



LensBright Initiative

2025-26

LensBright Initiative Package

Empowering students to see a brighter future, one lens at a time.

What is LensBright Initiative?

The **LensBright Initiative** is an award-winning, Philadelphia-based arts education and vocational nonprofit supported by the **University of Pennsylvania's President's Engagement Prize**, dedicated to building bridges between under-resourced high school students and lens-based creative industries and educational institutions.

The LensBright Initiative was co-founded by **Jack Nicholas Roney** (left; multidisciplinary artist, photographer) and **Ejun Mary Hong** (right; animation director, filmmaker), who met while mentoring West Philadelphia high school students through the Participatory Action Art Mentorship Program (PAAM). PAAM connects university art students with high school students to mentor them and create collaborative work in animation, architecture, and design.



Recognizing the students' strong passion for lens-based art, the limited resources available to support the stories they wanted to tell, and the powerful impact of project-based, peer-to-peer mentorship, Ejun and Jack founded the LensBright Initiative to further expand this impact.



2025–26 Programming

1) Professional Lens-Based Storytelling Projects through Weekly University–High School Peer Mentorship Program

Each year centers on producing a **real-world professional lens-based project**, such as a photography book, film, and animated film. University mentors and high school mentees work together through a structured, **weekly after-school curriculum** that guides them from concept to completion while building hands-on and industry-aligned skills.

This year's program will produce two projects, a stop-motion animation work and a photography project, each developed over the **January–June 2026 cycle**:

1. Stop-Motion Animation Film:

- **About:** A short stop-motion animated film featuring original characters and stories created by our high school students, reflecting their journeys and dreams as emerging artists. To support this project, we are **installing 15 stop-motion animation stations** at Sayre High School in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania and the Penn Animation as Research Lab. Students will use this studio to develop and produce the film.
- **Team:** Fifteen high school students from Sayre High School working alongside university mentors from Penn, Temple, and Drexel.

2. Photography Project:

- **About:** A photography project centered on developing a visual narrative using a three-act story structure, culminating in a published photography book. **Each student will be provided with a camera** for the duration of the project to support experimentation and storytelling.
- **Team:** Five high school students from Sayre High School working with university mentors.



Previous Work

1) Award-Winning Animated Documentary Film, *Footprints in the Sand* (2025)

Previous projects include ***Footprints in the Sand*** (2025), a mixed-media (stop-motion puppet and 2D computer animation) created by **a team of Penn students, six Sayre High School students, an orchestra, and university faculty.**

The film invites four lymphoma cancer patients from South Korea to share their stories. Our Sayre High School students participated in the film production as visual development artists.

The project was sponsored and supported by **ASIFA-Hollywood, SACHS Program, Netter Center, and the University of Pennsylvania.** The film received **three awards and seven official selections** from international film festivals.



Links:

[Trailer](#)

|

[Full Film](#)

|

[Production Video](#)

Previous Work

2) Exhibitions and Art Sales

Hosted **five exhibitions and four sales** over the past three years.



3) Career Development:

Hosted **70+ mentorship and workshop sessions** and organized **five meetings with industry professionals** from Sony Pictures, Pixar, LAIKA, DreamWorks, and Marvel Studios.



Photos of a series of guest speakers series with Will Conner (Visual Development Artist, Sony Pictures Animation), Ivan Moutinho (Editor, Marvel Studios), Demetrius Beckham (Operation Manager, Sony Pictures Entertainment), Savannah Steiner (Stop-Motion Animator, LAIKA), and Faryn Pearl (Animation Director, DreamWorks).

Ways to Become a Mentor!

Apply to become a Photo/Film/Animation Mentor!

When: Spring 2026 Semester – Tuesdays and/or Thursdays (2:30PM–5PM)

- Mentors can choose either once a week or twice a week depending on what works best for their schedules.
- Occasionally, there will be field trips and other extra-curricular activities that run outside of the prescribed time-slots (most commonly on weekends). While mentors are not strictly required to attend these, it is strongly encouraged for mentors to try and make themselves available to these events.

Where: William L. Sayre High School (58th & Walnut St.)

Roles: Mentors will work with program coordinators to facilitate after-school programming in the form of workshops, lessons, experience-based learning sessions, field trips, and other extra-curricular activities. Mentors will work with high school students in developing their lens-based artistic visions, and promote connections between the students and their peers, mentors, and visiting industry figures.

Expectations: Mentors should be passionate about art, and teaching art to students. Mentors are expected to be proficient (perfect not required!) in film and/or animation and/or digital photography. Mentors should be able to explain the fundamentals of their respective discipline (we will provide resources for you to learn this). Mentors must also be able to effectively connect and communicate with students. While previous teaching/counseling experience is preferred, all mentors will undergo a series of trainings and clearances to ensure they are able to work within a public school environment. Being a mentor to high school students can at times be overwhelming, therefore mentors should be prepared to handle such an environment.

Compensation: Mentors will be compensated **\$50 per session (up to \$100 per week)**.

If you have any questions, please reach out to us at hello@lensbright.org.

Apply via QR code below:



Ways to Sponsor a Project & How the Sponsorship Works

Ways to Sponsor a Project

We invite you and your organization to be part of our special projects by becoming a sponsor and a mentor. Below are different ways of sponsoring a project:

1. Idea Sponsorship

- Provide a prompt, theme, or concept for the projects and receive non-exclusive rights to distribute the resulting work. Based on the idea you provide, we will create a semester-long weekly workshops to produce a project accordingly.

2. Financial Sponsorship

- Support a project by donating funds that will be used directly for production, as well as for weekly mentorship and production sessions.

3. Media/Promotional Sponsorship

- Support a project by promoting it through your media channels/listservs for fundraising, recruitment, or distribution.

4. In-Kind Sponsorship

- Support a project by offering non-monetary goods or services. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - Leading a one-time workshop in an artistic practice (e.g., stop-motion animation, photography, storyboarding).
 - Donating art supplies.
 - Providing professional production or distribution services (e.g., photography book printing, film distribution).
 - Delivering a one-time guest lecture or conversation with students.
 - Other relevant contributions.

How the Sponsorship Works - Examples

Step 1:

Org A donates funds and provides ideas sponsorship by offering the prompt "Sketchbook Dreams: bringing students' stories and characters in their sketchbooks to life" for the stop-motion animation project.

Step 1:

Org B provides in-kind sponsorship by offering art workshops in photography and camera donation and offers the prompt "What Inspires you: Capture the places and people that inspire you" for the photography project.

Step 2:

Through the sponsorship received from Org A and B, the LensBright Initiative develops semester-long weekly mentorship sessions centered around the prompt, "Sketchbook Dreams" for animation project and "What Inspires You" for photography project with university faculty and students.

Step 3:

Production takes place from January to June 2026, and the LensBright Initiative will share monthly updates with the Orgs.

Step 4:

Once the project is completed, Org A and B will have non-exclusive rights to distribution and will be formally acknowledged as sponsors for the projects.



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To Become a Mentor &
Sponsor a Project &
For any questions:
hello@lensbright.org