Skills for Impact - Documentary Filmmaking 2018/2019 Spring

General

Instructor: Jeremy Braverman, Media and Visual Education Specialist
Spring, 2019
Course level: MA
2 Credits (2 ECTS Credits)
/N15 504
Office hours: by appointment

The SFI program is a mandatory, applied element of the MPA program. It aims to equip students with core vocational competencies that are of high value in the workplace, including team building, leadership, emotional intelligence, planning, risk management and critical reflection. The SFI modules complement academic learning on the MPA, and provide an important opportunity for practice oriented learning and broad skills development.

Course Description

With the proliferation of platforms for moving images in both public and private spaces, the ability to communicate through moving images is a basic skill that is becoming ever more important in all fields, and moreover, an increasingly important basic form of literacy in contemporary society.

This course is an introductory, intensive, documentary production course in which SFI students develop a range of skills essential to this medium. The successful execution of a documentary film requires intensive planning, organization and collaboration, and the course develops these skills which are essential to the SFI modules, along with providing students with a grounding in the craft of video production, and the creation of moving images, instructing them in basic skills that they can apply to their coursework and research, and beyond, in their careers. These skills cover the primary phases of the video production process, including pre-production, cinematography, sound and editing.

The course instructs students in the creation of moving images via the documentary mode of production, with a focus on traditional short documentaries such as character studies, process films and short advocacy videos.

Class sessions will combine lecture on relevant concepts, viewing and analysis of film examples, technical instruction on equipment, hands-on exercises, and critique of class projects at each stage of completion.

Learning Outcomes

Through learning to create moving images, in concert with formal analysis of examples, students gain valuable, versatile skills, and gain literacy in this increasingly important mode of communication.

Upon course completion, students will be able to:

·   Identify and articulate a variety of categories and genres of documentary work
·   Apply a deliberate structure and style to a short video project.
·   Work with basic technical proficiency in a range of areas of media production: operate a video camera and tripod, an audio recorder and microphone, and the Adobe Premiere editing system, controlling all technical functions, to produce a short video project.
·   Apply aesthetic concepts of cinematography, editing, and sound design to support a deliberate concept and vision.
·   Offer constructive critique of a documentary project, both as a work-in-progress, and a final version.
·   Create a comprehensive plan for a documentary film, and execute that plan.
·   Effectively collaborate in a small group to create a documentary film.
·   Refine a short documentary through a series of progressively more refined versions, to a finished work.

Course Requirements and Assessment

1.   <u>Final Film </u>(50% of the final grade) The final project is a 3-5 minute documentary film project which may take the form of one of the following:

·   Character portrait: a character study of a single subject using interview, observational footage, b-roll, and, if available, archival footage to construct a coherent narrative about a character for a documentary film.
·   A short documentary involving an interview of a person as they move through a location that has meaning to them, or discussing a topic while moving through a location that has thematic/metaphorical significance to the topic.
·   Process film: shoot someone performing an activity or process that has meaning to them. After, interview them about the process. When editing, use as little of the interview video as possible, focusing on using the audio of the interview under video of them performing the activity.
·   students may also propose an option not on this list, but all proposals must be approved by the instructor

Students will work in teams of two or three depending on course enrollment, and which option above the team selects. The division of labor is up to the individual team, but all members must contribute to the project in equal measure. Films will be evaluated on: the degree to which each element—cinematography, sound, editing—is used to support the subject matter; the degree to which a deliberate structure, theme, point of view, and style, as outlined in the proposal, is applied; the degree to which aesthetic principles taught in class are applied in the execution of the film; and the degree to which the overall work is refined through each stage of the process, from pitch through rough cut to final cut, based on peer and instructor feedback.

2.   <u>Film Proposal and Pitch </u>(20% of the final grade) This is a portfolio of materials including: a brief synopsis, a statement of purpose, a written treatment, an aesthetic statement describing the form and style, a shooting schedule and a budget. The pitch is an in-class presentation of the concept of the film.

3.   <u>Participation in critiques and class discussions (20% of the final grade).</u> This course is a workshop, and is predicated on the active participation and contribution of all members to class discussions, but especially to critiques of student work. Each member has a responsibility to offer feedback in a constructive manner, and will be evaluated on the degree to which they do. Each filmmaker has the responsibility to listen and note that feedback, and to incorporate it into their creative process. The filmmaker may not speak while their film is being critiqued, until the end of the critique, when they may ask questions, and they must take notes during their critique. If they wish, they may prepare a brief questionnaire for viewers to fill out that addresses questions about the audience's understanding of the film.

