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BOSTON UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM FALL 2007

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## Journalism Students Go Down Under To Learn Craft



Sydney Opera House. Photo courtesy of John G. Reay

By Lauren Gniazdowski

Boston University students with a love of writing and travel got the chance to indulge their passions last summer with a new internship program in Sydney, Australia.

Associate Director of Academic Programming for the Sydney Summer Internship Program, Sharon Clarke, developed the new course, entitled Travel Writing in Australia.

The course was offered for the first time last summer to students participating in the Sydney Internship Program through Boston University International Programs.

"From my conversations with students on our B.U. Program over the semesters, I realized there are parts of Australia with which they are unfamiliar," Clarke, a native of

Australia, said in an email. "It seemed a good idea to offer students an opportunity to explore and write about places they may otherwise never see."

Clarke said the purpose of the course is to broaden students' abilities and knowledge in travel writing across both professional and creative forms of the genre. There was an emphasis on producing written work focused on coastal and bushland Australia.

"I think the course is different because it blends experience and creativity: the physical, visual and oral savoring of travel outside the classroom and then the bringing of this inside the classroom as the foundation for everything that follows," said Clarke.

The course began with two classroom sessions to introduce

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## B.U. Professor Recalls Making History with Nixon

By Jennifer Cendrowski

Perched on a chair in a room at the Beverly Hilton hotel, Robert Zelnick is pretending to be Richard Nixon. The year is 1977, and 36-year-old Zelnick is posing as the former President to help British television journalist, David Frost, prepare for the next day's interview with Nixon himself.

The Nixon Interviews, broadcast in four 90-minute segments, were the first interviews conducted since Nixon's resignation in 1974.

"Nothing like them had ever been done before, nothing like them has ever been done since," says Zelnick, who was the executive editor

of the project. "No questions were barred. We had complete editorial control over what aired. We asked about Vietnam, Watergate, and other alleged abuses of power and it produced some of the most dramatic moments in the history of public affairs television."

Thirty years later, The Nixon Interviews are being performed live in London, with Zelnick's own one-time acting stint being reenacted on stage by a professional. The play, Frost/Nixon, written by famed screenwriter and playwright, Peter Morgan, began showing in London in August 2006, and came to the States on Broadway in late April. It is

also being adapted into a film that will be released by Universal and directed by Ron Howard, who began filming in Hollywood in August.

"By the end of the interviews there were reporters from TIME and Newsweek who suggested that I had come to look and sound like Nixon," says Zelnick.

Zelnick was recommended to Frost by Nixon opponent and political journalist Joseph Kraft. Frost, who at the time was 38, persuaded Nixon to sit down with him after promising the former President \$600,000, a piece of the profits from the interviews and the chance to redeem himself to the American people. Frost relied on a

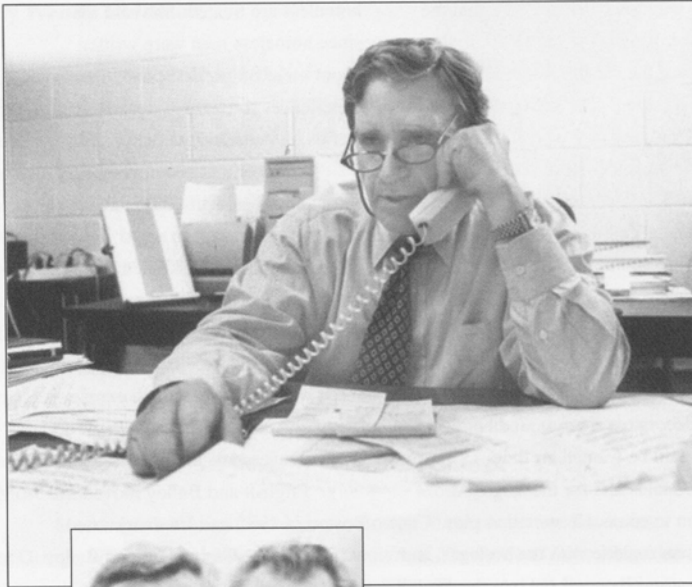
team of researchers, led by Zelnick, to prepare him for the interviews.

