

Communication Arts CMAT 433 Documentary Production

Spring 2018 T 12:30 – 3:15p CH 335

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office hours: Tue 11 - 12:30p; Wed 11 - 1p; Thu 11 - 12:30p

Course Description

This course investigates documentary styles and techniques while emphasizing the documentary production process. Students will develop a documentary project. Over the course of the semester they will turn in the various components (proposal, treatment, rushes, etc.), culminating in a completed 24-30 minute documentary.

Objectives

This course is designed for those who have an interest in exploring historical or current events by using digital tools to make a short documentary. The course explores the documentary genre within the framework of filmmaking. Coursework throughout the semester will focus on these general areas of study: writing and production, research and documentary. Students finish the course with the production of a documentary.

1. To explore the different ways we can understand an event better through film;
2. To understand the strengths and limitations of the film medium;
3. To learn to understand film "language" and "read" films critically;
4. To acquire and develop skills of filmmaking as a means of understanding and expressing insights.
5. To develop skills in research, analysis and writing.

The assignments for this course reflect Salisbury University's priority on writing across the curriculum.

Readings

Bernard, S. C. (2016). *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Non-Fiction on Screen* (4th edition). Burlington: Focal Press

Course Requirements

1. **Participation** (attendance, contributions to discussions and short assignments) makes up 10% of your final grade. Along with the art of documentary filmmaking, a major part of what you are learning is how to work effectively in a team, as this is how production work is routinely organized. Your participation in the production team is vital to the outcome of each project and hence attendance at all lectures and production is mandatory. I expect everyone to attend class and participate in discussions. You have both the freedom and responsibility to decide how you will spend your time, but as this class meets only once a week, you must make a special effort to be in class, on time, every time. Two absences drop the participation grade to a maximum grade of 70%, three to 60%, four to 50%, etc. Habitual lateness and other disruptive behavior will also affect this grade.
2. Production of a **documentary film**, worth 60% of your final grade. See below for details.

3. A **treatment** of the overall vision and objectives of the film, worth 15% of your final grade.
 5. Required **readings** will be worth 15% of your final grade. See below for details.
Late assignments will lose 50% off the total grade for each day over the deadline.

Academic Integrity

The best learning environment is one based on mutual respect and trust. However, the desire to achieve a good or passing grade without doing the necessary work may tempt some students to engage in acts of “academic dishonesty,” including the following:

- Plagiarism: presenting as one’s own work, whether word for word or in paraphrase, the words or ideas of a website or another author. All sources of information used must be properly cited.
- Cheating on exams, tests, and quizzes, including copying from others, the wrongful giving or receiving of unauthorized exam material, and the use of illegitimate sources of information (e.g., “cheat sheets”);
- Unsanctioned collaboration with other individuals in the completion of course assignments, including examinations;
- Falsifying data and use of fraudulent methods in laboratory, field work, and computer work;
- Falsifying excuses for non-attendance or failure to complete assignments.

While some students may try to rationalize or justify these acts as expedient, they are wrong and there are no mitigating circumstances to excuse them. Individuals who engage in academic dishonesty damage the learning environment and their own integrity and character. If you are unclear about what constitutes academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, please ask – ignorance is no excuse. Discovery of academic dishonesty results in stiff penalties for the offender, including a failing grade for the assignment in question and often a grade of F for the course. The Student Affairs Office keeps records of plagiarism cases, and multiple offenses could bring a penalty of expulsion from the entire USM system. The university catalogue and student handbook provide further details.

Class Schedule (Tuesdays 12:30-3:15, TE 335)

January 30	Introduction. Orientation. Logistics Read: Bernard, chapter 1	
February 06	Types of Documentary: The Expository: <i>Victory at Sea; Shock of the New</i> The Observational: <i>Gimme Shelter; Triumph of the Will</i> The Participatory: <i>Shoah; Man with a Movie Camera</i> The Reflexive: <i>Waiting for Fidel; Far from Poland</i> The Poetic: <i>Rain; NY, NY.</i> The Performative: <i>Tongues Untied; Turksib</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 2	Doc Concept Topics Due
February 13	Documentary Treatment and Production Step One: Asking Questions, Finding a Topic Step Two: The Research Journey	Doc Concept Idea Due

Step Three: Analyzing
 Step Four: Developing the Argument
 Step Five: Communicating: Tell a Story
 Film: Ken Burns, *Civil War*, Pt. 1; *Nanook of the North*
 Read: Bernard, chapter 3

February 20	Documentary Production Workshop Discussion of documentary treatments and demonstration of camera techniques Read: Bernard, chapter 4	Documentary Treatment Outline Due
February 27	Treatment and Production Workshop Discussion of documentary treatments and demonstration of editing techniques Read: Bernard, chapter 10	Documentary Rough Treatment Due
March 06	The Conventions of Film, Art and History Film: <i>Ararat</i> (A. Egoyan, 2002) Read: Bernard, chapter 5	Documentary Final Treatment Due
March 13	How Documentaries use History Film: <i>Why We Fight</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 6	Documentary Production: Shoot
March 20	Spring Break. No Class	
March 27	Intimate Portraits in the Documentary Film: <i>The Town That Was</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 8	Documentary Production: Shoot
April 03	History and Culture in documentaries Film: <i>Moving Midway</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 9	Documentary Production: Shoot
April 10	The Reenactment/Expository Documentary Film: <i>The Thin Blue Line</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 11	Documentary Production: Shoot
April 17	The “Re-Enactment” in Documentary Film: <i>Nanking</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 12	Documentary Production: Edit Paper Rough drafts due
April 24	Narration in Documentaries Film: <i>Eyes on the Prize</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 13	Documentary Production: Edit
May 01	Challenging History and its Methods: The Pseudo-Doc Film: <i>JFK</i> Read: Bernard, chapter 14	Doc Production: Edit

