

Aronson fellowship report – Yasmin Arquiza  
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As the communications manager of a conservation NGO in the past five years, I have produced several short films on community-managed fisheries in the Philippines as part of our environmental advocacy work. Most of these productions have focused on the role of civil society and government partners, and the impact of their interventions in rehabilitating and sustaining municipal fisheries. Often, our extensive interviews with municipal fishers are not used in a substantial way due to constraints in terms of length and the focus of a particular film.

Through the Aronson fellowship, I have finally found a way of repurposing some of our file footage to tell the stories of small-scale fisheries in the Philippines. The grant for the spring semester has arrived at just the right time, as the United Nations has proclaimed 2022 as the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture. As a vehicle for public awareness, the short film on municipal fishers in the Philippines that I proposed would be useful in helping donors and other supporters appreciate the realities of daily life in coastal communities.

With permission from Rare Philippines, I scoured our archives for the best interviews from our previous productions and selected three stories that would provide a brief but meaningful snapshot of the issues confronting coastal fishers in a tropical country. The topics and soundbites were carefully curated so that the stories contain past, present, and future perspectives with subjects ranging from illegal fishing to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic to the challenges of climate change.

During the spring semester, I was fortunate enough to have selected Media Design as one of my subjects and I managed to apply the introductory lessons I learned on filmmaking in producing the Meet the Fishers video. I was hoping to have more time in practicing basic editing to be able to do the technical work on my own, but in the end, I realized that I would have to hire a professional video editor if I wanted a good quality film. The financial support from the Aronson fellowship provided the necessary funds for the editing process, aside from the much needed and very well appreciated subsidy for my spring semester tuition at The New School for Social Research.

I found the inputs from our resource persons and other fellows during the monthly meetings very valuable as well. I really enjoyed listening to the project updates and learning new stuff about soils and fabrics, for example, that I would not have encountered in my readings. The insights from professors and other academics were also useful in helping me explore possible directions for further studies, hopefully a doctorate in anthropology, so that I can finally do more research and writing about environmental topics I'm interested in, especially those related to biodiversity conservation and indigenous cultures. These meetings became not just a venue for academic reflections but also a good exercise in learning more about other cultural traditions and people from various parts of the world.

When I left Rare Philippines in June, my colleagues generously gave me a farewell and appreciation party for all my contributions in advancing our advocacy work, especially in providing communications materials. My final output for them was the Meet the Fishers video, which I could not have completed without the support of the Aronson fellowship. As a graduate student juggling work and studies, I have struggled with time management and adjusting to life in a new country, but the experience has been very much worth it. The video is now one of the public awareness materials being shared in the Rare Philippines social media channels, and I hope it will continue to serve as a valuable resource for current and future partners.

I'm also hoping my output for the Aronson fellowship will be useful for the Tishman Center as well, with its emphasis on good design in the pursuit of environmental advocacy. It was truly challenging to distill hours of interview footage into six minutes and come up with a coherent story. I would be very interested in finding out the impact of the film on its intended audience, the potential supporters of sustainable small-scale fisheries, in the years to come.

As a long-time communications professional and environment advocate, I have benefited tremendously from the Aronson fellowship in terms of refining my direction in working on media design and repurposing other material in my archives. After all, conserving resources does not only mean protecting what we have in our natural environment, but also striving to make use of media files that are lying idle in our computer hard drives. Like many digital nomads, I still have a bunch of photographs that I'm still hoping to process and turn into a valuable artistic resource in the future.