



**CTPR 431 - PLANNING THE DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION**  
**2.0 Units**  
**SPRING 2024 | Wednesdays 9AM - 11:50AM**  
**Location: SCB 207**

**Instructor:** Professor Lori Webster Fore  
**Office:** Virtual  
**Office Hours:** By appointment  
**Contact Info:** [lwebste@usc.edu](mailto:lwebste@usc.edu)

**Student Assistant:** Victoria Dong  
**Contact Info:** [yzhao796@usc.edu](mailto:yzhao796@usc.edu)

**IT Help Contact Info:**  
Jason Martinez  
[jmartinez@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:jmartinez@cinema.usc.edu), (213) 821-2762  
Brian Hinton  
[bhinton@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:bhinton@cinema.usc.edu), (213) 740-6608

### **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 simulations, workshopping of your work, and discussions with professionals currently working in documentary. **Students are expected to write/develop, shoot footage, and edit throughout the course** with emphasis on story development. Previous film experience is encouraged but not required.

### **Learning Objectives**

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

### **Classwork:**

- Create a 5-10 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 547 non-consideration; 10-12 minutes for 547 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.

### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

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

### **Optional Readings and Supplementary Materials**

- *Clearance and Copyright: Everything the Independent Filmmaker Needs to Know*, by Michael C. Donaldson (Silman-James, 4th ed., 2014)
- *Looking Two Ways*, by Toni de Bromhead (Left Coast Press, 1996)
- *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, by Patricia Aufderheide (Oxford Press, 2007)

## **FILMS TO WATCH**

Viewing a variety of documentaries is a necessary way to enrich your repertoire. Throughout the course you will watch documentaries both in class and on your own. Refer to the documentary watch list in the class Google Drive for recommendations of documentaries to watch. New recommendations are also welcome!

In addition, the Monday 547 Screenings with filmmaker Q&A are an invaluable opportunity to see the latest documentaries and gain insight on process from foremost documentarians in the industry. While Monday screenings are not required, they are highly encouraged.

## **JOURNALS**

Periodically throughout the semester, you will be required to write a journal entry to be compiled in a single Google document. **Journals when assigned are due by 9am Tuesday by email to me.** A lot of your most important learning will happen by doing, seeing, and observing in the field. Journals are a record of your changing connection with and response to the subject matter, which can be useful in retrospect, especially at the production stage. Questions to consider in your journal entry – How is your thinking developing? What new ideas and observations about your project are coming up? What questions are you asking yourself about how to proceed? You're encouraged to dig deep for understanding, challenge your own assumptions, and consider ways your identity and experience inform your perspective.

Journals will be kept confidential (this restriction doesn't apply if there are any safety or legal implications). If you'd like a direct response to something in your journal, please state it in your journal. On occasion I may request permission to anonymously discuss a topic of interest mentioned in your journal entry.

### **Grading Breakdown**

- |                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| • Participation / Engagement      | 20% |
| • Assignments                     | 20% |
| • Final Treatment                 | 20% |
| • Final Sizzle (aka "Pitch Tape") | 20% |
| • Final Oral Pitch                | 20% |

TOTAL	100%
-------	------

Below are opportunities for Extra Credit:

- Legal Clinic with Jef Pearlman, Director of [USC's Intellectual Property & Technology Clinic](#) (copyright, public domain, fair use, defamation)
- 547 Monday Screenings with Q&A
  - For an expanded documentary repertoire, 431 students are encouraged to attend 547 screenings and Q&As on Mondays from 10AM - 12:50PM in SCA 112. Upcoming films and guests will be announced in the weekly recap emails from your SA. *Students who attend should be in their seats in SCA 112 by 10am sharp, as the films start on time.*

Grading will be heavily dependent on the level of effort during 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 are 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:

**\*\*\*ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE BY 9AM THE DAY BEFORE CLASS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.\*\*\***