Zelnick divided the information gathered from research and interviews into four segments: Watergate, other abuses, domestic policy, and foreign policy. The team briefed Frost on the case, and the role-playing began.

So how does Zelnick feel about his life and the work that he labored over being resurrected and made into entertainment, both on stage and on the big screen?

"First of all, it's fun," he says. "It's good that the interviews are recognized as significant so many years after the fact, and there's still a

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Journalist David Frost With Richard Nixon.  
Photo: Google Images

Professor Zelnick. Photo courtesy of  
Daily Free Press

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lot of public interest in it. But the other thing that you're conscious of is that some poetic liberties have been taken with the facts. They invent some scenes. They have some things in there that I know for a fact never happened. And you don't know exactly what to do about it because you don't want to be a bad sport."

To prevent Morgan from taking too much creative license with the truth, Zelnick met with the playwright in New York and told him anything and everything he wanted to know about The Nixon Interviews.

Even though Zelnick's experience working with the former President three decades ago remains unchanged in his mind, his perception of Nixon has evolved over the years.

"My feelings about Nixon at this time are complex," says Zelnick. "First of all, I started out with the normal, liberal bias against Nixon. He was the man who was one of the big communist hunters in the 40's and 50's. We heard he had run dirty campaigns in California. Then there was the 'Checkers' speech with his stupid little cocker spaniel cavorting about the room. I think I have a deeper understanding of Nixon's importance as a political figure. At the time, I regarded Watergate and the abuses of power as a threat to basic American institutions. Looking back on it, it seems more like a stunt, at least the Watergate break-in. I still think he was a man who handled that affair so badly that by the time he left office there was no alternative but impeachment or resignation."

Indeed, Richard Nixon was for a long time likened to Richard III, Shakespeare's tragic king who was destroyed by his own hubris.

"I think that even the people who really liked Nixon and devoted part of their lives to him felt that there was a dark side to his character and that the fall of Richard Nixon had certain elements of a Greek tragedy, where a man was brought to the doom of the evil of his own character," says Zelnick.

Still, the passing of time has warranted not only the recreation of The Nixon Interviews, but a reevaluation of Nixon and the scandal surrounding his presidency. Zelnick and Frost are pairing up once more to rethink the past and revise the book that they collaborated on together in 1978: *I Gave Them a Sword*. The book is a behind-the-scenes account of The Nixon Interviews, from idea to execution.

"It's something that's brought back all these memories as I've worked on it," says Zelnick. "We go back and assess the consequences of the Nixon/Frost interviews. We have a separate chapter on Nixon's big comeback where he became a respectable member of society again. And we have a chapter on Nixon reassessed. Should he be reassessed? What would reassessment look like? We take a hard look at it. It's not a fawning, shallow-type of book."

Zelnick interviewed Robert F. Ellsworth, Assistant to the President during the Nixon administration and U.S. Ambassador to NATO, in December, for the book. Ellsworth revealed the torment that from time to time still plagued the former President.

"Ellsworth said that over drinks and dinner, he asked Nixon whether he had any lingering feelings about Watergate and whether he thought the other side had been unfair to him," says Zelnick. "Nixon starts saying, 'No, no. It was all my damn fault. I gave them the sword, and they stuck it in!' And as he's talking, he starts chewing on his napkin and by the time he finishes, the napkin is almost entirely in his mouth, and he's grinding it in complete and total fury. This is with a guy who he's been friends with for a quarter century or more and it just overcame him."

Like Nixon, who perhaps never forgave himself, and evidently never forgot the events that came to define his life, modern literature, theater, and cinema are making sure the public remembers too. Zelnick and Frost released their updated book *Frost/Nixon*, last Spring.