

Documentary Filmmaking for Social Change

Fall, AY 2019-2020

Instructors

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Time and Location

Thursday, 15:30-17:10 (Seminar), 17:20-19:00 (Workshop)

Please note: Sessions will take place in the CEU Library's Mirabaud Media Lab, N15 504, unless otherwise noted.

Course Description

A workshop-style course in which students examine of the use of video in advocacy campaigns, culminating in the production of an advocacy documentary working in small groups.

Aided by the spread in low-cost, high-quality technologies, video and moving image media are becoming increasingly ubiquitous and multi-form, and are playing an ever-increasing role in advocacy strategies. It's not easy to be heard in a sea of information and messages--this is why video documentary, when used wisely, can be an invaluable ally in advocacy work.

In the analytical component of this course, we will overview theories of social change, the role of civil society in policy-making, and the power of the visual for activists. We will explore different advocacy tactics and strategies, and look critically at a range of campaigns. Students will be encouraged to consider audience, outreach, and amplification, as well as the strategic use of social media, traditional press and community outlets. Finally, we will examine fundamental issues such as privacy, data protection and ethics in video documentary.

The practical component of the course provides students with grounding in the craft of video production and the creation of moving images, covering all phases of the video production process. Through learning these skills and understanding how moving images are created, in concert with analysis of existing campaigns and theories of social change, students learn to construct advocacy documentaries that communicate a message, move an audience, and ultimately effect change on a given issue.

Class sessions will combine lecture and discussion of relevant concepts, viewing and analysis of documentaries, technical instruction on equipment, hands-on exercises, and critique of projects and students' films at each stage of completion.

Learning Outcomes

Upon course completion, students will be able to:

- Analyze and evaluate key theories of social change, as related to advocacy documentary;
- Analyze and evaluate different advocacy tactics, strategies and campaigns;
- Articulate fundamental issues such as privacy, data protection and ethics in video documentary;

- Identify and articulate key concepts related to the production of documentary film;
- Create a strategic advocacy campaign with clear objectives and project design, including a comprehensive plan for outreach and dissemination of an advocacy documentary film;
- Apply a deliberate structure and style to a short video project;
- Work with basic technical proficiency in a range of areas of video production including: operating a video camera and tripod, an audio recorder and microphone, and the Adobe Premiere editing system;
- Apply aesthetic concepts of cinematography, editing, and sound design to support a deliberate concept and vision in a short documentary;
- Effectively collaborate in a small group to create a short documentary film;
- Refine a short documentary through a series of progressively more refined versions, to a finished work; and
- Offer constructive critique in a workshop setting of a documentary project, both as a work-in-progress, and a final version.

Course Requirements and Assessment

1. **Final Film (50% of the final grade)** a 3-8 minute, advocacy documentary film which includes a complete project proposal that outlines the strategic advocacy campaign objectives and design. Students complete the project working in groups of 2 or 3, which they form by the second week of the semester. 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; 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; and the degree to which the film successfully supports its intended overall advocacy campaign.
2. **Advocacy Campaign Proposal, Film Proposal and Pitch (20%)** 6-10 pages. This is a portfolio of materials including: a brief synopsis; a statement of purpose; summary of advocacy strategy, outreach and dissemination, and intended outcome and target audience(s); 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 and advocacy strategy.
3. **Practical Exercises (10%)** Students complete three film exercises and one advocacy exercise 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. Production 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.

4. **Final Reflection and Self-evaluation (10%)** 3 pages. The reflection can cover a variety of topics and should include specific reference to readings throughout the course, including the group's approach to the film, how that changed throughout the process, and how that initial vision is reflected in the final work. The self-evaluation should cover what you learned through the process of making the film, the successes of your group, the failures, and what you would now do differently based on what you've learned through this process.
5. **Participation in critiques and class discussions (10%)** 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. As part of the participation grade, students are required to complete all of the assigned readings and demonstrate familiarity with them in class.

Course Text

There are two primary texts for the workshop courses:

Anderson, K & Lucas, M. 2016. *Documentary Voice & Vision*. New York: Routledge.

This text is available for online reading and chapter download here:

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/centraleurope-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4470164>

Gregory, Sam. 2005. *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism*. Pluto Press: a PDF link can be found below

Additional resources that might be of use: Video for Change <http://v4c.org/resources> and Witness <https://witness.org/resources/>

Course Schedule

Readings and films will be assigned for each session. Details will be available on the course e-learning site.

Week 1

Seminar: What is your theory of social change? How can documentary film help us get there?

Workshop: Documentary Fundamentals: Elements of the documentary; organizing structures--narrative and others; Documentary Planning and proposals

ASSIGN: Theory of Social Change worksheet

Week 2

Seminar: Developing advocacy strategies: What makes a good campaign?

Workshop: Editing concepts and principles; Avid Nexis; Reserving Edit Stations

ASSIGN: Exercise 1 – Adobe Premiere and Avid Nexis tutorial

DUE: Project group list; Theory of Social Change worksheet

Week 3

Workshop 1: Cinematography: Visual Language, Composition

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

ASSIGN: Exercise 2 - Camera

DUE: One paragraph summary of Final Project idea.

Week 4

Seminar: Creating a Successful Advocacy Campaign

Workshop: Production Audio: Microphones and location sound recording

DUE: Exercise 1 – Adobe Premiere

Week 5

In-class Presentations of Advocacy Strategy and Film Pitch: Teams deliver pitches in class and receive feedback

Week 6

Seminar: Ethics and responsibilities as filmmakers and campaigners

Workshop: Interviewing: Interview preparation & techniques; stage interview

ASSIGN: Exercise 3 - Final Prep

DUE: Final Film & Advocacy Campaign Proposal

Week 7

Seminar: Misinformation, Disinformation, Authenticity and Trust

Workshop: Lighting: Review lighting equipment, stage exercise

Week 8

Seminar: Witnessing and Video for Human Rights

Workshop: Post-production Audio: Sound Editing, Narration, Music

DUE: Exercise 3, view exercise

ASSIGN: Final Paper

Week 9

Seminar: Documenting Protest, Memory, and Community Communication

Workshop: Titles, Color Correction; Edit Lab

Week 10

Individual Meetings on Rough Cuts

Week 11

Rough Cut Screening and Critique

DUE: Rough Cuts

Week 12

Fine Cut Screening and Critique

DUE: Fine Cuts