The project allowed a critical analysis of Disney’s most renowned Princesses; studying their conventions through plot and character. The money from ACCIAC granted me the rare opportunity and time to study film scripts and learn about the craft of screenwriting in a manner that would have otherwise been impossible. I thank the ACCIAC grant for providing me with support to do what I love and giving me a launching pad for what I hope will be a lifetime career as a screenwriter in children’s films. I will be presenting my project via poster format at Research Day.

I. Executive Summary or Abstract: “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,” “Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “The Little Mermaid,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “Aladdin” are six of the best known and most influential Disney films of all time, not only for their brilliant storylines, but for their vibrant characters. For the purpose of my research I had to study these films with a critical eye in order to study the film’s conventions, plots, and the Princess image that is portrayed in all of the films. These films are extremely important to analyze because they serve as the source where millions of young children form their notions and beliefs about love, personal identity, morals, right, and wrong.

II. Overview of the Project: My impetus for this project derived from personal reasons. I have found that most of my intrinsic ideals about life have stemmed from these Disney films. Particularly, my idolization of the Disney princesses has proved to be problematic and impractical in the real world. My primary goal of this project
was to allocate ideals emphasized in Disney films and the qualities of the Princesses. Although the lifestyle Disney promotes through its films is ideal and positive, I believe that amends need to be made to the stories they produce. At the same time, I wanted to ensure that I got a solid grasp on the film’s plotlines and story structure because it is undeniable that they are unfathomably successful and popular. The six Disney Princesses I studied are extremely powerful in what they represent and teach young children, and my current goal is to use my studies of the Princess archetype as an outlet to present positive, romantic, yet realistic ideals and characteristics.

III. Location and Methodology: I spent the last few months studying six Disney films: “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “The Little Mermaid,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “Aladdin,” which are the stories of the most famously recognized Disney princesses. I spent the first month or so reading Using the books “Cinderella Ate My Daughter” by Peggy Ornstein and “Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom” by Eric Loren Smoodin which discuss the popular archetypes and conventions presented in Disney films and their impact on American popular culture. These books provided a basis for my thinking and gave me an idea of what I was looking for. However, neither one of these books paid attention to all six of the Disney Princesses so I knew that there was much work for me to do. Surprisingly, through all my research I discovered that the work I completed this summer is unprecedented. Although there are hundreds of books written about Disney films, none seem to directly take the angle which I did in their
critiques. The next two books I read were Joseph Campbell’s “The Hero with a Thousand Faces,” a screenwriter’s version of Aristotle’s “Poetics,” and “Story” by Robert McKee which all gave me a firm foundation on plot and character in a script. These books were particularly powerful in guiding my thinking in terms of a film and story structure which is invaluable. Next, I did an in-depth analysis of a film each week, in order of their release dates. I conducted this part of my research in the following order: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine. The aspects I focused on were character, plot, and how the mentality and notion of good and evil, right and wrong were presented. I attempted to look at the plot in two ways: the hero’s journey and McKee’s outline. The hero’s journey consisted of the following stages: 1. Separation/Departure (The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, The Crossing of the First Threshold, The Belly of the Whale), 2. The Trials and Victories of Initiation (The Road of Trials, The Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, The Ultimate Boon), and 3. The Return and Reintegration with Society (Refusal of the Return, The Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, The Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of the Two Worlds, Freedom to Live). McKee’s outline was more geared for a script and its sections were: The Inciting Incident, Progressive Complications, Crisis, Climax, and Resolution. For each film I have lengthy, detail oriented analyses which I sent to my advisor for feedback.

IV. **Summary of Results**: From my research, I gained ineffable insight into the Disney films. For the purpose of summarizing everything I discovered, it is most effective
to explain my research in two sections: the films made while Walt Disney was alive and the films made after he was dead. The first three films, “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Cinderella,” and “Sleeping Beauty” were made in 1937, 1950, and 1959 respectively. The similarities of the Princesses in these films are strikingly and the most unrealistic of the six. All three films begin with a narrator reading about the princesses and their kingdoms from a storybook and ended with “and they lived happily ever after.” Their ideologies are primarily and obviously revealed through the song lyrics of the films. Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora are three princesses who all dream of only one thing: to find their Prince Charming. They all sing beautifully and although they are princesses, live humbly and are dressed rather plainly. They rely heavily on their wishes, dreams, fairy godmothers, and loyal animal friends to be united with their Princes. They are inactive Princesses and almost ridiculously naïve. Their sense of identity revolves around their respective Prince counterparts; they themselves are only known for their looks and voice. They fall in love with only one glance and face little conflict because they rely on their Princes and others to fight their battles and the evil witches or stepmothers in their lives. After a thirty year gap, Disney released their second phase of Princesses in 1989, 1991, and 1992. These princesses were Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine. Their qualities and traits proved to be far more modern than the first three and much more admirable. All three Princesses begin with a sense of unhappiness at their present situations and all dream of bigger and better things. However, unlike the first three princesses, they aren’t afraid to take action and make their dreams come true on their own accord. They face controversy, judgment, and even
ridicule but preserve regardless in search of love, freedom, and adventure. These characters are just as beautiful as Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora but also have much more to offer.

V. Conclusions from your Project: Not only was I able to discover and specify the conventions, ideals, and belief systems in each of the six films, I gradually understood why the films are so effective in delivering their messages. The music is very important in conveying messages as are the secondary characters that are extremely central in guiding the hero and heroine of each of the films together. The films are extremely fun and entertaining to watch; another reason the ideals of their stories are delivered so successfully. Another conclusion I came to was that the Princesses did not fit the hero’s journey mold. Although I would argue that the films were influenced by Campbell’s idea of the hero’s journey and perhaps even used as a reference, their stories did not fit into the mold accurately enough to make this a legitimate, definitive argument. Mckee’s outline proved to be far more effective in analyzing the plots of each film than Campbell’s.

VI. Significance to the broader field of inquiry: Because this research has allowed me to pinpoint the specifics which make a classic, stereotypical Disney Princess, I now have the required knowledge and tools that I need to create a character which is the antithesis of these female archetypes. The ACCIAC has given me the support and funding to take the first and most fundamental steps in actually selling a film script to a studio and being able to see a modern version of the Disney Princess on
the big screen. My research is significant because I now have the ability to form children’s stories for a new generation by breaking away from past traditions and conventions. However, because Disney films are extremely effective and successful, my future work must still possess the Disney “feel.” By this I mean the classic story structure that we have all come to know and love. From here on out, I hope that my work challenges and confronts the classic conventions of the Disney Princess. I hope that my renewed story ideas will lead to an evolutionary change in the way we think of Disney films and offer a modern fairytale for children to look up to. I believe that it is about time that Disney films offer an updated fairytale that changes the way many young children, especially girls, are trained to think of life and also present more realistic and feasible Princesses for children to venerate.