

CTPR 431 (18543)
PLANNING THE DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION
SYLLABUS - SPRING 2020
Wednesdays 9-11:50, SCB 207

Professor Mary Posatko posatko@usc.edu

Office meetings: by appointment

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Required Textbook: *Directing The Documentary*, by Michael Rabiger (6th ed., Focal Press, 2015) Recommended: *Clearance and Copyright: Everything the Independent Filmmaker Needs to Know*, by Michael C. Donaldson (Silman-James, 4th ed., 2014) *Introduction to Documentary*, by Bill Nichols (Indiana University Press, 2010); *Looking Two Ways*, by Toni de Bromhead (Left Coast Press, 1996); *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, by Patricia Aufderheide (Oxford Press, 2007); KCRW's *The Business* podcast.

The specific object of this course is to acquire the knowledge, skills, insight and judgment needed to research, develop and pitch a documentary production. There will also be some consideration of documentary fundraising, distribution, and career possibilities. The broader goal is to facilitate the development of each student's unique cinematic voice through the exploration of a documentary story idea that the student feels passionately about. Although we will cover some technical issues, this is not a production class; the emphasis is on the larger picture, issues of aesthetics and meaning and purpose, ethics and responsibility and cultural context, what you want to express as a filmmaker and why, what you think film can and should be, brought to bear through class discussion on the specific project you are developing.

As a cinematic form, documentary has experienced an explosion of creativity in recent years. In addition to discussion of class projects, we will view all or part of numerous documentaries (both USC student films and professional productions) and consider the almost limitless range with regard to style, tone and subject matter that contemporary non-fiction filmmaking can embrace.

Each student will write a 5-10 page treatment, produce a 5-7 minute sample videotape (the pitch tape), and present a 5-7 minute oral pitch for their project. All

students will pitch their project on CTPR 547 pitch day, even those students who do not wish their projects to be considered for CTPR 547, or who are not eligible (you must be a graduate production student, have completed the CTPR 507/508 sequence, and have crewed or be crewing a CTPR 546 or CTPR 547 project, either documentary or fiction or be an undergraduate production student, have completed CTPR 310, and have completed or be currently taking CTPR 450). It is possible to co-develop, co-pitch and/or co-direct a project with another eligible student. The CTPR 547 committee will select three documentary projects. For the documentary section of CTPR 547, the student who has developed a selected project becomes its writer/director and must find qualified and eligible crew members for the other positions on the project.

In addition to the pre-reqs for interested candidates – grads 508 & 531; undergrads 450, 310 & 431 – students must disclose any reasons preventing their projects from adhering to the customary Sat/Sun shooting times at the time they make the decision to pitch. They are encouraged to gather a crew interested in their project prior to pitch day even though it is understood that crew commitments can still stay open until the Wednesday following Friday pitch day at noon. This deadline importantly must be met in order for the project to be ‘green lit.’

Claudia Walters for grads and Marcus Anderson for undergrads, and the 547 Directing Faculty should be kept informed as the crews commit.

This course also takes the place of CTPR 553 as a prerequisite for a CTPR 581 or CTPR 582 doc.

Schedule of Classes

Week 1 — Jan 15 General orientation; initial discussion of students’ ideas for their projects. Intro to Documentary lecture and Powerpoint.

Assignment 1: Exercises for originating ideas (see separate sheet); write descriptive paragraphs about three ideas for documentaries (to be emailed, 1/20 by 8AM); Rabiger, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Week 2 — Jan 22 Discuss research ideas with class. Continue Intro to Documentary lecture and Powerpoint.

Assignment 2: “Get out of the car” exercise (see separate sheet); do preliminary research and write a one-page description of one project (to be emailed 1/27 by 8AM); Rabiger, Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Week 3 — Jan 29 Discuss projects; interview exercises.

Assignment 3: Send me a list of 2-3 547 docs. or 2 547 and 1 other documentary that you think would be useful to your own project by 2/3 by 8AM. Continue research; locate, pre-interview, and write descriptions of three potential characters for your project (to be emailed to class 2/3 also); REQUIRED: Rabiger, Chapters 17, 18 & 31 (interviewing chapter)

Week 4 — Feb 5 Discuss projects; interview production, style and techniques lecture and Powerpoint. Watch pitches from last semester.

Assignment 4: Group A -- Conduct a video interview, select a 5 minute segment to be screened, unedited, in 2/12 class. Rabiger, Chapters 19, 20, 21 & 22.

Week 5 — Feb 12 Group A -- Screen and discuss uncut 5-minute segment of video interview. Treatment lecture.

Assignment 5: Everyone: send me a review of the three docs that you have viewed and include responses to them in terms of your specific project by Monday 2/17, 8AM. Group B -- see 2/5; due 2/19 Group A -- Write first draft of treatment (1-3 pages), and research report (1 page), including a bibliography/filmography of films, books, articles and resource persons you have consulted or intend to consult; email copies to instructor and other students by 2/24, 8AM.

Week 6 — Feb 19 Group B -- Screen and discuss uncut 5-minute segment of video interview. Scenes, tone, style lecture and Powerpoint.

