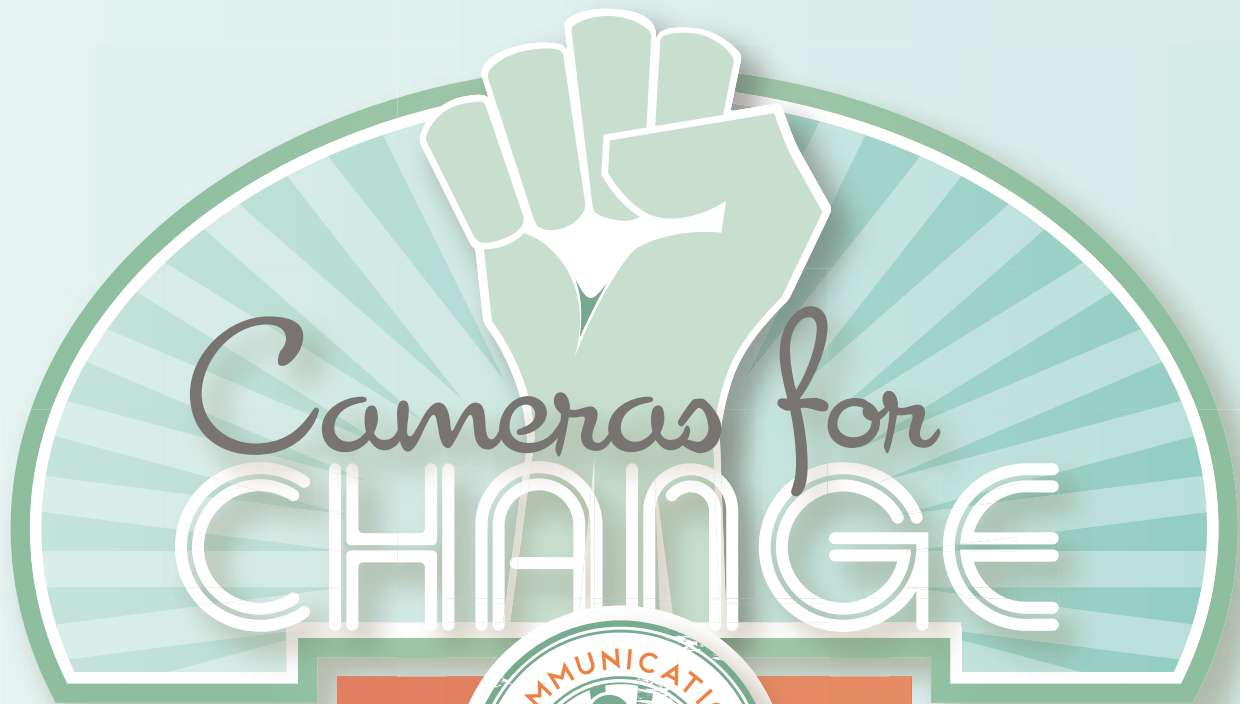




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HOW AN ACTIVIST ORGANIZATION USES VIDEO TO
CREATE SOCIAL CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA

Growing up in Medellín, Colombia's second largest city, Camilo Perez Quintero observed a long and complex internal armed conflict among guerrillas, paramilitary forces, and drug cartels that have plagued the city since 1947. As these groups continue to target youth to join their ranks, more and more children view gang association as an obligation rather than a choice—one that Perez hopes to challenge.

"Violence here is in the head," says Perez. "It has become normalized in daily life because people feel it is the only thing they can turn to. For me, achieving peace was a matter of changing the scope; it was about changing the tools. I never really liked guns and understood that I could transform my own reality without them."

In 2008, Perez helped form Pasolini Medellín, an activist organization that also targets Colombian youth, allowing them to counter violence with cameras rather than guns. His team brainstorms movie ideas with community members to achieve the goal of letting them become "artisans of their own lives." After months of script writing and character development, the cameras finally start rolling.

"The participants are the actors for all our films," says Perez. "By acting, they are taking the first steps to changing a violent reality."

So far Pasolini Medellín has produced 67 films, from emotional documentaries to music videos. They aren't always factual—elements of fiction are used in instances where honest testimony becomes a danger to participants. Stories are told through tragic comedies with metaphors and irony to avoid retaliation by militant groups.

In one community, for example, armed militants were raping 12- and 13 year-old girls. Parents didn't believe it was happening. "If a kid accuses a soldier, he is always wrong," Perez notes. In order to side-step censorship, Pasolini Medellín worked with the victims' classmates to create a short video clip, using puppets to express sexual violence.

"We presented the video to the parents and the school. It was so well-received—the kids felt empowered and parents finally understood," Perez says.

Pasolini Medellín's slogan is "using art to disarm minds," giving people the chance to express themselves and rewrite their stories

not only through video, but also with hip-hop, graffiti, and radio.

"By getting involved in the arts, we are stealing kids from the violent circle. We are ourselves a gang," Perez says. "Kids think that they need a gang, and ours gives them the chance to make a change for the better."

Perez joined Ohio University's Communication & Development Studies program in 2011 to reflect on and analyze his work in Colombia.

His thesis project involves creating an ethnographic map based on interviews with Pasolini Medellín participants. Perez is seeking to uncover reasons behind the organization's success, which, as he believes, can always be improved upon.

"As an organization, we were paying too much attention to the doing and never really understood the consequences. Having a camera also can mean having a gun. I've learned that there are ethical considerations to keep in mind when filming, especially in violence-prone areas. You need to be respectful," he says.

In addition to his thesis, Perez shoots video for several Ohio University programs, including Communication & Development Studies' 25th anniversary celebration and the international UNICEF conference, which focuses on using communication to promote social change. He's also been working with his research advisor, Jenny Nelson, to produce short collaborative videos about people living with Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis, supported by Ohio University's 1804 Fund.

"Camilo brings a practiced hand to the

The organization Pasolini Medellín, formed by Perez, so far has produced

:: STUDENT PROFILE



CAMILO PEREZ QUINTERO

HOMETOWN
Medellín, Colombia

PREVIOUS EDUCATION
University of Antioquia

REASON FOR ATTENDING OHIO UNIVERSITY
Practitioners/scholars recommended the Communication & Development Studies program; there are few programs like this.

DEGREE PURSUED
Master's degree in communication and development

FACULTY ADVISOR
Jenny Nelson

FUTURE PLANS
Doctoral program

table," Nelson says. "He really knows how to disappear behind the camera. He'll get six or seven angles on the same thing with no problem. He's very creative."

Nelson is helping Perez to incorporate communication theory into his writing. Because English is his second language, writing in this more academic style can be a challenge. But Perez is working diligently with the intention of someday continuing his work for Pasolini Medellín.

For now, though, he is calling Athens "home."

"My wife and kids are happy here," he says. "But here, the individual is above everything. We are more collective in Colombia. You have good things in the United States, but despite what you hear, we have good things in Colombia, too. We can learn from each other."

