

INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION

Spring 2019 - VM 242-01 - 4 credits
Thursdays 6-9:45p - Ansin 601

You have to understand, my dears, that the shortest distance between truth and a human being is a story.
Anthony de Mello

Instructor: Colleen Kelly Poplin
colleen_kelly@emerson.edu
(617) 824-8287

Office / Hours: 180 Tremont (Ansin Building), Office 406A
By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the catalogue: *A gateway course on single-camera field production for students who want to learn the art and technology of non-fiction storytelling. Through a series of workshops, screenings, and hands-on production projects, this course emphasizes content development, storytelling strategies, and production skills in the context of relevant ethical, aesthetic, and social issues.*

In this course, you will face the unique challenge of being a documentary filmmaker: the perpetual balancing act of managing ethical decisions and coping with technical issues (should I trick this uncooperative interview subject? crap, my subject said the best thing ever and there was too much background noise!), all while struggling to create an artistic representation of our shared reality. It is a wild ride. Buckle up!

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through readings, screenings, discussion, and production assignments, we will attempt to answer these questions:

- What are the defining characteristics of documentary storytelling?
- What is a documentary filmmaker's responsibility to their viewers? And their subjects?
- How is a filmmaker's "voice" represented in their films?
- How does the process of creating the documentary differ from fiction filmmaking? How may it be similar?
- What role does the documentary play in the world of mass-market entertainment?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the role of the documentary filmmaker as an artist and social being
- Display working knowledge of digital field production and post-production technology
- Recognize viable strategies for developing and structuring documentary narratives
- Utilize screen grammar and visual storytelling devices effectively in a range of documentary genres
- Understand how to effectively collaborate on a professional documentary production

REQUIRED READING / SCREENINGS

- *Directing the Documentary, 6th Edition* by Michael Rabiger (ISBN: 9780415719308)
- All other readings will be distributed in class and/or uploaded to Canvas.
- Links and/or viewing information for all required screenings will also be on Canvas.

EQUIPMENT ALLOCATION (EDC)

Students must supply their own SD cards.

- Canon C100
- Canon 70D (backup camera)
- Tascam DR-44 recorder
- Canon lenses / batteries
- Microphones: shotgun and wired lavalier
- Sidefinder 502 kit (monitor)
- Shoulder mount / tripods / monopods
- Lights: Lowel Elemental kit, Kino Flo BarFly kit, Chimera
- Gel kit / Flexfills
- Boom poles / XLR cables / extension cords
- Slates

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- External hard drive (recommended capacity: 1TB)
- *At least* one high quality SDHC/SDXC memory card for video
- Attend Premiere or Avid editing workshop (sign-up sheets outside DPL – Ansin 809)
- If using external audio recorder (required if using DSLR camera): additional SDHC card, AA batteries
- Optional: production is easier with a multi-tool (I have a Swiss Army Evolution 11)

PARTICIPATION / ATTENDANCE

This course requires informed and committed participation. Come to class ready to actively listen and discuss. More than two absences will lower your final grade by a letter. For example, if you earn an A- but miss three classes, you will receive a B-. If you miss four or more classes, you will fail the course.

GRADING

You are expected to regularly produce creative work. This is based on the principle that the more you practice, the better you become. Use EVERY assignment to communicate what is important to you and **take risks**.

Creative Partnerships / Participation	10%
Project 1: Life as It Unfolds	20%
Project 2: Interview Profile	20%
Documentary Mode Video Experiments	25%
Final Project	25%

ASSIGNMENTS

Further details on all assignments will be shared in class.

Creative Partnerships / Participation (10% of final grade)

You will be assigned a “creative partner” for the duration of the semester. This person will be your go-to: you will work together in class, initiate critique of each other’s work, and become a support system. Details and partnerships will be announced in class on January 31st. This portion of your grade also accounts for class participation. I expect you to 1) read and watch all assignments in advance, 2) be actively involved in discussion, and 3) provide useful feedback and critique to your peers.

