a bit nervous knowing they were going to have to wear uniforms to school, but they took to it fast. They're at Ilam School, and that's a terrific school. And the youngest, Sondro, started childcare here...right down the street. He wasn't happy at first, but has also taken to it thanks to the wonderful staff. So we came for some family adventure – and so I could do my part to participate in the growth of Cinema Studies at UC – and it is working out really, really well.



Suhunny and Sondro having fun at the water park

What have you been doing at UC?

I elected to teach two classes. The first focuses on science fiction film and ideology, specifically the 'sign of the alien.' We look at signs of aliens in religious scripture, science (from Percival Lowell's work on Mars to today's planter hunters), self-alienation (various forms of cosmetic surgery and body modification), UFOs, abductions, and, of course, popular film and television. The class is interested in how otherwise 'trivial' signs of aliens in popular culture carry troubling ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality, among others. I'm also teaching documentary film. We're looking at the history of documentary film, from actualities made around 1895 to Triumph of the Will and Nanook of the North to films on the Iraq War, Global Warming and homophobia. Students get to make an iPhone doc as their final project, and they're engaging some really interesting subjects. For research, I'm outlining a book on whiteness as race in today's USA (the recent election providing some critical opportunities). And, of courses, seeing as much of the city and area as my kids can handle.



Sojin and Suhny enjoying the playground at Ilam School

What have you most enjoyed about your time here at UC/Christchurch?

I am really enjoying the extra time with my family. I spent ten years straight in administration, which was tough on my kids (the oldest is only ten). And it was tough on my partner. But we're back into the groove of adventure. I have also really enjoyed working with my students; they're as 'hungry' for film studies – criticism and social justice filmmaking – as students I've taught at SF State, ASU, and UCLA. They have made my transition back to teaching enjoyable and stimulating. I have some terrific students here. And, I have enjoyed reengaging with my Cinema Studies colleagues, the College of Art, and the campus more generally. This is a terrific place to live and to work.