

CTPR 531 (18630D)

Planning the Documentary Production

Fall 2021 Syllabus

Classroom: SCB 304
Class times: Thursday 9-11:50am
Instructor: Daniel Junge
Phone: 310-488-9256
Email: djunge@usc.edu
Office Hours: By appointment...Normally available within 24 hours

Course Purpose and Goals:

This course teaches the development and preparation of a documentary film for CPTN 547. During this course, students will develop ideas, write proposals, pitch, and be prepared to shoot a short (under 26:40) documentary during the upcoming semester.

During the course, we will discuss story, structure, tone, theme, style, point of view, and other elements integral to documentary storytelling. We will practice skills vital to undertaking your first documentaries.

We will also provide an overview of the documentary tradition, as well as sub-genres and modes of expression within the form. We will also explore topics around the documentary industry including fund-raising, distribution, and ethics – especially as they pertain to your proposed projects.

Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

Students will propose 3 documentary ideas

Students will fully develop one documentary idea, including...

Research and Development
Rough Draft of Proposal
Final Draft of Proposal with Imagery
3-5min Sizzle Reel
Pitch Presentation

Students will complete various out of class exercises related to producing a documentary.

Students will read required pages and discuss in class.

Students will view required documentary films and discuss in class.

Students will support fellow students with thoughtful criticism

Students grades will be based on the following...

Newspaper Assignment – 5%

Outline 3 Film Ideas – 5%
“Rubber Meets Road” Assignment – 5%
Interview Assignment – 5%
Verite Assignment – 5%
Rough Draft of Proposal – 10%
Final Draft of Proposal (with imagery) – 20%
Sizzle Reel – 10%
Pitch Presentation– 20%
Class Participation and Group Feedback – 15%

Late projects will be downgraded 10%^{11/17}_{12/17}

Class attendance is mandatory. If you cannot attend a class, you must coordinate with me first. Unexcused absences will result in automatic 5% deduction from participation grade.

Course Expectations in regards to CTPR 547:

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). 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 all qualified and eligible crew members for the other positions on the project by (date TBD). Interested and eligible producers are encouraged to pitch with the 531-eligible director.

Required Texts:

Rabiger, Michael & Hermann, Courtney – “Directing the Documentary,” 7th Edition, 2020, Focal Press

Bernard, Sheila Curran – “Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen,” 4th Edition, 2016, Focal Press

Recommended Texts:

Donaldson, Michael C. – “Clearance and Copyright: Everything the Independent Filmmaker Needs to Know,” 4th edition, 2014 Silman-James Press

Aufderheide, Patricia – “Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction,” 2007 Oxford Press

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: August 26th

Introductions

Discuss Syllabus / Expectations

Lecture: Documentary Subgenres, Modes of Expression, and basic elements

Assignment in class: Newspaper – “Documentaries Are All Around Us”

Reading due for next week: Bernard Chap 2 “Story Basics, Chap 3 “Finding the Story” and Rabiger Chap 6 “Developing Story Ideas,” Chap 8 “Developing Ideas for a Short Doc”

Week 2: September 2nd

Lecture: Choosing your subject

Screen and discuss SAVING FACE, 2012, by Daniel Junge

Lecture: “Casting” a documentary

Reading due for next week: Bernard Chap 8 “Research” and Rabiger Chap 7 “Hypothesis, Research, and Plan”

Assignment for next week: Three Ideas for Docs

Week 3: September 9th

Mark Harris to Zoom in to discuss 547 parameters

Go over Three Ideas Assignment

Lecture: Research and Access

Assignment for next week: Rubber Meets Road

Reading for Next week: Rabiger Chap 3 “How Documentary Developed”

Week 4: September 16th

Discuss Rubber Meets Road Assignment

Lecture: Early doc history, expository mode, screen clip THE PLOW THAT BROKE THE PLAINS

Lecture: Verité / Direct Cinema, screen clip of SALESMAN

Lecture: Television documentaries, the video revolution screen clips of HOOP DREAMS

Lecture: Cinematic docs, Re-Enactments, Screen clips of THE THIN BLUE LINE

Due next week: Interview Assignment

Week 5: September 23rd

Review Interview Assignments

Discuss updates on documentaries, commit to final idea.

Lecture: Interviews (including camera and sound)

Due next week Observational / Scene assignment

Week 6: September 30th

Review Observational / Scene Assignment

Lecture: Voice and POV

Reading Due Next Week: Bernard, Chap 9 "Planning and Pitching," Chap 10 "Treatments & Proposals"

Week 7: October 7th

Lecture: Proposals (Documentary Core and my template)

First draft of proposals due on Oct. 18th!