4.   <u>Exercises (10%)</u> Students complete three exercises in groups outside of class time, exploring and developing the specific skills discussed in class. Exercises will be evaluated on the group's demonstrated grasp of the concept to be practiced, and the effort they put into the exercise. Exercises will be turned in as a clearly labeled Premiere project file on

the group's Nexis workspace, and will be viewed and critiqued in class, time permitting, or during appointments scheduled with the instructor outside of class time.

According to the CEU Student Rights, Rules, and Academic Regulations (Annex 1.), in case of a 2-credit course, students are expected to spend 80-100 hours on non-classroom, autonomous, self-directed learning (homework, consultations with the course instructor and preparing for classes).

Course Text

Anderson, K & Lucas, M. 2016. *Documentary Voice & Vision.* New York: Routledge
-This text is available for online reading and chapter download

Sound Effects and Music online resources

📁 Assignment Sheets and class handouts
- Exercise 1 - Premiere .docx
- Exercise 2- Camera Basics NEW.docx
- Final Project, Option 1 - Conventional Interview.docx
- Final Project, Option 2 - Location Tour .docx
- Final Project, Option 3 - Process Film.docx
- Final Project, Option 4 - Game Exercise .docx
- IMPORTANT SHOOTING REMINDERS! .docx
- Proposal Assignment sheet.docx

[Download folder]

📁 Sample Proposals

🌐 Sony PMW-X70 operating guide

📄 Equipment check-out/check-in manual

📁 Adobe Premiere and NAS resources

📁 Release Forms

Film Ideas Forum

A forum for students to post potential ideas for a film project for the semester. You'll need to know the topic for your film and who you'll be working with by the 2nd week of the semester. Please post a 50-100 work description of the type of project you'd like to work on here. This could be a specific idea, or even just a general idea of the type of project or general subject matter.
Add a new topic to this forum

🗩 Main Course Forum
Add a new topic to this forum

Week 1 - April 9

Session 1: Course Introduction; Documentary Fundamentals; cinematic structure; Doc proposals
Prezi: http://prezi.com/wtend-g6_kwz/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Read: Kelly Anderson and Martin Lucas, *Documentary Voice and Vision*, ch. 1-3, p. 3-40
        Review Syllabus
        Article: Attention, Doc Filmmakers, Don't Make These 10 Mistakes

Watch: *Saving Face* (39:57): https://www.filmsshort.com/short-film-pages/saving-face-daniel-junge-sharmeen-obaid-chinoy.html#.Whwmk0trzuS
The Umbrella Man (6:36): https://vimeo.com/80076227
Soul of a Scrapyard (5:35): https://nyti.ms/2sPRc2J

For class discussion: Think about the story structure of Saving Face
   -Who is/are the protagonist(s)? What is/are their story goal(s)?
   -what is the basic narrative conflict? What's the hook?
   -aside from the principal story conflict, are there other conflicts that function on different levels?
   -what basic narrative question(s) does the film pose at the beginning, creating suspense throughout, that gets answered in the end?
   -what are the key turning points, including the climax? How is the climax portrayed/revealed? Through interview? Through visuals?

For Umbrella Man and Soul of a Scrapyard, which are shorter films, think about how they are structured. Does each use the same, narrative elements as Saving Face? If not, what creates a progression? What gives them structure--a beginning, middle, and end? What makes each watchable--why are they successful?

Assign: Group list and one-paragraph idea summary, due Week 2. Project Pitch, Week 3. Film project proposal, due April 30 via email.

Session 2: Editing Concepts and Techniques
Using the NAS (Network-Attached Storage); Reserving Edit Stations

Read: ch. 18-20 in *Documentary Voice and Vision*, p. 295-339
The Visionaries: A Roundtable of Documentary Editors. Sundance Institute: http://www.sundance.org/blogs/the-visionaries-a-roundtable-of-documentary-editors
If You Want to Learn How to Tell a Story, Edit a Documentary: https://nofilmschool.com/2014/10/if-you-want-learn-how-tell-story-edit-documentary

Watch:
Bitter Lake (watch from beginning until 12:40): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRbq63r7rys&t=675s
Coom Biddy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIY8UbddZts
Fed Up (excerpt - watch from 12:30 to 18:00): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y647tNm8nTI

Koyaanisqatsi (excerpt): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOIvJTuCrlE
Nobody's Business - intro (2:52): https://vimeo.com/74864356

Think about: what is the guiding principle behind the editing? How does that relate to the style and POV?
What is the pacing like? Do the cuts come fast or slow? Even or uneven? Does it change as the film progresses? (For a given scene, tap your finger each time there is a cut). How is juxtaposition used to create meaning?

