

CTPR 474, DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION

SYLLABUS: Fall 2014

4 Units

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Hours: By appointment

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Time: Monday 9-12:50

Room: SCA 258

Class Description:

This class is an exercise in documentary filmmaking and total collaboration. During the 15 weeks of the course, each partnership will make one short documentary film, working together from initial conception to final finish. The partners will be equally responsible both creatively (deciding what subject to film and how to film it) and managerially (who will fulfill what role when). So, you may very well find yourselves swapping roles during production and most certainly will be sharing all tasks. You yourselves will be your entire crew/production unit.

During the semester you will screen selected dailies and cuts for your classmates, SA, and me (your instructor). We will all serve as your filmmaking community and give you a ton of feedback. Much of what you will learn, you will learn on your feet-by doing. But you will also benefit by learning to listen to and filter the critiques you receive.

Your documentary may follow any of the traditional formats, from clip show to verite, but I also encourage you to experiment as much as you wish. The "documentary form" is very plastic and constantly changing, and you should feel free to mold it to your subject. Aesthetic risk taking is condoned here.

Boundaries and Rules: (well, there always are some)

- 1) The final length of each project will be between 10 and 15 minutes, including credits. Your finished project will be your color-corrected fine cut picture and mixed sound on DVD.
- 2) You may shoot as much material as you wish, but remember that you are limited to 2TB of space on the Avid Lab drive (supplied by the school.) If you would like to

purchase a drive that should meet your needs throughout your entire SCA career, we recommend purchasing one of the RAID options (see Equipment and Facilities). All the listed drives are SCA approved and are readily available at many vendors. The USC books store carries many of them as well as some SDHC memory cards. Keep any drive you use dedicated to your CTPR 474 project alone.

- 3) If you intend to edit your project outside of the school's Avid Lab you must clear this with your SA and instructor.
- 4) The school will provide you with a camera NXCAM a mixer, shotgun mic, boom pole, pistol grip, and cables. Please use school equipment for shooting.
- 5) Students will provide their own:
Headphones (required) for shooting and Avid lab. We recommend Sony MDR 7506, which are available at the USC *Bookstore*. Also a smaller set of headphones for the camera operator.
SDHC memory cards for the Sony NXCAM camera (see approved list under Equipment and Facilities.)
- 6) Any re-enactments or directed action must conform to all SCA policies regarding use of actors; SAG agreements, child labor laws, permit requirements, safety forms, etc. If you can avoid re-enactments, you should.
- 7) Except by explicit permission, all shooting must take place within a 50mile radius of USC.

Gray Areas and Red Flags: (check these out with me and your SA before you proceed or just stay away from them)

- 1) Use of professional facilities or technicians can result in failing the course. The core idea of the course is that the partnerships make the documentaries entirely on their own. However, there may well be situations where you might want to shoot with two cameras or have a slightly larger crew. In such a case, you must turn first to members of the class to help.
- 2) All featured copyrighted material must be cleared and acknowledged in your credits. Clearance can run the gamut from being a giant pain to totally impossible, and copyrighted material can include everything from the obvious (film clips and photographs) to the unexpected (an album cover or a featured baseball cap). So be sure to check that anything of this nature is in the public domain.
- 3) All music in the film must be composed for the film. This really is a sub-set of #3, but publishing and performance rights are really hard to clear in the amount of time available. Furthermore, if you want to score your documentary, a composer is the best way to go. USC has a fabulous school for film composing with many many eager young composers.
- 4) Working with children can be tricky. Normally, filming with any child, even your own, requires a Certified Studio Teacher to be present. Directing a child's action or calling one to a "set" most certainly does. This can cost bucks unless you can talk one of LA's CSTs into doing it for the credit and the glory. Check with me and Joe Wallenstein, in SCA 304, if you intend to use a child in any part of your documentary and bring a written clearance from Joe to your instructor (that would be me) **before** filming with a child.

EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

The School will provide:

1. Sony NXCAM HD Cameras and tripods.

N.B. WITH THE NXCAM CAMERA, THIS SETTING IS THE ONLY SETTING THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO EDIT YOUR FOOTAGE ON AVID:

HD 1080/60i FX (59.94i)

Setting can be found by clicking on "Menu"

Toggle down to REC/OUT SET then select "Exec"

Toggle arrow to the right and down to select "Rec Format" then select "Exec" then choose: HD 1080/60i FX (59.94i) and select "Exec"

To verify you've selected the correct format at the main screen select the "Display" button until you see HD 1080/60i FX (59.94i) on the viewfinder screen.

