

## YMCA Youth program encourages students to make creative content with technology

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The Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute teaches middle and high school kids to use technology as a creative and educational tool. Miguel Torres is a technology instructor who was once one of the students. They are making short films, prepping for their summer film festival. (07/28/15 Photos by Brad Graverson/LANG

The Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute teaches middle and high school kids to use technology as a creative and educational tool. They are making short films, prepping for their summer film festival. Students film in the attic, during for a gritty, moody scene. July 28, 2015. (Brad Graverson / Staff Photographer)



The Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute will host a film festival on Friday, showcasing 12 short films produced entirely by students at the Scottish Wright Hall in Long Beach.

For the past 15 years the [Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute](#) has encouraged the use of technology as an educational tool for youth throughout the city. The institute, which is primarily funded through grants, hosts an array

of project-based activities that focus on 3D animation, music production, graphic design and special effects for students.

Good grades aren't a prerequisite to join the program. Bob Cabeza, the vice president of community development in Long Beach, said the program is open to middle school students within the city who face social barriers.

"The gist of the youth development program is students get to make creative content with technology that connects academics and the workforce," he said.

Students who enroll in the program will have a support system throughout their academic career, Cabeza said. Youth can head in after school to learn new computer skills or get help with homework. The overall goal is to prepare students for college.

Salvador Jimenez, an alumnus of the institute and current high school student, said he learned how to use programs like Adobe InDesign and Photoshop to contribute to their magazine project.

"I didn't know how to use those programs until now," he said. "I made my own animations and got to design small things we put on the cover of our magazine."

Jimenez said he also got to try his hand at creating movies on iMovie. The movies shot for the film festival

offer students a creative license to document any story in any style.

One movie called “Por Mi Amor” is novella-styled comedy film that focuses on a villain’s vengeance on a couple. Another movie “Bunker 864” will delve into the lives of civilians trapped in a bomb shelter during the Cold War era.

Since the program is free to participants and funded through grants from supporters like the [California Emerging Technology Fund](#) and [Southern California Edison](#), they try to take in as many students as possible. This year about 320 are enrolled.

“The program is the most evaluated program in the country - we improve graduation rates, grades and college attendance,” Cabeza said.

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The program makes an effort to recruit females since more than half of the creative arts and industries are made up of males, he said.

Even after students graduate from a university, many return to give back to the incoming crop of participants. Some teens become earn paid internships for the institutes youth-led business, [Change Agent Productions](#). Interns use their digital media skills to create promotional videos for nonprofits all while learning real life business skills.

The program originally started in Long Beach but has spread nationally and globally. There are 12 sites throughout the United States with another in Canada and Cambodia. A site is currently being built in South Africa.

“It all started in here in Long Beach and it’s still replicating,” Cabeza said.

The film festival is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. at Scottish Wright Hall, 833 Elm St. For more information, email Bob Cabeza at [Bob.Cabeza@lbymca.org](mailto:Bob.Cabeza@lbymca.org) or visit [www.lbymcayi.org/](http://www.lbymcayi.org/).