Assign: Exercise 1 – Adobe Premiere and Avid Nexis tutorial

[P] **Editing Powerpoint**
Uploaded 10/04/18, 12:18

Week 2 - April 16

PLEASE NOTE: There will be an *Outside session on April 25th at 1pm in the Media Lab*:
Audio Practical: Location sound recording, the Tascam DR-70D

Session 3: Documentary Cinematography: Visual Language, Composition
Prezi: https://prezi.com/tgj03msy_cj6/cinematography-dfhss-17/
Cinema has developed a widely accepted visual grammar, replete with rules we have all internalized, whether we are cognizant of it or not. We begin to explore and understand the structure and nature of this language, as a first step toward fluency.

READ: 7-10 in *Documentary Voice and Vision*, pp. 83-164

WATCH:
    Luv'in the Black Country (9:58) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjUXiZ9i_y4
    Over Eten (1:42): https://vimeo.com/180163754
    Leviathan (excerpt) (8:00): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJT-RmZNDqs
    Daybreak Express (5:18): https://vimeo.com/16674798
    The Imposter analysis (5:05): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0TnU80idDA
    You Don't Know Jack (3:34): https://www.focusforwardfilms.com/films/78/you-don-t-know-jack
       -Inspiration for You Don't Know Jack - Wes Anderson (2:23): https://vimeo.com/89302848
          - Inspiration for Anderson: Kubrick (1:44): https://vimeo.com/48425421

Think about how composition is used to reinforce theme, develop character, portray setting, and communicate meaning in these films.
-What compositional techniques do the films utilize? Do they apply or subvert any basic rules of composition?
-How does this support the story/tone/theme?
-How would you describe the pacing of the film? What creates that pace? How does it relate to the story/tone/theme?

Workshop 2: Camera: In-class technical instruction on the camera; Camera check-out procedure

ASSIGN: Exercise 2 - Camera basics

DUE: One-paragraph summary of Final Project Idea, Exercise 1

📁 Doc Legal, Ethics

Week 3 - April 23

PLEASE NOTE: There will be an *Outside session on April 25th at 1pm in the Media Lab*: **Conducting Interviews**

Session 5: Pitches
Teams deliver pitches and receive feedback. Pitches should be 3 minutes maximum (they will be timed).

Session 6: Audio Practical: Location sound recording, the Tascam DR-70D

READ: Ch. 13-14 in *Documentary Voice and Vision*, p. 205-242
Sound for Documentary, part 1: http://kino-eye.com/2013/03/04/sound-for-documentary-part-1/
Sound for Documentary, part 2: http://kino-eye.com/2013/03/16/sound-for-documentary-part-2/
Most common mistakes in documentary audio: http://www.danmccomb.com/10-most-common-film-audio-mistakes

📄 Interviewing, Production Powerpoint

Week 4 - May 7

Session 7: Interviewing, stage interview

READ: ch. 6, 15-16 in Documentary Voice and Vision, pp. 63-82, 243-268
WATCH: On Interviewing (please ignore unfortunate aesthetic choices) (7:46): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eMEZUTzMzs
Nick Broomfield on Interviewing (1:34): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuNs3FSteN8

Session 8: Sound Editing and Mixing

Read: ch.16-19, p. 255-323, The Visionaries: A Roundtable of Documentary Editors: http://www.sundance.org/blogs/the-visionaries-a-roundtable-of-documentary-editors
Due: Documentary Proposal
Due May 4th: Camera Exercise 2: Interview exercise

Watch: Letters From Siberia (part): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILiVndlT368
Nobody's Business (part): https://vimeo.com/74864356
Bitter Lake (watch from beginning until 12:40): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gU2moizkfGk&feature=youtu.be&t=12m50s
Coom Biddy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIY8UbddZts

DocHouse Sound Design Masterclass with Peter Albrechtsen (until 46:45): https://vimeo.com/60171257

Documentary Film Editor Tom Haneke, ACE on Editing Audio in "Mother Teresa":

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUie5AlGUHQ

Audio Editing in Premiere Pro CC (watch until 27:30): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddzvGi4jupQ

DUE: Exercise 2 - Camera Basics

Outside consultations this week: Exercise 2 - Camera Basics critiques

Online audio resources

Sound Design & Narration Powerpoints

Week 5 - May 14

Session 9: Color Correction, Titles

Session 10: Rough cut screening

Read: Ch. 21, 22 p. 340-377

watch the following in Lab using Premiere--this can also be done later, right before you start to work on color correction:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3iJwzIeUq4

Week 6 - May 22 (please note, this is a Tuesday!)

Session 11: Edit Lab
Session 12: Fine Cut Screening

Final Films Due: Wednesday, May 30th at noon.