2. A 2TB RAID External drive for editing.

3. Editing stations in the SCA Avid lab.

. Students must pay a Lab Fee of \$500 and also an Insurance Fee of \$300.

Students will provide their own:

1. Headphones (required) for Avid lab. We recommend Sony MDR 7506, which are available at the USC Bookstore. You will need a 1/4" adaptor. Also small headset w/ mini plug for camera.

2. SDHC Memory (16 GB) cards for NXCAM. (Class 10 rated) **SCA APPROVED SDNC CARDS:**

- Kingston Ultimate X 16GB SDHC Flash Card: Model # SD10G2/16GB
- SanDisk Extreme 16GB SDHC Flash Card: Model # SDSDRX3-16GB-A21
- SONY 16GB SDHC Flash Drive: Model # SF16NX/TQ
- Lexar Professional 133x 16GB SDHC Flash Card: Model

#LSD16GCRBNA133

- PNY Professional Series 16GB SDHC Flash Card: Model # P-SDHC16GB10-EFS2

3. If you wish to purchase an additional drive, these are the SCA approved External Hard Drives:

- G-TECH: G-RAID (2-6TB RAID)
- G-TECH: G-DRIVE (1TB Single Drive)
- Glyph-Technologies: GT-050Q (1TB Single Drive)

A second drive or 16GB flash drives are highly recommended to back up material in the case of drive failure.

Students will be required to bring their projects to class on their drives from time to time.

The Schedule and Deadlines:

In all film work deadlines are important and expected to be met. The timetable for the class and schedule of deadlines are as follows:

Week 1: Introductions. Course description and calendar reviewed. Partnerships formed and finalized.

Week 2: Each partnership pitches ideas to class.

Week 3: Proposal and Shooting Plan Development.
Equipment check-out in class.

Week 4: Proposal and Shooting Plan Development (continued). Class discusses interview techniques, shooting for editing in verite and other styles, and the appropriateness of various documentary styles to different subjects and filmmaker intentions.
Shoot interview exercises.

Week 5: First Written Proposals and Shooting Plans Due. Partners present proposals and shooting plans to class for discussion. View Interview exercises.
Principal photography and editing begins.

Week 6: Each partnership to show 5 minutes of selected dailies to class.
Principal photography and editing continues.

Week 7: Screening of dailies and class discussion continues.

Principal photography and editing continues.

Week 8: Screening of dailies and class discussion continues.

Principal photography and editing continues.

Week 9: Each partnership presents selected cut scenes/sections to class.

Principal photography ends. Editing continues.

Week 10: Each partnership presents selected cut scenes/sections to class.

Week 11: In-class editing session.

First week of pick-ups.

Week 12: First rough cut screenings of projects.

Second week of pick-ups.

Week 13: Second rough cut screening.

Begin sound track sweetening and color correction.

Week 14: Fine Cut Screening.

Sound mix and color correction polish (in AVID).

Week 15: Final in-class screenings.

Final Completed Proposals due.

Finals Week: Picture/sound output.

Public Screening.

Recommended Readings:

Writing, Directing, and Producing Documentary Films and Videos, Alan Rosenthal

Documentary Storytelling, Second Edition: Making Stronger and More Dramatic Non-Fiction Films, Shelia Bernard

Making Documentary Films and Videos: A Practical Guide to Planning, Filming, and Editing Documentaries, Barry Hampe

The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide: A Down and Dirty DV Production, Anthony Artis

Safety:

USC BOILERPLATE: “All students are expected to understand and abide by the USC School of Cinematic Arts guidelines. Violations of any of the safety guidelines may result in disciplinary action ranging from confiscation of footage to expulsion from the University.”

Remember that you are responsible for reading and following the safety procedures in the Safety handout. (See Student Production Notebook). And that means all partners. Here, especially, you hang together, or we will hang you together. Discuss with your instructor and SA any and all shots that involve weapons, projectiles, cars, stunts, children, or risky procedures involved in shooting your project. They must be cleared and signed off on the proper forms **before you shoot**, not only by the instructor, but also by the school Safety Coordinator.