Project 1: *Life as It Unfolds* (20% of final grade)

You will be assigned a stop on the glorious MBTA as the seed for a 3- to 5-minute direct cinema / observational mode project. Walk the neighborhood surrounding your T-stop and find someone or something going through a process. Document life as it unfolds. Projects will be evaluated for the successful execution of your idea, originality of concept, and production value. A grading rubric will be distributed. Late submissions will be penalized 10 points for every day the project is late.

- T-stops assigned: January 31
- Project: February 14

Project 2: Interview Profile (20% of final grade)

You will choose an interview subject and interview them for at least one hour. You will string together a 3- to 5-minute narrative from this interview and present to the class for feedback (part one). You will then incorporate feedback and add B-roll to produce a finished profile piece (part two). Interview subjects must not be related to Emerson. Projects will be evaluated for the successful execution of your idea, originality of concept, and production value. A grading rubric will be distributed. Late submissions will be penalized 10 points for every day the project is late.

- Bio and questions: February 28
- Interview string: March 14
- Interview with B-roll: March 21

Documentary Mode Video Experiments (25% of final grade)

We will discuss defining characteristics of various documentary modes and screen examples of each mode. You will demonstrate your understanding of the various documentary approaches by creating a 2- to 3-minute project in each narrative / production style. These are experiments, so have fun! Unlike your other projects, production value is not as important as progress toward understanding the documentary form. Each piece must be uploaded to Canvas *before class starts*. I will randomly select projects to screen, and creative partners should be prepared to discuss how projects relate to the relevant mode. **Late submissions are not accepted.** If you miss the deadline, you forfeit the points allotted to that mode.

- Expository: February 7
- Observational: *Illustrated through Project 1*
- Participatory: February 21
- Reflexive: February 28
- Poetic: March 28
- Performative: April 4

Final Project (25% of final grade)

You will create a 7- to 10-minute documentary of any form and subject. The parameters for the final project are purposefully open so that you can develop your own personal style and documentary voice. You will present your proposal, rushes, and a rough cut to the class for feedback/critique. You will also be required to create a real-world budget for your project. Projects will be evaluated for the successful execution of your idea, originality of concept, and production value. **Late submissions are not accepted.**

- Three ideas: March 21
- Proposal / budget: March 28
- Rushes: April 11
- Rough cut: April 18
- Final project: April 25

ANTICIPATED SCHEDULE

If we need to change things up, we will do that together.

WHAT DAY IS IT?	WHAT ARE WE DOING?	WHAT DO I DO IN ADVANCE?	WHAT IS DUE?
Thursday, 1/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Micro-docs: Crash course in documentary production - EDC Contracts (7pm) - Class introductions / detailed syllabus review 	-	-
Thursday, 1/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lenny Manzo, Director of Production and Safety (6pm) - Camera demo / workshop: Canon C100 and Canon 70D - <i>How can we define documentary film?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch <i>Cameraperson</i> (2016) - Read Rabiger, Chapter 12 - Sign up for Avid and/or Premiere editing workshop (outside DPL – Ansin 809) 	-
Thursday, 1/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative partnerships and T-stops assigned - <i>How did documentary filmmaking get started?</i> - <i>Why are ethical issues central to documentary filmmaking?</i> - The Expository Mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch <i>Night and Fog</i> (1955) - Read Rabiger, Chapter 2 and Chapter 21 - Read Pryluck, <i>Ultimately We Are All Outsiders...</i> (Canvas) - Read Pryluck, <i>Whose Life Is It Anyway?...</i> (Canvas) 	- The Self-Inventory (see Canvas and Rabiger, pg. 7)
Thursday, 2/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Observational Mode - What is “direct cinema”? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch <i>Gimme Shelter</i> (1970) - Read Rabiger, Chapter 3 - Read Maysles, <i>Documentary Commandments</i> (Canvas) 	- Expository Mode video experiment
Thursday, 2/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Screening of Project 1 with partnered critique - The Participatory Mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch <i>Tarnation</i> (2003) - Read Rabiger, Chapter 6 	- Project 1: Life as it Unfolds (doubles as Observational Mode video experiment)
Thursday, 2/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What gives documentaries a voice of their own?</i> - The Reflexive Mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch <i>Surname Viet Given Name Nam</i> (1989) - Read Rabiger, Chapter 13 and Chapter 17 	- Participatory Mode video experiment
Thursday, 2/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Art of the Interview - Microphone demo - Audio workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read Rabiger, Chapter 10 and Chapter 31 - Read Block, <i>6 Tips for Getting Your Subject to Open Up on Camera</i> (Canvas) - Read Irving, <i>Beyond the Talking Head...</i> (Canvas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflexive Mode video experiment - Short bio of interview subject and list of questions (Project 2)