May 08	Producing a Historical Film: John Sayles' <i>Matewan</i> Doc Production: Rough Cut Due Film: <i>Matewan</i> (J. Sayles, 1987) Read: Bernard, chapter 7
May 15	Conclusions and Wind-up Discussion Doc Production: Finalize Edits
May 17	(Finals Week) Screen and critique documentaries, <i>1:30pm - 4:00pm</i>

Assignment Details

Readings

Each week, read the chapter/s listed on the syllabus. These readings are the fundamental basis of your production. After reading the assigned chapter/s for the week summarize **each** chapter in one typed double-spaced page.

The (Collaborative) Documentary Project:

Working in teams, you will write a treatment and then produce a 30 minute documentary.

Treatment*: The documentary treatment or proposal is generally the first document a filmmaker prepares in the pre- production process. Offering a concise description of the overall vision and objectives of the project, the treatment is used to obtain financial backing and support from collaborators. It typically includes a section outlining the budget. Although your treatment requires neither a budget nor collaborators, writing it will force you to conduct research on your topic, identify likely sources, decide on a stylistic approach, come up with a working structure, and work through some of the inevitable obstacles faced by documentary video producers (e.g., permissions, lack of access, technical challenges).

Assignment: Submit a five-page, typed, double-spaced treatment for a 30 minute documentary. Unconvincing proposals will require selection of new topics or revisions. Your treatment should include the following (use subheadings for each):

Title

Category: What documentary type or types (observational, interactive, etc.) does your film fall within?

Synopsis: A brief summary of the story at the heart of your documentary. Use the following terms from Bernard: *story, conflict, theme, emotional impact*

Structure: Decide on the *arc* your story will take (based on the research you've conducted). If possible, divide the story into Acts (I, II, & III) and describe the climax and anticlimax. If it helps to exhibit your ideas on structure in storyboard form, feel free to do so.

Characters: A list of protagonists/antagonists

Soundtrack: A discussion of narration, music, and/or other sound elements you plan to include

Social Context and Research Background: Explain the larger historical and/or social framework/context for your documentary. For example, the social context for a documentary on a local environmental activist fighting for cleaner rivers might include a brief history of the type of industries responsible for polluting our city's waterways. You'll need at least 5-6 sources. Try finding articles and books on your topic by searching online databases at the Library and media sources.

Source List: Who specifically do you plan to interview for the film (provide brief biographies of each).

Shot List: Based on your work on the structure of the proposed film, create a list of all shots/scenes— A-roll and B-roll—that you'll need.

Bibliography: Include an appropriately cited bibliography at the end.

*Adapted from Elizabeth Gailey, DOCUMENTARY I: HISTORY, THEORY & PRACTICE. UTC

Use the *Quality Checklist*** to evaluate your film as you complete the stages in production.

Quality – 40%

- My documentary is accurate: All the information in my documentary is true to the best of my knowledge. My project offers interpretation/argument that is supported by evidence.
- I show analysis and interpretation: My documentary doesn't just recount facts or tell a story. I interpret and analyze my topic. My documentary has a strong central thesis or argument that I prove. I can point to where I state my thesis on my script.
- I place my topic in context: My topic didn't take place in isolation. I made sure to place my topic into context – the intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting for my topic.
- My project shows wide, balanced research and I used available primary sources: I investigated multiple perspectives about my topic and looked at all sides of an issue.

Analysis—20%

- I present a thesis in my project and back it up with information drawn from my research.
- I have demonstrated significance and impact: My project offers an answer to the “so what?” question. I explain why it is important to know about these events.
- I have shown change over time and cause and effect: My documentary offers an explanation of what things changed over time and why the changes took place.
- I demonstrate significance of my topic in history and draw conclusions: My documentary does more than just describe my topic. I explain why my topic is important or demonstrate its significance.

Sources—20%

- My project uses a depth and range of available primary sources: I consulted a wide variety of sources from the time period of my project (newspaper accounts, diary entries, photographs, archival accounts, and other first-hand accounts).
- My project uses a depth and range of secondary sources: I used accounts written by historians and other experts to understand the issues involved in my topic and their long-range significance.

I make effective use of sources in my documentary: Sources are used as evidence for points made in my narration.

Clarity of Presentation—20%

My documentary tells a coherent, well-organized story: I made sure my documentary is easy to follow and understand.

I used the documentary medium effectively: My topic lends itself well to telling a story through visuals and narration. I was careful to use the technology appropriately to emphasize my message.

My documentary and written materials show attention to detail and make an impact: My documentary script and images are carefully written and selected. I have proofread and edited my annotated bibliography.

**Adapted from National History Day