



**CTPR 431: PLANNING THE DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION  
SYLLABUS - SPRING 2023  
Wednesdays 9AM-11:50AM  
Room SCB 207**

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Textbook:

Directing the Documentary by Michael Rabiger (7th ed., Focal Press, 2015)

Recommended Books:

- *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)
- *In the Blink of an Eye* by Walter Murch
- *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, by Patricia Aufderheide (Oxford Press, 2007)

Course Description

Welcome to “Planning the Documentary Production.” This class will cover the fundamentals of non-fiction filmmaking while encouraging creative growth, confidence-building, and real-world problem solving. Each student will develop their own unique documentary project, culminating in a film sample (“pitch tape”), treatment/deck, and pitch presentation to the 547 faculty and other students. In addition to lectures, this class will include in-class exercises, simulations, workshopping of your work, and discussions with professionals currently working in documentary. While previous film experience is not required, **students are expected to write/develop, shoot footage, and edit throughout the course.**

Objectives:

- Discover, develop, and build confidence in your voice
- Learn fundamental documentary filmmaking skills
- Develop and execute creative ideas

### Classwork:

- Create a 5 page treatment/deck
- Create a 3-5 minute sample film (aka the “pitch tape”)
- Present a 4-5 minute oral pitch for your project

Total time (including Q&A): 7-10 minutes for non-consideration; 10-12 minutes for consideration

\*All students will pitch their project on CTPR 547 pitch day, even those students who do not wish to be considered for CTPR 547 or who are not eligible for CTPR 547.

### On CTPR 547 Consideration

While consideration for CTPR 547 is optional, the faculty will be selecting 3 projects among the undergrad and grad students, who pitch, to fund and support in the CTPR 547 course for the following semester. To be eligible for CTPR 547 selection, you must:

- Be a graduate production student who has completed CTPR 507/508, and who has crewed (or is crewing) for a CTPR 546 or CTPR 547 project.  
OR
- Be an undergraduate production student who has completed CTPR 310, and has completed (or is currently taking) CTPR 450.

The CTPR 547 committee will select 3 documentary projects between the graduate and undergrad students on Pitch Day. If selected, the student who pitched becomes the writer/director on the project the following semester and must secure eligible crew members for the other positions on the film. It is possible to co-develop, co-pitch and/or co-direct a project with another eligible student.

Those who are pitching for consideration are encouraged to start seeking student crew members prior to pitch day. Be sure to thoroughly vet potential crew members by interviewing and checking references. You are encouraged to crew up within two weeks of being selected in order for the project to be officially greenlit. Claudia Walters for grads, Marcus Anderson for undergrads, and the 547 Directing and Producing Faculty should be kept informed as the crews commit. Students also must disclose any reasons preventing their projects from adhering to 547’s customary Sat/Sun shooting times at the time when they decide to pitch.

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

### Grading Criteria

- Attendance 10%
- Participation / Engagement: 20%
- Assignments: 20%
- Final Treatment: 15%
- Final Sizzle (aka “Pitch Tape”): 20%
- Final Oral Pitch: 15%

**Extra Credit: Legal Clinic with Jef Pearlman (date / location TBD)**

431 students are also welcome to attend 547 screenings and Q&As on Mondays from 10AM - 12:50PM in SCA 112. Upcoming films / guests will be announced in the weekly recap emails from your SA.

Grading will be heavily dependent on effort over the course of the semester. No one is expected to begin or end the course as an expert, or to make the “perfect” film. However, students who demonstrate a genuine interest in improving their craft and opening themselves up to growth opportunities will be rewarded for their effort.

The ability to meet deadlines will be factored in as well. Understandably, challenges will arise, but being accountable and communicative throughout the process of developing your project will provide the opportunity to brainstorm problem solving strategies during class discussions.

