Mike Quill, Jonathan Cohn and Justin Schunick stand on location where their movie, "Tangent," was shot, with their homemade camera crane.

For five minutes, Jonathan Cohn had broken all the rules - of moviemaking. But it paid off when his fast-paced film, created earlier this year for Campus MovieFest, was chosen among 16 out of 25,000 entries to be screened at the Atlanta Film Festival.

"We didn't want to lose people with how much was going on," Cohn said, "but we needed just enough that it would blow someone's mind in a five-minute span."

It worked - and the film, "Tangent," took home "Best Picture at Northeastern" by a judging panel of students and staff, followed by "Best Drama in Boston" at a showing at the John Hancock building, prompting its trip to the International Grand Finale in Atlanta.

The film, produced by a team rounded out by juniors Mike Doran and Mike Maker and middlers Mike Quill and Justin Schunick, is about choices and consequences - reflected by its title, which means "in contact, but not crossing or intersecting."

That model takes shape within the first few scenes, when a young girl - surprised to find a close friend in the midst of a drug deal - blindly takes a few steps back into a busy street and is hit by a passing car.

The film focuses on the trail of a $5 bill exchanged in the transaction as it moves from one person to the next, passed along as part of a number of different pacts.

Cohn said his approach for the plot was to "get people's attention right off the bat, and then go into the movie and explain what was happening."
"In order to feel like a part of the movie, you must somehow connect the audience with the characters so they share the same feelings," he said.

The group was loaned a laptop and digital camcorder from organizers to produce their film and were given a week to complete their production - including a storyboard and shooting and editing the final footage.

"We had to manage our time very wisely, as far as editing," Cohn said. "We could have easily done a 30-minute movie, but we had to keep cutting and cutting it."

"As we watched, we had to make sure that we didn't lose any people in those quick sequences, when we kept going from location to location," he said.

Friends came together to serve as actors - as did spectators on the street.

"In one scene where there was a party, we had to move our seven extras we had in the frame and change the camera angle because we didn't have enough people," Cohn said.

"We didn't want to make the film focus on acting, because we didn't know actors, and we didn't write a script that had dialogue because that might make our film look amateurish," Quill said.

Campus MovieFest, billed as the world's largest student film festival, featured entries from 16 universities across the country this year, including the University of Georgia and the University of Tampa, as well as Boston College and Tufts University.

Last year, Cohn, who serves as president of NUTV, placed second with his comedy, "Facebook: The Movie."

"With a comedy, all you have to do is make the audience laugh once, and you win them over," Cohn said.

"It required a tremendous amount of work and planning, and we basically pulled all-nighters every night," Cohn said. "That made it fun, but also a pretty thrilling week."

To see "Tangent" for yourself, check out www.shred444.com.