

PRODUCING FILMS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Fall 2014

Tufts University
Experimental College &
Dept. of Drama and Dance

Monday and Wednesday, 6:00 - 9:00 PM
Mark Computer Lab, Tisch Library

Instructor

Khary Jones, Lecturer in Drama and Film
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Teaching Assistants

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

To explore and interrogate the role of documentary film as a vehicle for initiating change in society.

To cultivate in students an interest in creating media, not just consuming it

To teach students the basic skills needed to develop, capture, and compose their own short documentary films.

To give students the visual vocabulary and understanding of narrative storytelling necessary to read films from the point of view of filmmakers. That is, to expose the narrative design of some of the best documentaries so we can use them as models for approaching our own productions.

COURSE READINGS

Required articles, interviews, and other selections will be made available on the Trunk site. Readings are subject to change. Please pay attention to announcements in class and via email.

*Required Text: Sheila Curran Bernard, Documentary Storytelling: Making Stronger and More Dramatic Nonfiction Films (*eBook available through the Tisch Library catalog)*

REQUIREMENTS, EXPECTATIONS

Attendance and Participation

This course will be taught as a production workshop. Instruction will take place in the classroom through lectures, discussions, and hands-on workshop addressing film craft as well as in the field as you produce your films. As such, attendance is both necessary and mandatory in order to complete this course successfully.

Late assignments will be lowered by a half (1/2) for every 24 hours late. However, because feedback of assigned video exercises occurs in class, late assignments will lose the benefit of their peers' insights.

No cellphone use in class. The course works better this way.

Equipment

*Hard Drive (500GB minimum) USB 3.0, Thunderbolt, or Firewire. Mac Formatted.
Purchased by student (*Please contact me privately, if this presents a hardship)*

Smartphone (for the first assignment only)

*Provided by student (Use your own or borrow a friend's. *Please contact me privately, if this presents a hardship)*

Camera and Sound Packages

Provided by Tufts

Adobe Premiere Pro System (a non-linear, non-destructive editing application)

Available on systems in Tufts computer labs.

Academic Integrity

Ideas matter. Effort matters. Author your own work.

Tufts takes seriously its Academic Integrity handbook and there can be serious consequences for students found in violation. All written assignments will be submitted to the course's Trunk site and evaluated using TurnItIn, an automated system capable of determining the originality of student work. TurnItIn utilizes a proprietary algorithm and an extensive network of databases, websites, and indexes.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Prepared Questions and Comments: *Due for each assigned film. A minimum of three questions and one comment that express your reaction to course films in terms of the week's readings and our overall interest in narrative design, development of character, and overall effectiveness. Questions / Comments will be used as the basis for class discussion. Posted to Trunk by 3pm on a film's scheduled discussion date. About 250 words.*
2. Film Analysis Essays, 4 (Student Assignment): *500-700 word essays that engage the structure, characters, and themes of course films. Due in class and posted to Trunk before class.*
3. Film Treatment for an 8 minute Short Documentary (Group Assignment): *Your film on paper. The treatment should narrate what we will see on screen, the major characters, and the issues at stake.*
4. Group Led Discussion (Group Assignment): *In weeks eight, nine, and ten, each documentary production team will lead a 20 minute discussion of a film they have chosen from the course's supplemental filmography.*
5. Director's Statement, (Student Assignment): *A narrative expression of your personal journey in this course. Using specific examples from our course films explore your growth as a viewer of documentary film and your growth as a documentary storyteller.*

PRODUCTION ASSIGNMENTS

(Detailed descriptions of assignments will be made available in class and on Trunk)

A Two (2) Minute Short Documentary Essay (Student Assignment)

Create a two minute short doc according to a series of very specific guidelines and restrictions

A Three (3) Minute Character Sequence (Student Assignment): Create a three minute footage sequence utilizing interview, verite, and, if available, archival footage to construct a coherent narrative about a character for a documentary film.

An Eight (8) Minute Short Documentary (Group Assignment): With two or more classmates, create a short documentary film which relies on verite, character interviews, and archival footage to introduce, develop, and resolve a non-fiction story grounded in a contemporary issue.

GRADING

Film Analysis Essays (averaged)	15
2 Minute Doc	10
3 Minute Character Sequence	15
Film Treatment (Card Outline, Narrative, Presentation)	10
8 Minute Doc	25
Group Led Discussion	15
Attendance/Participation (Prepared questions and comments)	10

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Readings are weekly and should be prepared for discussion at our Monday class meeting)

Week 1: Why Documentary?

Wed, 9/3 - Welcome; Review syllabus; About You; About Me

Week 2: Cinéma Vérité, A Truthful Cinema: Objectivity?

Mon, 9/8 - Watch *American Dream*,

Wed, 9/10 - Camera Wkshp 1 (Composition; Verite Shooting); Edit Wkshp 1 (Dailies)

Read: Chapters 1, 2 in *Documentary Storytelling*; "Cinéma Vérité / Direct Cinema 1958-1970" in *A New History of Documentary Film*

Week 3: Whose Documentary? Subjectivity

Mon, 9/15 - **Production Exercise 1 Due, Discussed**

Wed, 9/17 - Watch Sherman's March; Camera Wkshp 2 (Interviews)

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 4: Character and Documentary

Mon, 9/22 - Watch *Salesman*; **Film Analysis Essay 1 Due**

Wed, 9/24 - Writing Wkshp 1 (Research)

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 5: Story and Documentary: The New Documentary Film I

Mon, 9/29 - **Production Exercise 2 Due, Discussed**

Wed, 10/1 - Watch *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*;
Writing Wkshp 2 (Outline to Treatment)

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 6: Structure and Documentary: The New Documentary Film II

Mon, 10/6 - Watch *An Inconvenient Truth*; **Film Analysis Essay 2 Due**

Wed, 10/8 - **Production Team Presentations** (Group Assignment);
Treatments Due for 8 Minute Docs (Group Assignment)

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 7: Tone and Documentary; Working with Archival Footage

Mon, 10/13 - No class; Columbus Day (University Holiday)

Wed, 10/15 - Watch *The World According to Dick Cheney*;

Film Analysis Essay 3 Due;

Edit Wkshp 3: Editing with Archival Footage

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 8: Assembling the Film

Mon, 10/20 - **Watch Film TBD, Group led film discussion #1**

Wed, 10/22 - Edit Wkshp 4 (Looking at Dailies, Making "Selects")

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 9: Narration: Who's Talking?

Mon, 10/27 - Watch *Eyes on the Prize, Episode 10: The Promised Land*

Wed, 10/29 - Writing Wkshp 3: Narration

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 10: The Introduction

Mon, 11/3 - **First Assemblies of 8 min Films Screened, Discussed**

Wed, 11/5 - **Watch Film TBD, Group led film discussion #2**

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 11: The Scene

Mon, 11/10 - **Opening Scene and Second Assemblies Screened, Discussed;**

Editorial Needs Identified; Additional Shooting Planned

Wed, 11/12 - **Watch Film TBD, Group led film discussion #3;**

Edit Wkshp 5 (From Assemblies to Scenes)

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 12: Case Studies from the Edit Room I

Mon, 11/17 - **Watch Film TBD, Group led film discussion #4**

Wed, 11/19 - Edit Wkshp 6: Key Challenges

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 13: Case Studies from the Edit Room II

Mon, 11/24 - **Rough Cuts Screened;** Discussed w/ Outside Advisors

Wed, 11/26 - Edit Wkshp 7: Key Challenges

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 14: Documentary Film Now

Mon, 12/1 - **2nd Cuts Screened,** Discussed

Wed, 12/3 - Watch *The Act of Killing*; ; **Film Analysis Essay 4 Due**

Read: Selected interviews and articles (Trunk)

Week 15: Exhibiting Your Work

Mon, 12/8 - **Final Cuts Due**; Final Class; Technical Rehearsal

Wed, 12/10 - Screening Night

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“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”
– Howard Thurman