That said, class participation is an essential part of the course. Your participation includes attentively engaging with the works in progress of colleagues and offering thoughtful, honest, constructive feedback. Learning to recognize, analyze and be tactfully articulate and helpful with problems throughout the documentary pitch development process are all part of being a good collaborator, as is learning to listen to, interpret, sift through and make good use of feedback from others.

A Safe & Constructive Space

- All are encouraged to speak to the class or to the professor to communicate issues.
- All are welcome to communicate their preferred pronouns, identifiers, orientations, or boundaries if they would like to.
- All are encouraged to be receptive to any respectful and constructively-given feedback.
- All are encouraged to embrace diversity of opinions in discussions.

**THE COURSE PLAN:**

**Week #1 – January 11 | DOCUMENTARY: MEANING AND IMPACT**

- Introductions, overview of course, expectations
- What is documentary?
- Exploring personal motivations for storytelling
- Ideation and finding / creating story ideas
- In-class samples & exercises

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
Create a list of 10 documentary ideas you would like to explore. You are encouraged to list ideas that can be produced locally, and completed within one semester.	Jan 17th @ 9AM
Recommended: Watch a feature documentary you would normally never watch. Come ready to discuss one thing that you enjoyed and one thing you would've done differently.	

**Week #2 – January 18 | VOICE & POINT OF VIEW**

- Voice, point of view, and ways to focus an idea
- Research & methods of inquiry
- Clarity of storytelling – Who is your audience? What do you want to achieve?
- Artistic integrity & accountability
- In-class samples & exercises

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
Choose 3 documentary ideas you want to pursue, and: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Write a paragraph description for each</li> <li>2. List 3 scenes that you would like to shoot for the idea</li> <li>3. List 3 people you would like to reach out to for interviews/shoot</li> <li>4. Write an assessment on the challenges of producing this idea</li> </ol>	Jan 24th @ 9AM

**Week #3 – January 25 | CHARACTERS: PRODUCING & INTERVIEWING**

- Discuss homework
- Selecting characters & building connection – getting out the car...or on the phone
- The craft of documentary interviews (style, technique, ethical consideration)
- In-class simulations and exercises

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Select the topic you want to pursue in this course.</li> <li>2. Identify 3 characters you want to interview and initiate contact with each of them.</li> <li>3. Write a rough outline of your idea (half page to a 1 page). Include the 3 characters you initiated contact with, the themes you want to explore, and a “wishlist” for the scenes you want to shoot. Include a section on your motivation and creative vision.</li> </ol>	Jan 31st @ 9AM
<p>Extra credit: Attend 547 talk on legal issues with guest Jef Pearlman (date / location TBD)</p>	

**Week #4 – February 1 | CRAFTING SCENES**

- B-roll vs. verite
- Coverage – shooting for the edit
- The impact of scenes vs. talking heads
- Documentary scene samples
- Assign class members into GROUP A and GROUP B

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE

Group A – conduct and shoot a video interview; select 5 minutes unedited to screen in class	
Group B - prepare a list of interview questions for your shoot	

**Week #5 – February 8 | ACTIVE LISTENING**

- How to receive and give feedback
- Workshop footage
- Strengthening directing skills - in-class exercises on active listening
- Producing skills for documentary

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
Group A – write the first draft of a treatment (1-3 pages) and prepare a spoken “elevator pitch” to share with the class	
Group B – conduct and shoot a video interview; select 5 minutes unedited to screen in class	

**Week #6 – February 15 | CREATING A COMPELLING SIZZLE**

- What is a sizzle reel (or pitch tape)? What is a sample?
- Real life applications
- Narrative structure
- What makes for a good sizzle for 547, for streamers, for potential partners?
- Workshop footage/edits

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
Group A – shoot footage for a scene, select 5 minutes to share (edited or unedited)	
Group B – write the first draft of a treatment (1-3 pages) and prepare a spoken “elevator pitch” to share with the class	

**Week #7 – February 22 | SOURCING THIRD PARTY CONTENT**

- When archival / third party content is beneficial
- Legal considerations with copyright (licensing, fair use, public domain)
- Feedback on treatments
- Workshop footage/edits

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE

Group A – shoot footage for an interview or scene, select 5 minutes to share (edited)	
Group B – shoot footage for a scene, select 5 minutes to share (edited or unedited)	

**\*\*MID SEMESTER CHECK-INS\*\***

SA will arrange 15 minute Zoom meetings with professor this week.

**Week #8 – March 1 | CREATING AN ENGAGING TREATMENT & DECK**

- Deck structure and essentials
- Format & aesthetics – making it “you”
- Workshop edits

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
Group A – second draft of treatments (3-5 pages)	
Group B – shoot footage for an interview or scene, select 5 minutes to share (edited)	

**Week #9 – March 8 | PITCH FUNDAMENTALS**

- Overview of pitch requirements
- Structuring your pitch presentation
- Finding a compelling hook for your pitch
- Elevator pitch exercise
- Workshop edits

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
Group A – continue to work on edits; practice pitching	
Group B – second draft of treatments (3-5 pages)	

**[USC SPRING RECESS - No school March 12-19]**

**Week #10 – March 22 | HONING YOUR VOICE**

- Overcoming fears of public speaking & pitching
- Remembering your why
- Projecting your voice and your vision
- Doc ideas that bravely break the mold
- Elevator pitch exercise (cont.)

HOMEWORK	DUE DATE
Group A & B - continue to work on edits; practice pitching	
Recommended: Watch Brené Brown's "The Call to Courage" on Netflix	

**Week #11 – March 29 | BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER**

- Practicing your narrative
- Thinking on your feet - mock Q&A
- Drilling the fundamental 547 questions
- **PRACTICE PITCHES**

**\*\*\*\*\*FINAL PITCH MATERIALS DUE MARCH 31, 2023\*\*\*\*\*  
(to be confirmed)**

**Week #12 – April 5 | POWERING THROUGH**

- Facing creative challenges and obstacles
- Problem-solving / producing through problems
- **PRACTICE PITCHES**

**\*\*\*\*\*PITCH DAY – FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2023\*\*\*\*\***

**Week #13 – April 12 | DEBRIEF & CLASS CELEBRATION**

- Celebrating personal growth
- Reflecting on lessons learned
- Feedback on pitches

**Week #14 – April 19 | DOCUMENTARY CAREER TALK**

- Q&A with guest speakers on careers in documentary
- Crewing, collaborating, and the art of teamwork
- Overcoming imposter syndrome and emotional barriers in professional endeavors

**Week #15 – April 26 | NEW FRONTIERS IN DOCUMENTARY**

- The convergence of new media and documentary
- Q&A with guest speakers on careers in documentary
- Funding, artist development programs, and more

## **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.

## **SCA Classroom Covid Protocols Fall 2022**

### **All SCA Classes are In-Person Classes:**

In accordance with USC policy, all classes will be held in person. Students who become ill and need to self-isolate will be supported in their efforts to stay current with classwork and assignments to the extent possible. Please contact your professor and/or your SA prior to class start time if you become ill and need to self-isolate. Do not come to class if you are experiencing any symptoms of Covid-19 or other illnesses. Requests for longer term exemptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and require a written accommodation from the USC Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS).

### **Masking:**

Masks are not required for classes but are strongly recommended. You cannot require students to wear a mask.

### **Exposure Guidelines:**

Students do not have to quarantine after "close contact exposure" to someone with Covid in the absence of symptoms, but: Anyone with "close contact exposure" to a person with Covid must wear a mask for 10 days after exposure regardless of symptoms or test result. Anyone with "close contact exposure" to a person with Covid is required to test on day 3-5. Testing can be either one PCR or 2 Antigen separated by 24 hours. Do not test on days, 1 or 2 as the test may not be accurate. "Close contact exposure" is now defined as "sharing the same indoor airspace, e.g., home, classroom, airplane, etc., for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period." Outdoor contact is no longer considered exposure.

For the spring semester, the university is updating its COVID-19 isolation processes.

1. Students in **university operated, communal-style on-campus housing** (Birnkranz, Marks, New North, Pardee) are *required to isolate* at university-provided isolation locations if they are positive for COVID-19. Instructions for requesting isolation accommodations are contained in the [MySHR contact tracing form in these instructions](#).
2. Students in **university operated, suite- or apartment-style university housing** *may request* university-provided isolation. Instructions for requesting isolation accommodations are contained in the [MySHR contact tracing form in these instructions](#).
3. Students in **off-campus, non-university housing (private leasing)** are not provided university isolation accommodations.



Roommates and suitemates of positive individuals do not meet the criteria for isolation space. Students with high-risk medical conditions who have questions about potential COVID-19 exposure or infection in a roommate or housemate can contact USC Student Health using the Advice Nurse message option in [MySHR](#). Student Health is also available by phone at 213-740-9355 (WELL).

Additional details may be found at [coronavirus.usc.edu/health-safety-faqs](https://coronavirus.usc.edu/health-safety-faqs). Questions related to COVID-19 processes may be directed to [covid19@usc.edu](mailto:covid19@usc.edu); 213-740-6291.

### **Leaving Isolation after Testing Positive:**

[Important note: this applies to classroom attendance only. Students on set are subject to an automatic 10 day isolation (from set). See “Covid Protocols for SCA Productions.” It is therefore possible that a student can be allowed to return to class, but not set.] If you test positive for Covid, you must isolate for at least 5 days. Be sure you count your isolation days properly: • Day Zero (0) is your date your symptoms began, or if you are asymptomatic, the date of your positive test. • Day One (1) is the first full day after Day Zero. You may end isolation on Day 6 if: • You have no fever for 24 hours (without fever-reducing medicines). • Your symptoms are improving. • You have negative Antigen test on Day Five (5) or later. During days 6-10 (after leaving isolation), you must exercise additional precautions: • Wear a well-fitting surgical mask, KN95 or N95 at all times both indoors and outdoors. • Eat alone or outdoors. Individuals dining on campus must use “Grab and Go” options. If you do not have a negative antigen test on or after day 5, you must isolate for at least 10 days, and for the last 24 hours of isolation, your symptoms must be significantly improved, including no fever. Once you have met the above criteria you may end isolation and return to campus on Day 11. • A negative test is not needed nor recommended to end isolation after Day 10. If symptoms are gone or significantly improving, you may return to class. • If you still have significant symptoms after Day 11, you should seek medical advice. • After you've ended isolation, if Covid-19 symptoms recur or worsen, you must restart your isolation at Day 0. [Note: If a student tests positive outside the USC Student Health system, they should report their positive result by completing the contact tracing form in MySHR.]

### **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](https://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, <https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>

#### **Support Systems:**

*USC Writing Center:*

<https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/handouts-and-video-tutorials/>

*USC Kortschak Center (for tools on time management to organization, goal-setting, and more):*

<https://kortschakcenter.usc.edu/tools-resources/>

*USC COVID-19 Resource Center*

<https://coronavirus.usc.edu/covid-19-vaccine-information-center/covid-19-vaccine-faq/>

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

<https://studenthealth.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-of-absence/>

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

<http://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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*

<http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault>

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

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*

<http://equity.usc.edu>, <http://titleix.usc.edu>

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776 <http://osas.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.

*Campus Support & Intervention* - (213) 821-4710 <http://campussupport.usc.edu>

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 <http://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

<http://dps.usc.edu>, <http://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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

<http://dps.usc.edu>

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds* - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

<http://ombuds.usc.edu>

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS ARE NOT PERMITTED INDOORS IN THE SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX DURING COVID.