



*The*  
**John F. Kennedy Jr.  
Initiative for  
Documentary Film  
and Social Progress**



*“Documentary film  
is a rare medium that lives  
at the intersection of art  
and social science.”*

EDWARD STEINFELD, DIRECTOR  
WATSON INSTITUTE

# There are *many paths* to truth, and *many ways* to tell it.

We live in a time of uncertainty, inequality, political instability, and contested societal narratives. Distortions and inaccuracies have been allowed to override facts—especially when those facts reveal uncomfortable truths. And, where the truth is complex, so much of society seems to have lost the ability to discuss, debate, and learn.

Established in 2019 by friends, family, and classmates of **John F. Kennedy Jr. '83**, the John F. Kennedy Jr. Initiative for Documentary Film and Social Progress brings film and filmmakers to campus to shed light on some of the most challenging and complex issues facing society through the prism of documentary.

## INFORMING MINDS. MOVING HEARTS. MOBILIZING CHANGE.

Some of the most prominent names in the industry spearheaded this effort: **Rory Kennedy '91**, director, **Davis Guggenheim '86**, director, and **Randall Poster '83**, film music supervisor.

The inaugural event, held in January 2020, previewed *Coup 53* and featured a panel discussion with director **Taghi Amirani**, co-writer and editor **Walter Murch**, and Watson Institute Senior Fellow **Stephen Kinzer**.

Additional programming has featured preeminent figures, many of them Brown alumni: **Liz Garbus '92** previewing her new documentary with **Stacey Abrams**, *All In: The Fight for Democracy*; *Boys State*, co-produced by **Davis Guggenheim '86**; a student conversation with Award-winning, Oscar-nominated Brazilian director **Petra Costa**; and a documentary-making master class with Emmy-nominated investigative journalist and filmmaker **Emily Kassie '14**.

Future events include the JFK Jr. Distinguished Lecture by **Frederick Wiseman**, “dean” of American documentary film.

At the Watson Institute, where we study our world through both the social sciences and the humanities and from practitioners and scholars, film has long been a teaching and learning tool. We believe that combining all these perspectives reveals truth in a new, richer light and makes possible positive responses to seemingly intractable problems.

*“Documentaries are among the most effective ways to unpack complex and layered narratives. Bringing filmmakers to Brown will start conversations and connect students around the critical issues facing our nation.”*

IVY FILM FESTIVAL UNDERGRADUATE DIRECTORS



By partnering with the *Brown Arts Initiative*, the JFK Jr. Initiative gains access to deep expertise in the craft and art of film. Through master classes and workshops, renowned figures offer practical training for tomorrow's documentarians, while screenings and lectures attract a broad audience from campus and the community.

The initiative also envisions filmmaking fellowships that will combine practice and scholarship to inform public policy, as well as professorships of the practice that will bring experts from the world of film into the classroom.



*“Our vision is to create substantive engagement—academic programming with partners across the University—as well as access to the premier practitioners of documentary film, bringing them to Brown to open direct dialogue with the community.”*

RANDALL POSTER '83

To find out more or to support the initiative, visit <https://watson.brown.edu/filminitiative> or contact [watsonevents@brown.edu](mailto:watsonevents@brown.edu).