Thursday, 3/14	- Screening of interview strings with partnered critique - Lighting demo and workshop	- Read Rabiger, Chapter 11	- Project 2, Part 1: Interview string only
Thursday, 3/21	- Screening of Project 2 with partnered critique - <i>What makes documentaries engaging and persuasive?</i> - The Poetic Mode	- Watch <i>Lessons of Darkness</i> (1992) - Read Rabiger, Chapter 18	- Project 2, Part 2: Interview Profile with B-roll - Three short doc ideas
Thursday, 3/28	- Final Project proposal presentations - The Performative Mode	- Watch <i>Waltz with Bashir</i> (2008) - Read Rabiger, Chapter 8	- Poetic Mode video experiment - Final Project proposal and budget (two hard copies)
Thursday, 4/4	- <i>How have documentaries addressed social and political issues?</i>	- Start shooting final project - Read Rabiger, Chapter 14 and Chapter 15 - Read Wissot, <i>Whose Story?: Five Doc-Makers on (Avoiding) Extractive Filmmaking</i>	- Performative Mode video experiment
Thursday, 4/11	- Partnered screening of final project rushes - Individual production meetings	- Continue shooting final project - Start logging footage and editing final project	- Final project rushes
Thursday, 4/18	- Rough cut screening of final projects - Individual production meetings (continued)	- Continue editing final project	- Rough cut of final project
Thursday, 4/25	- Screening of final projects - Crying over how much we will miss each other	- Finish your masterpiece!	- Final Project

Diversity Statement

Every student in this class will be honored and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents, and backgrounds. Issues of diversity may be a part of class discussion, assigned material, and projects. The instructor will make every effort to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. If you have any concerns or suggestions for improving the classroom climate, please do not hesitate to speak with the course instructor or to contact the Social Justice Center at 617-824-8528 or by email at sjc@emerson.edu.

Title IX Statement

I am a responsible employee at Emerson College which means I am not a confidential resource. I am required to report disclosures that may violate Emerson's Sexual Misconduct Policy. If you would like to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Healing and Advocacy Collective, Counseling and Psychological Services, and/or the Center for Health and Wellness. If you would like to report an incident involving a possible violation of Emerson's Sexual Misconduct Policy, please contact our Title IX Coordinator at titleix@emerson.edu or 617-824-8999. You can also report online: www.emerson.edu/reportaconcern

Accessibility Statement

Emerson College is committed to providing equal access and support to all students who qualify through the provision of reasonable accommodations so that each student may fully participate in the Emerson experience. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Services at SAS@emerson.edu or 617-824-8592 to make an appointment with an SAS staff member. Students are encouraged to contact SAS early in the semester. Please be aware that accommodations are not applied retroactively.

Plagiarism Statement

It is the responsibility of all Emerson students to know and adhere to the College's policy on plagiarism, which can be found at: www.emerson.edu/policy/plagiarism. If you have any questions concerning the Emerson plagiarism policy or about documentation of sources in work you produce in this course, speak to your instructor.

VMA Production Safety Statement

Safety is a major concern on any film or video set; safety training is also a requirement for employment in the production industry. Emerson supports safety measures and requires safety training through seminars and the VMA Student Production Safety Manual. Students participating in any Emerson film or video production must meet all requirements as set forth by the VMA Student Production Safety Manual and Lenny Manzo, the Director of Production and Safety (DPS). Students with questions or concerns should contact Lenny Manzo (DPS) at 617-824-8126 or leonard_manzo@emerson.edu. In case of emergency, the PRODUCTION SAFETY HOTLINE can be reached 24/7 at 617-939-1311. If you choose to work with minors in your production(s), familiarize yourself with the College's policies on minors (available on the College website). At no time is a student to be one-on-one with a minor without a guardian present.