**Please upload homework assignments in your designated folder and label the file as follows: Week#\_FirstNameLastName.**

### **Week #1 – January 10 | DOCUMENTARY: MEANING AND IMPACT**

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

HOMEWORK
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> <i>Ideas must be able to be produced locally and completed within one semester.</i>
JOURNAL #1: Write a paragraph in your journal about your reason for taking this course as well as aspirations you may have in the world of documentary. What are you most eager to learn? What are your areas of strength? What, if anything, about documentary filmmaking seems daunting at this stage?
READ: Rabiger - Chapters 1-4

### **Week #2 – January 17 | 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
Select the topic you want to pursue in this course, and: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Write a rough outline of your idea (half page to a 1 page), 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><li>2. Identify 3 potential characters for your project and prepare a list of questions.</li></ol>

3. Initiate contact with your 3 potential characters and pre-interview each of them.
Watch a documentary from the list provided in the Google Drive and share your observations of style, technique, elements that inspired you and/or that you may have approached differently.
READ: Rabiger - Chapters 5-7

### **Week #3 – January 24 | CHARACTERS: PRODUCING & INTERVIEWING**

- Discuss homework
- Selecting characters & building connection (i.e. “get out the car”)
- The craft of documentary interviews (style, technique, ethical consideration)
- In-class simulations and exercises
- Assign class members into GROUP A and GROUP B

HOMEWORK
<p>Group A &amp; B –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prepare a spoken “elevator pitch” to share with the class</li> <li>2. Watch a documentary from the list provided in the Google Drive and provide a brief written analysis.</li> </ol>
READ Rabiger - Chapters 17, 18 & 31

### **Week #4 – January 31 | CRAFTING SCENES**

- Elevator pitch (Group A & B)
- B-roll vs. verite
- Coverage – shooting for the edit
- The impact of scenes vs. talking heads
- Documentary scene samples

HOMEWORK
Group A – Conduct and shoot a video interview; select 3-5 minutes unedited to screen in class
Group B – Watch a documentary from the list provided in the Google Drive and share your observations of style, technique, elements that inspired you and/or that you may have approached differently.
READ: Rabiger - Chapters 19 - 22, Chapter 31 (pg 449 - 471)
Extra credit: Attend 547 talk on legal issues with guest Jef Pearlman (date TBD: 10A-12:50PM in SCA 112)

### **Week #5 – February 7 | ACTIVE LISTENING**

- Discuss homework
- How to receive and give feedback

- Strengthening directing skills - in-class exercises on active listening
- Producing skills for documentary
- Workshop interview footage (Group A)

HOMEWORK
<p>Group A –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Write the first draft of a treatment (1-3 pages)</li> <li>2. JOURNAL #2: Write a paragraph in your journal about how your documentary development process is going so far. What feelings come up for you? What challenges are you facing at this stage? What milestones do you look forward to building on?</li> </ol>
Group B – Conduct and shoot a video interview; select 3-5 minutes unedited to screen in class
READ: Rabiger - Chapters 19 - 22, Chapter 31 (pg 449 - 471)
Extra credit: Attend 547 talk on legal issues with guest Jef Pearlman (date TBD: 10A-12:50PM in SCA 112)

### **Week #6 – February 14 | CREATING A COMPELLING SIZZLE**

- What is a sizzle reel (or pitch tape)? What is a sample?
- Narrative structure
- What makes for a good sizzle for 547, for streamers, for potential partners?
- Workshop interview footage (Group B)

HOMEWORK
Group A – Plan and shoot enough footage for a scene involving one or more potential characters, and cut the scene together a Scene #1 (no longer than 5 minutes)
<p>Group B –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Write the first draft of a treatment (1-3 pages)</li> <li>2. JOURNAL #2: Write a paragraph in your journal about how your documentary development process is going so far. What feelings come up for you? What challenges are you facing at this stage? What milestones do you look forward to building on?</li> </ol>

### **Week #7 – February 21 | THIRD PARTY CONTENT**

- Feedback on treatments
- When archival / third party content is beneficial
- Legal considerations with copyright (licensing, fair use, public domain)
- Workshop edits - Screen Scene #1 (Group A)

HOMEWORK
----------

Group A – Watch a documentary from the list provided in the Google Drive and share your observations of style, technique, elements that inspired you and/or that you may have approached differently.