Reading for next week: Rabiger Chapter 17 "Point of View and Storytelling"

(Fall Break)

(Monday, Oct. 18th, email your proposal to class by midnight for review)

Week 8: October 21st

Bring notes on your classmates' proposals...Discuss as group

Lecture: Decks and Sizzles

Due on Monday night: Final deck layouts

(Monday, Oct. 25th, email your decks to class by midnight for review)

Week 9: October 28th

Review deck layouts

Lecture: Pitching

Due in class next week: Rough cut of Sizzles

Week 10: November 4th

Review Sizzle rough cuts and rehearse pitches

Due next class: Completed Sizzles and Pitch Presentations

Week 11: November 11th

Rehearse pitches, final tweaks

Friday, November 12th

PITCH DAY 8:30am-4pm

Week 12: November 18th

Review Pitches, critique fellow students

View over break KOYAANISQATSI

(THANKGIVING BREAK)

Monday, November 29th

(Full 547 crew lists for the 3 chosen 547 projects must be submitted)

Week 13: December 2nd

Lisa Leeman visits class to discuss producing

Discuss KOYANAANINSQATSI

Lecture Personal, Participatory, Reflexive and Poetic Documentaries

Week 14: December 9th

Lecture: "The Biz"

Special Guest TBD

Assignment Descriptions

Newspaper Assignment

Same newspaper to be distributed to everyone in class. Read through paper and find three potential documentaries from the stories, features, or ads. Don't just consider what the story is, but how the film will be presented.

Three Film Ideas Outline

Propose three potential film ideas for your potential final project. Describe film in several paragraphs – 1/2 page (single-spaced) each, to be presented in class.

"Rubber Meets Road"

This is where you find out how viable your project idea is. Do research (online, calls, etc) to determine the heart of your story and its subjects. Reach out to at least one key subject to pre-interview and determine access. Re-write your story – reframing as necessary based on the parameters you've learned through research. All of this should be written in a 1-2 page paper to be presented in class.

Interview Assignment

Conduct a short interview (1hr. max) with subject from your film and cut into a 5-minute sequence. This sequence can be highlights of the interview but you will be graded up for presenting in a cohesive fashion with beginning / middle / end.

There can be jump cuts in the interview, but you will be graded up for coverage and continuity edits (we will discuss in class).

Consider that you are gathering material for your sizzle, and that you'll have more "bites at the apple" with your subject if it is selected for production.

Observational / Scene Assignment

Film an observational shoot with your subject. This can be a specific activity relevant to your film, or as much as an entire day if you and subject are willing.

Do not interview your subject or have them address camera, unless necessary for your sizzle (let's discuss in class). Do not interact with subject(s) while filming. Have them go about their activity; your task is to film them.

Cut this footage into a 3-min scene with a beginning, middle, and end and continuity edits. You may intercut bites from your previous interview assignment, if relevant. Consider getting necessary COVERAGE while shooting.

If your film is not observational in nature / does not contain observational elements, you may instead shoot aesthetic B-Roll and cut your interview to this.

Rough Draft of Proposal

Write 3-5 page proposal using Documentary Core standard or my template (as discussed in class) to thoroughly detail your story and approach the material. Write evocatively and persuasively to convince readers of the drama, importance, resonance of your story/subject as well as your vision for bringing it to screen and the viability of your production. This rough draft is text only; visuals will be added later.

Final Draft of Proposal / Visual Deck

Employing notes from instructor and class, expand and/or hone your written pitch to its completed form. Find visuals to express your story – whether literally or tonally – on the internet or through your research. Using layout program, add these visuals and stylize your text to convey the texture of the film to readers. This document should work as a stand-alone sales document but will also be scrolled through as you give your pitch in person.

Sizzle Reel

Edit a 3-5 minute sizzle reel for your film using footage in your possession or ripped from the internet. This sizzle reel can either explicitly spell out the story you will tell, or merely convey tonally what you intend to do through similar imagery and soundtrack. I will provide examples in class.

Pitch

Prepare a 15-minute presentation and defense of your proposed film. You will be walking audience through your deck, but speaking as vividly and convincingly of your story and your approach as possible. Build in time for screening your sizzle reel – whether to begin or in middle or at end, making sure you allow time for answering questions.

Durations and order may vary, but an example would be:

1 minute talk to tease your film

2 minute sizzle reel

5 minutes walking through the deck and describing the story, approach, team and plan

7 minutes taking questions

Syllabus Changes:

There may be changes in this syllabus as class progresses. Instructor will let students know at least a week in advance of any changes.

ALL STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO UNDERSTAND AND ABIDE BY THE USC SCHOOL OF CINEMA-TELEVISION SAFETY GUIDELINES. VIOLATIONS OF ANY OF THE SAFETY GUIDELINES MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION RANGING FROM CONFISCATION OF FOOTAGE TO EXPULSION FROM THE UNIVERSITY.

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 University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A

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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

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

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

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

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

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

USC Support and Advocacy (USCSA) – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu