

## **Making the Short Documentary**

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### **Introduction**

This course is designed to give a basic understanding of how documentary films are made, providing technical training and practical experience in shooting and editing digital video. Through a series of exercises and in-class critique sessions, students will practice using composition, lighting, sound, and editing to tell stories about real-life people and events. Students will also develop a basic understanding of the documentary form through a series of short lectures about issues facing documentary filmmakers today.

The course will include screenings of documentary shorts and features that demonstrate various models of successful documentary storytelling techniques, and a guest speaker who will show and discuss their work. All course work leads up to a final project, in which students will research, shoot and edit their own documentary short.

NOTE: Course fees provide for use of editing software and needed microphones, but students must have use of their own digital video camcorder and hard drive of at least 200GB. Instructor may be contacted if students have questions about these items.

### **Course Goals**

This course has three major goals, which are interrelated:

- A) To teach students the fundamentals of video camera technology and editing equipment.
- B) To teach the fundamentals of the documentary film form.
- C) To develop students' critical and aesthetic sensibilities.

### **Methods of Instruction**

- A. In-class lectures, demonstrations, and discussions
- B. Readings
  - 1. Texts

- a. Schroepfel, Tom. The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video. (Second Edition, Revised.) Self-published, 1982.
- b. Rabiger, Michael. Directing The Documentary. Third Edition. Focal Press, 1997.

2. Handouts
- C. Three filmmaking exercises (to be completed outside of class)
- D. Final Project (10-minute documentary)
- E. In-class screenings

### **Evaluative Criteria**

#### **A. Production Exercises (85%)**

These are graded on technical competence, originality, and aesthetic maturity. The grade also reflects the level of effort and commitment exhibited by the student.

NOTE: All exercises must be completed to receive a passing grade for the class.

#### **B. Class participation (15%)**

This grade reflects the level of engagement the student has shown in class discussions and critiques.

### **Schedule (NOTE: Screenings and Guest Speaker are TBA)**

#### **Class 1**

Class topics:

- Review syllabus
- Introduction to Documentaries
- Composition

Assignments:

Read Rabiger Chapter 1 (Introduction)

Read Schroepfel Chapters 2 (Composition) , 3 (The Basic Sequence), 6 (The Montage)

Exercise #1--Composition

#### **Class 2**

Class topics:

- Exercise #1 due
- Modes of Documentary
- Continuity and Montage

Assignments:

Read Schroepfel pp. 1-8, 12-20 (Camera) & Chapter 5 (Camera Moves)  
Rabinger read chapter 30-Ethics

### **Class 3**

Class Topics:

- Ethics and Objectivity
- Go over Exercise #1
- Camera/exposure

Assignments:

Read Rabinger Chapter 14 (Interviewing)  
Exercise #2 – Exposure & Camera Moves

### **Class 4**

Class Topics:

- Exercise #2 due
- Watch & Review Exercise #2
- Audio recording
- Interviewing

Assignment:

Exercise #3--Document a process

### **Class 5**

Class Topics:

- Exercise # 3 raw footage due
- Introduction to Final Cut Pro

Assignments:

- Finish digitizing material
- Write final project proposal

### **Class 6**

Class Topics:

- Final Project proposal due
- Final Cut Pro lab time for students-edit exercise #3

Assignment:

- Finish editing Exercise #3

### **Class 7**

Class Topics:

- Exercise #3 final edit due

- Consultations re: final projects
- Watch Wesleyan undergraduate documentaries

### **Class 8**

Class Topic:

- Review Exercise #3

### **Class 9**

Class Topic:

- Editing documentaries

Assignment:

- Begin shooting final project

### **Class 10**

Class Topic:

- Hands-on tutoring

Assignment:

- Complete Rough Cut of final project

### **Class 11**

Class Topic:

- Watch and critique rough cuts

Assignment:

- Complete final edit of final project

### **Class 12**

Class Topics:

- Show and discuss *Jimmy Scott: If You Only Knew*
- Wrap-up