Assignment 6: Entire class — read Group A draft treatments and be prepared to discuss; Group B -- see 2/12, distribute by 3/02, 8AM.

Week 7 — Feb 26 Discuss first draft of Group A treatments and research reports in personal individual meetings with Prof. Posatko. Write feedback to each member in group A by 03/02.

Assignment 7: Entire class — read Group B draft treatments and write feedback to each student by 03/04; Groups A and B — plan and shoot enough footage for a scene involving one or more potential characters, and cut the scene together (it should be no longer than 3 minutes), due 03/11.

Week 8 — March 4 Discuss first draft of Group B treatments and research reports with Prof Posatko

Assignment 8: Groups A & B — Write second draft of treatment (3-5 pages) and email to instructor and other students by Monday, 03/30 8AM.

Week 9 — March 11 Screen cut scenes, groups A & B.

Assignment 9: Continue work on treatments and shooting for pitch tape.

Week 10 — March 18 Spring Break - NO CLASS

Week 11 — March 25 Discussion of pitching. Watch pitches from last semester.

Assignment 10: Read second drafts of treatments (emailed by 03/30, 8AM) and **bring hard-copy printouts with your marginal notes (2 copies)** to April 1 class. Complete first cut of pitch videos and prepare oral pitches, for presentation to class April 8.

Week 12 — April 1 Discussion of second draft treatments.

Assignment 11: Complete final written treatments; submit to instructor (digitally) and 547 documentary selection committee (digital or hard copies, TBA) and to SA for SPO availability (hard copy) by Monday April 13, no later than noon.

Week 13 — April 8 Presentation of pitch tape cuts and oral presentations.

Assignment 12: Complete pitch tapes and prepare final oral presentations.

Week 14 — April 15 Final run-through of oral pitches and pitch videos. Pitch day scheduled for Friday, April 17, beginning at 8:30 am — all students are required to

be present for all the pitches.

Friday— April 17 Pitch Day 8:30-4pm

Assignment 13: Choose a short segment from a documentary (3 minutes or less) and prepare to lead a brief class discussion — due 4/22; write a self-evaluation of your treatment, pitch tape and oral presentation (see separate assignment) and email to Prof. Posatko by 4/20, 8AM.

Week 15 — April 22 Screen documentary segments and lead class discussion; complete class and instructor evaluations

Week 16 — April 29 Final Class: Fundraising, labs, etc. lecture.

GRADING CRITERIA Class contribution 20% Final written treatment 20% Final video pitch tape 20% Final oral pitch 20% Journal, other assignments 20%
Total 100%

Class contribution includes listening to, reading or viewing attentively the works in progress of the other students, and offering thoughtful, honest, constructive comments. Learning to recognize, analyze and be articulate and helpful about problems in conceptualizing a project and presenting its pitch tape, written treatment and oral pitch are part of developing as a filmmaker and collaborator, as is learning to listen to, interpret, sift through and make good use of feedback from others. If you don't volunteer responses, you may be called upon to do so.

Assignments will be evaluated on the quality of the work and the ability to meet deadlines.

Production Division Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Two absences will result in a student's grade being lowered by one full letter (IE: A becomes B). A third absence will result in a student's grade being lowered by one, additional full letter (IE: B becomes C). A student's grade will be lowered by one full letter for each additional absence. Two late class arrivals equate to one full absence.

If a student misses class due to an emergency, the student must contact the professor prior to class or contact the Production Office at 213-740-3317.

JOURNALS Journals are due each Monday by 8AM via e-mail. A lot of your most important learning will happen experientially outside of the classroom. I am

interested in how your thinking is developing, what new ideas and observations about your project are coming up, and questions you may be asking yourself about how to proceed. I am especially concerned with how you approach the creative process, how you get to new ideas and concepts, and how you reach deeper levels of understanding of your project. Journals are also a record of your changing connection with and response to the subject matter, which can be useful in retrospect, especially at the production stage.

The journals are private, seen only by me (this restriction doesn't apply if there are any safety, ethical or legal implications). You can discuss anything. I will only respond to something in a journal if you ask for a response (e.g., "please help me with this problem"). Occasionally I may ask your permission to bring up in class, anonymously, a topic or issue of general interest mentioned in a journal entry.

DIGITAL POLICY For this class we will use what might be called the Harvard Business School Rule: during the class, students will not be allowed to use laptops, mobile phones, or wireless connections. Unless permitted by the instructor, cell phones must always be turned off during class. Your grade will be impacted if you use these devices.

To understand the reasons for this policy, you may want to read the following: a study called "Why you should take notes by hand – not on a laptop"; a *New Yorker* piece called "The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom"; and the studies of the late Stanford University Professor Cliff Nass that show the dangers of multitasking (summarized in this NPR segment. Or, read Nicolas Carr's piece in the *Wall Street Journal* last year called "How Smartphones Hijack Our Minds: Research suggests that as the brain grows dependent on phone technology, the intellect weakens." The *Los Angeles Times* published an article on this "off the grid" policy in 2015.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.

<https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail diversity@cinema.usc.edu. You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

Disruptive Student Behavior:

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

PLEASE NOTE:

FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX