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**GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Name (First, Last), Preferred Name**

Vahid, Valikhani

**Program/Major**

Film Studies

**Graduation Term and Year**

Spring 2024

**Hometown (Town, State, Country)**

I currently reside in Florida.

**Are you a scholarship recipient?**

Yes

**Provide a synopsis of your thesis (3-8 sentences)**

My thesis explores the theme of societal estrangement in Iranian society through three documentaries filmed in Tehran across different historical periods. Despite the prominence of "New Wave" and "Poetic Realism" in Iranian cinema, Iranian documentaries have been overlooked. My study argues that, under different political systems, these documentaries marginalize segments of Iranian society while projecting a unified image, revealing deep-seated estrangement. By analyzing the concept of estrangement within the documentaries, my research explores how shifting political dynamics impact individual and collective identities, referencing critical historical events from the Iranian Constitutional Revolution to the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent years.

**What led you to your research? What does your research cover?** The motivation behind my research originated from a desire to delve into and comprehend my cultural identity. Despite obtaining a Graduate Certificate in American Culture and Society from USF, I still identified gaps in my understanding of American culture, contributing to a sense of being an outsider in the United States. This realization prompted me to shift my focus to Iranian cinema. While initially captivated by Iranian narrative cinema, my background in documentary photography led me to explore Iranian documentary films. Surprisingly, this aspect of Iranian cinema has not received significant scholarly attention compared to its narrative counterpart. Despite the challenges posed by limited resources, I dedicated myself to contributing to this overlooked area and bringing fresh insights to studying Iranian documentaries.

**Things that help to keep you motivated during the Master's program.**

Several factors kept me motivated during my Master's program at USF, most notably the positive and supportive atmosphere fostered by the faculty. I expressed my gratitude to the Humanities faculty for their healthy and professional interactions, both among themselves and with the students. This positive environment minimized distractions, allowing students to concentrate solely on their projects and studies. Having faced a challenging academic setting before coming to USF, finding a supportive and welcoming learning environment was a significant source of encouragement. This discovery fueled my determination to continue and succeed in my education.

**What do you do outside of the Academic world? Any Hobbies? Activities?**

I dedicate time to work on personal projects, delve into photography literature, and engage in experimental film projects. In addition to my artistic pursuits, I play the Oud, an Iranian musical instrument, and contribute to Iranian cultural events within my community whenever my schedule permits. These activities provide a creative outlet and allow me to stay connected with my cultural roots and contribute to the local community.

**Do you have any advice for future applicants or possible readers of your thesis?**

Dear future applicants,

If you are seeking a welcoming and supportive academic environment, I highly recommend considering any program under Humanities and Cultural Studies at USF. The program's structure is also well-designed, allowing you to complete your classes by the third semester. Your final semester at USF can focus solely on your thesis, providing a valuable opportunity for in-depth research and academic accomplishment.

**Why did you decide to pursue a graduate degree? Why your particular program?**

I decided to pursue a second graduate degree after completing my M.F.A to enhance my skills in articulating and analyzing motion pictures. The program's placement within the Humanities department at USF offered a distinctive academic environment, diverging from my Art and Art History background and broadening my perspective. This transition boosted my confidence in expressing thoughts about any artwork and strengthened my ability to teach within this new field.

**Looking back on your time at USF in the Humanities & Cultural Studies Department, what are you most proud of and why?**

As a non-native writer, the commitment to improving my academic English writing skills has been fulfilling. Coming from a Studio Art background with writing challenges, I am proud that my time in this department has enabled me to critically analyze diverse text forms, including pictures, films, poems, novels, and more. Now, I am confident in constructing compelling arguments and effectively supporting them through my writing.

**What do you consider to be the strengths of your academic program?**

The program's structure, along with its required and elective courses, is impressive. Additionally, the availability of the Graduate Certificate, particularly the one in American Culture and Society, is remarkable.

**Tell us something you have learned/discovered during your program that surprised you?**

I found this program to be intensive in reading and writing. While it may sound intimidating, it was entirely worthwhile. I improved my reading skills, particularly with challenging texts that readers often find difficult to comprehend. Being a student in the HCS department helped me overcome this obstacle.