Group B – Plan and shoot enough footage for a scene involving one or more potential characters, and cut the scene together a Scene #1 (no longer than 5 minutes)

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

SA will arrange 15 minute Zoom meetings with professor this week

**Week #8 – February 28 | CREATING A COMPELLING DECK**

- Discuss homework
- Deck structure and essentials
- Format & aesthetics – making it “you”
- Workshop edits - Screen Scene #1 (Group B)

**HOMEWORK**

Group A & B –

1. Shoot/edit Scene #2 of pitch tape to screen (max 3 minutes)
2. Work on second draft of treatment (in pitch deck format)

**Week #9 – March 5 | PITCH FUNDAMENTALS**

- Overview of pitch requirements
- Structuring your pitch presentation
- Finding a compelling hook for your pitch
- Workshop edits - Screen Scene #2 (Group A&B)

**HOMEWORK**

Group A & B –

1. Prepare rough cut of pitch video to screen in class
2. Practice rough oral pitch

**\*\*\*\*\*SPRING RECESS MARCH 11 - 15, 2023\*\*\*\*\***

**Week #11 – March 20 | 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
- Screen Rough Pitch Tapes and practice Rough Pitch (Group A&B)

**HOMEWORK**



Group A & B –

1. Make revisions to pitch tape
2. Practice oral pitch

### **Week #12 – March 27 | POWERING THROUGH**

- Facing creative challenges and obstacles
- Problem-solving / producing through problems
- Drilling the fundamental 547 questions
- Screen Rough Pitch Tapes and practice Rough Pitch (Group A&B cont.)

#### **HOMEWORK**

Group A & B –

1. Continue revisions to pitch tape and oral pitch
2. Finetune pitch deck

### **Week #13 – April 3 | BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER**

- View 547 Pitches
- Practice your narrative
- DRESS REHEARSAL FOR PITCHES: Pitch tape & oral pitch (Group A)
- Thinking on your feet - mock Q&A

#### **HOMEWORK**

Group A & B – Finalize pitch materials. Final submission instructions to be provided via email.

**\*\*\*\*\*PITCH MATERIALS DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2023\*\*\*\*\***  
**(to be confirmed)**

### **Week #14 – April 10 | THE HOME STRETCH**

- View 547 Pitches
- DRESS REHEARSAL FOR PITCHES: Pitch tape & oral pitch (Group B)
- Thinking on your feet - mock Q&A

**\*\*\*\*\*PITCH DAY – FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 2023\*\*\*\*\***

### **Week #15 – April 17 | DEBRIEF & CLASS CELEBRATION**

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

## HOMEWORK

Group A & B – JOURNAL #3 - Write a paragraph in your journal about the biggest life lessons you've learned from this course. What areas did you strengthen? What surprised you most (about your topic, yourself, etc)? What are your aspirations for the future.

### **Week #16 – April 24 | CAREER TALK & NEW FRONTIERS IN DOCUMENTARY**

- 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
- Funding and artist development programs
- The convergence of new media and documentary

## **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 2023**

### **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).

## **Academic Integrity**

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a

competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

### **Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies**

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

### **Course Evaluations**

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. The process and intent of the end-of-semester evaluation should be provided. In addition, a [mid-semester evaluation](#) is recommended practice for early course correction.

### **Academic Support Systems**

#### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

#### **Support Systems:**

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

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

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call The 988

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086 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.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298 Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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 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 Non-emergency assistance or information.

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

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.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu) Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines

that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

*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/>