Think and plan out the situations you will be shooting in and stay alert at all times. Shooting a documentary can be far more dangerous than a studio set. I have been kicked, clubbed, gassed, knocked down, had a gun stuck in my face, bit by a horse, almost run over by an elephant as well as a truck, etc., etc., while shooting documentaries. I've never so much as stubbed my toe on a set.

Any accident or damage **must** be documented in an ACCIDENT REPORT, in writing, signed by all partners. A copy must be given to your instructor the next day.

If you are faced with a change in production plans that raises new safety or ethical issues, **CALL** your instructor or SA and discuss it. If you are uncertain as to how to proceed or cannot reach your instructor or SA, post-pone the shot/scene until a later time and continue shooting scenes that pose no safety problem.

PARTNERSHIPS: Learning to work with someone else is one of the most important aspects of this class. Some of you have made films on your own, some have worked with or as part of large crews, and some have worked with a partner on projects where the roles were clearly defined. What this course asks of you is relatively unique. We are asking that there be no "boss" in your partnership: that you together decide on all aspects of your project, both aesthetic and practical from initial concept to final completion. From this point on, with very few exceptions, you will be making films with other people. Working with equal partners presents unique challenges, mostly enriching, but sometimes producing very negative feelings. Your SA and instructor will do their best to help you through any partnership difficulties you may have, but ultimately the success of your partnership is your responsibility. Bottom line, though, you may not change partners or do a film on your own in this class.

Details, Details: (and other paperwork)

- 1) If you wish to have your film considered for festivals or any release outside of this class or personal use, each partnership must collect photocopies of all required permits, releases, emergency medical information, etc., and put them in a production notebook for archival purpose. Paperwork necessary for a Documentary Production note book include: **CHECKLIST:**

Treatment (both initial and final)

Proposed Shooting Schedule

Completed Call Sheets

Participant list with contact information

Participant Releases (including Minor Releases & Studio Teacher Form if applicable)

Crew List with Addresses & Phone Numbers

Crew Emergency Information (for Worker's Comp)

Location Permits & Releases (if required or requested owner of location)

Weapons/Stunts Permits
Hazardous Shooting Conditions Sign-Off's
Releases for any copyrighted material not deemed to be public domain or fair use
Music Performance Releases
Composer Releases
Music Library Track Information
Credits List
Transcript (if requested)
Other, specify: Anything additional that your instructor or SA requests

- 2) Deadlines are important and must be met all along the way if you are to complete your project on time. Please refer to the calendar weekly to be sure that you know what is expected at all times. In particular, those of you who come into the class without a partner will have a week to find a partner. If the class happens to have an odd number of students, one partnership of three students will be allowed. All of you have until the fifth week to solidify your ideas and shooting plans. You have five weeks of principal photography, during which you will also be editing, a week off from shooting and then two weeks for pick-ups. Then about two weeks to work on your mix and color correction (both of which you do on Avid)...then we're done. We will schedule a public screening at the end of the semester.

Conferences and Such:

I am available in my office during the hours listed above. Contact me if you intend to drop by or if you wish to schedule a meeting for a different time. Please feel free to contact either your instructor or the SA with any questions or problems that you might have during the semester. Most issues can be easily solved, so don't be shy.

And yes....The Grades:

10% of your final grade is based on your grade on your first written proposal and shooting plan (due week 5).

10% on your dailies & rough cuts. Includes meeting weekly schedule of materials

20% on your final written proposal (due week 10).

10% on your in-class contribution to the discussions.

50% on the grade you receive on your final project. Includes success of final project, effort, and process.

By the way, we do not grade "on a curve." Each student's grade reflects his or her individual work during the semester. Also, attendance and punctuality will influence your final grade. You will be graded down one notch (e.g. B to B-) for every three unexcused absences and/or every four times you are late for class.

Ringling cell phones make everyone unhappy. Vibrating ones make me wonder what that weird noise is. Please turn your phone all the way off during class. This applies to **ALL PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES** (known or unknown throughout the present or any expanded universe), with the exception of laptops used for class purposes. Don't let me or your SA catch you on Facebook, Email, or Twitter!! This is under grades because the success of this class is depends on every student's full presence. Or, as Ram Dass said, "Be here now." I will grade down one notch anyone who violates this policy more than two times.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered one of the faculty (or the TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am-5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

And Finally.....

Good luck & let's have some fun with this.