

COURSE SYLLABUS

NATI 5052: Documentary Filmmaking for the Social Sciences and Humanities

Instructor:

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Central European University

Fall, 2017

Course level: MA

2 Credits (2 ECTS Credits)

Course e-learning site: <http://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=5758>

Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

An introductory documentary filmmaking course designed to fit the interests and needs of CEU students across a variety of departments.

With the proliferation of moving images in both public and private spaces, the ability to communicate through them is a skill that is becoming ever more important in numerous fields, and moreover, an increasingly important form of basic literacy in contemporary society.

This course provides students a grounding in the craft of documentary production, and the creation of moving images, instructing them in fundamental skills that they can apply to projects in their respective research, and beyond. These skills cover all phases of the documentary production process, from idea development, through pre-production and preparation, cinematography, sound and editing. Through learning to create moving images, in concert with formal analysis of documentary examples, students gain valuable, versatile skills, and gain literacy in this increasingly important mode of communication.

Class sessions will combine lecture on relevant concepts, viewing and analysis of documentary examples, technical instruction on equipment, hands-on exercises, and critique of class projects and films at each stage of completion. Outside of class, working in small groups, students will complete the final project, a 5-8 minute documentary film, and prior to that two short, video-based exercises exploring and developing specific production skills.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Apply a deliberate structure, theme, point of view, and style to a short, documentary film.
- Refine a documentary idea down to an engaging short, verbal pitch, and execute that pitch.
- Work with basic technical proficiency in a range of areas of video production: operate a video camera and tripod, an audio recorder and microphone, and the Adobe Premiere editing system, controlling all technical functions, to produce a short documentary film.
- Apply aesthetic concepts of cinematography, editing, and sound design to support a deliberate concept and vision in a short, documentary film.
- Refine a short documentary film through a series of progressively more refined versions, to a finished work.
- Identify major modes of documentary form, and the basic elements of documentary films, and critique their use.
- Articulate basic issues in documentary ethics.

Course Requirements and Assessment

1. Final Film (50% of the final grade). The final project is a 5-8 minute documentary film. It is recommended that the film adhere to one of the five categories of short documentaries defined in the reading, but you may also propose an alternate form of documentary that relates to your research, as students are encouraged to tailor this project to their respective discipline.

Students will work in teams of two or three depending on course enrollment, and the scope and type of film the groups produces. Groups should be formed by the second class meeting of the semester. The division of labor is up to the individual team, but all members must contribute to the project in equal measure.

Films will be evaluated on: the degree to which each element—cinematography, sound, editing—is used to support the subject matter; the degree to which a deliberate structure, theme, point of view, and style, as outlined in the proposal, is applied; the degree to which aesthetic principles taught in class are applied in the execution of the film; and the degree to which the overall work is refined through each stage of the process, from pitch through rough cut to final cut, based on peer and instructor feedback.

2. Film Proposal and Pitch (20%) This is a portfolio of materials including: a brief synopsis, a statement of purpose, a written treatment, an aesthetic statement describing the form and style, a shooting schedule and a budget. The pitch is an in-class presentation of the concept of the film.
3. Final Reflection and Self-evaluation (10%) 3-4 pages. The reflection can cover a variety of topics, including the group's approach to the film, how that changed throughout the process, and how that initial vision is reflected in the final work. The self-evaluation should cover what you learned through the process of making the film, the successes of your group, the failures, and what you would now do differently based on what you've learned through this process.
4. Participation in critiques and class discussions (10%) This course is a workshop, and is predicated on the active participation and contribution of all members to class discussions, but especially to critiques of student work. Each member has a responsibility to offer feedback in a constructive manner, and will be evaluated on the degree to which they do. Each filmmaker has the responsibility to listen and note that feedback, and to incorporate it into their creative process. The filmmaker may not speak while their film is being critiqued, until the end, when they may ask questions, and during it they must take notes. If they wish, they may prepare a brief questionnaire for viewers to fill out that addresses questions about the audience's understanding of the film.
5. Exercises (10%) Students complete three exercises in groups outside of class time, exploring and developing the specific skills discussed in class. Exercises will be evaluated on the group's demonstrated grasp of the concept to be practiced, and the effort they put into the exercise. Exercises will be turned in as a clearly labeled Premiere project file on the group's Nexis workspace, and will be viewed and critiqued in class, time permitting, or during appointments scheduled with the instructor outside of class time.

COURSE SCHEDULE

RECOMMENDED VIEWING prior to week 1:

Lumieres' films: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEQeIRLxaM4>

Nanook of the North (at least part): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoUafjAH0cg>

Wiseman on High School: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/highschool/video/frederick-wiseman-2001/>

High School (excerpts): <https://vimeo.com/117171342> <https://vimeo.com/65241039>

Rouch on Chronicle of a Summer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pxk-fg771r8>

**All reading/viewing assignments should be completed prior to the class period in which they are listed*

Week 1: Course Introduction, Documentary Fundamentals (Sept. 21)

Introduction; Storytelling basics; Elements of the documentary; Documentary Forms; Avid Nexis; Reserving Edit Stations

READ: ch. 1-3, Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 3-40

Review Syllabus

Article: [Attention, Doc Filmmakers, Don't Make These 10 Mistakes](#)

WATCH: Saving Face (40:01) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd1DebORZAs>

Mothers

Csipke

Soul of a Scrapyard (5:35): <https://nyti.ms/2sPRc2J>

Toys of War (4:54): <https://nyti.ms/2mzFhGP>

Nobody's Business - partial (2:52): <https://vimeo.com/74864356>

ASSIGN: Exercise 1 – Adobe Premiere

Week 2: Documentary Planning, Cinematography (Sept. 28)

Documentary treatments and proposals; Visual Language; Composition

READ: ch 4, 7 in Documentary Voice and Vision, pp. 41-50, 83-106

Article: [Tips on Pitching from the IDFA Forum](#)

Proposal and Pitch Guidelines, Sample proposals (On Moodle)

WATCH: Luv'in the Black Country (9:58) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjUXiZ9i_y4

Over Eten (1:42): <https://vimeo.com/180163754>

A Grain of Sand pitch (5:04): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3A_TlowL9A

ASSIGN: Final project proposal and pitch

Week 3: Camera (Oct. 5)

In-class technical instruction on the camera; Camera check-out procedure

READ: ch. 8-10 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 107-164

WATCH: How an image sensor works (1:12) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEVEGVV4EHk>

DUE: Exercise 1 – Adobe Premiere

ASSIGN: Exercise 2 - Camera

Week 4: Sound Recording (Oct. 12)

Microphones and location sound recording

READ: Ch. 13-14 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 205-242

Sound for Documentary, part 1: <http://kino-eye.com/2013/03/04/sound-for-documentary-part-1/>

Sound for Documentary, part 2: <http://kino-eye.com/2013/03/16/sound-for-documentary-part-2/>

Most common mistakes in documentary audio:

<http://www.danmccomb.com/10-most-common-film-audio-mistakes/>

WATCH: How to use the wireless lavalier mics:

<http://www.calebwojcik.com/blog/rodelink-filmmaker-kit-review-set-up>

Operating a boom pole: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6LqibtC-5g>

Week 5: In class pitches, Documentary Ethics (Oct. 19)

Each group pitches their project to the class, receives feedback

READ: ch. 5-6 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 51-82

Best Practices in Fair Use (on Moodle)

-text specific to the type of doc you're making (advocacy, video essay, archival [ch.20])

DUE: Pitches, Exercise 2

Week 6: Interviewing (Oct. 26)

Interview preparation & techniques; stage interview

READ: ch. 15-16 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 243-268

WATCH: On Interviewing (please ignore unfortunate aesthetic choices):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eMEZUTzMzs>

Gaudiopolis

ASSIGN: Exercise 3 - Interviewing

Week 7: Editing (Nov. 2)

Editing concepts and principles;

DUE: Final Project Proposals

READ: ch. 18, 19 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 295-324

WATCH: Letters From Siberia (part): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILiVndIT368>

Bitter Lake (watch from beginning until 12:40):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gU2moizkfGk&feature=youtu.be&t=12m50s>

Coom Bidy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIY8UbddZts>

Even If She Were a Criminal: <https://vimeo.com/11712366>

Very Nice, Very Nice: https://www.nfb.ca/film/very_nice_very_nice/

Koyaanisqatsi (excerpt): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOIvJTUCrIE>

Man with a Movie Camera (at least part):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z97Pa0ICpn8>

Week 8: Lighting (Nov. 9)

Review lighting equipment;

DUE: Exercise 3

READ: ch. 11, 12 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 165-204

Week 9: Post-production Sound (Nov. 16)

Sound Editing, narration, music

READ: ch. 21 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 340-362

WATCH: DocHouse Sound Design Masterclass with Peter Albrechtsen (until 46:45):

<https://vimeo.com/60171257>

Documentary Film Editor Tom Haneke, ACE on Editing Audio in "Mother Teresa":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUie5AIGUHQ>

Week 10: Titles, Color Correction; Edit Lab (Nov. 23)

WATCH (from 8:27): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnuDYyiHQJ8>

READ: ch. 22 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 363-377

ASSIGN: Final Paper

Week 11: Rough Cuts (Nov. 30)

Each group screens a rough cut of their film, receives feedback

READ: ch. 23 in Documentary Voice and Vision, p. 378-88

Week 12: Final Screening (Dec. 7)

Screen and critique final projects

Monday, December 11, 10:00am, Due: Final output of film

Tuesday December 12, 6:00pm, PUBLIC SCREENING, Auditorium

Friday, December 15, 10:00am, Due: Final Paper