RTVF 427 – Documentary Production

Dr. Larry Ward                                                                                              Office Hrs: Mon. 10:00-12:00
Office: CP-650-20                                                                                          Tues 10:00- 12:00
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Class website: : http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lward

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The primary purpose of this course is to provide students with an intensive hands-on experience in video production and postproduction. This course will emphasize all aspects of preproduction, production and postproduction, including how digital postproduction systems can be used to achieve greater creative flexibility as well as cost and time savings.

The class will include the application of virtual editing tools and methods used to create a finished program, as well as management of output work products. By the end of the class students will have completed a high quality documentary.

TEXTS

Handouts T.B.A.  Out of class producing, shooting, editing T.B.A.

EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on the total number of points you accumulate during the semester. Grades will be assigned according to the total number of points you obtain.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documentary presentation</td>
<td>50 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documentary proposal</td>
<td>50 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crew participation for semester project</td>
<td>100 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation/attendance /attitude</td>
<td>100 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total points available</td>
<td>300 pts</td>
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SUPPLIES/EQUIPMENT

We’ll need to talk a great deal about what these projects are going to cost and how quickly you can do them. It would be very, very helpful if you have your own 3-chip camera, a decent microphone and a couple of lights. Documentary work has its own special problems. Although you can use the school equipment, I think you’ll find that it is difficult to make equipment reservations when you are often at the mercy of your subject and not the other way around.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments must be completed by the end of the semester. If you have problems meeting deadlines, please let me know as soon as possible and we’ll try to work things out.
EQUIPMENT RESERVATION- CHECKOUT / MALFUNCTION

Given the number of people using our cameras and nonlinear editing labs, scheduling time on the equipment is going to be a primary concern. Much of what we will do in this class will be developed as the class progresses with the kind of shifting fortunes and changes of direction typical of any film/video production. This means that most of your work will be done outside of our regularly scheduled class periods. In effect, given the size of our class AND the wide variety of projects each of you will be undertaking, it may be more appropriate to think of our class in terms of 3 or 4 (or more) independent study projects. We’ll keep working and talking through logistics as the semester progresses, but our objective is to complete (by semester’s end) documentary videos that are as close as you can make them to broadcast quality. I want these documentaries to be at a level that you can submit to film and video festivals anywhere and feel confident about how audiences will respond to them.

Regular department rules for reserving cameras and editing times apply. This means you MUST return equipment within the prescribed check out time so that someone else can use it. Equipment or editing time is reserved using the standard department forms that are available outside the checkout office in the basement.

Always keep a record of the camera you use. If you think (feel or suspect) the camera is malfunctioning--don't attempt repairs yourself. Let the checkout staff (Claudia and the student assistants) or me know ASAP. Sometimes you won't suspect problems until you view your videotape, but the minute you discover a problem report it. We'll get the camera pulled and checked, hopefully before someone else tries to shoot with damaged equipment.

Whatever you do, DON'T leave expensive gear where it can be stolen. You are responsible for it when you check it out and if you leave it in the backseat of your car, you are either very rich or very.....

We are going to depend heavily on e-mail and the phone to maintain communication. This class is going to be messy in organizational terms. Since all of our work will be done outside of regularly scheduled class periods, we will simply not be working like a traditional class in terms of class meetings, lectures, etc. This means everyone has to make a special effort to “communicate” their schedule to the rest of their crew (e.g. the class as a whole). This can be confusing, particularly with some people shooting while others are in preproduction or editing. I’ll develop a master phone/e-mail list as soon as possible and we should all plan on using it.

SEMESTER ASSIGNMENTS

My assumption is that all of you know how to edit using Final Cut (Premiere or Avid Composer) and that you know our cameras: Sony, Canon, Panasonic. I’m hoping many of you have your own cameras. Using the checkout equipment for documentary production work poses some real problems. We may need to work through some of the additional logistics involved with shooting and organizing lots of material. By the 3rd week of class, I expect each of you to submit a proposal for a semester project. You are going to present these in class to solicit crew members and get a greenlight from me. Having your own camera will really help. And each production will definitely need an external hard drive for the editing phase of the production. We’ve got both Adobe Premiere and Avid Media Composer installed on a few machines in the school editing lab so we can look at your work on the timeline there.
Participation in other class member’s projects

Each of you is expected to participate in your classmate’s projects. You must be provided adequate lead time to enable participation in your project, but be prepared to give some time to projects other than your own. We’ll work out these details as the semester unfolds, but most of you already know that a two person crew is not going to be enough.

2) Finding/Writing/Pitching Your Semester Project

You will be graded on your participation on the documentary crew you are working with. This project must meet with my approval (as a substantive work, worthy of the course units you are receiving). The final results should be a documentary that can be competitive in festivals and/or even marketable.

Using the website documentary material as your guide you need to formally write this proposal and then present it to the class on the date listed in the syllabus. Your proposal will be used to recruit a production crew from the class. So first and foremost, your proposal will be a selling (and recruitment) tool.

If you are going to try to work alone, then your proposal must explain how you're going to handle sound and image recording by yourself. I’m not saying that you can't work this way, but just carrying around lights, camera, microphones, etc. is difficult by yourself. And given the difficulties of documentary production, a production with only one shooter and no sound recordist is next to impossible. At the least, you have to give these questions some very serious thought. And convince me that what you are proposing is possible.

The primary objective of this class is to make a documentary at a high enough level technically and creatively that it could be screened on television, entered in film festivals, even converted to film (for festivals) if necessary. This all but eliminates 1-chip cameras and lousy on-camera microphones. It doesn’t necessarily eliminate tape. People have been entering Sundance for years with things shot in the min-dv format (720 by 480) so you shouldn’t necessarily think hi-definition is required. But it would be nice if it was shot in high definition.

Your documentary proposal should do the following things:

1) Sell readers (fellow students and me) on the quality of your documentary idea. Is it significant? Interesting? Does it have the potential to attract and excite viewers, buyers or festival judges. Is it worth spending a semester working on? Has it already been done? What is your unique “angle” on this topic?


3) Organization and Scheduling: How do you plan to shoot this? Can you do this in a semester? How many people will it take to execute this plan? Do you have the time and resources to do this along with your other classes, your job, and your personal life? Is it even possible to do this documentary logistically and legally? Can you get enough access? Rights? Etc.
SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES
(subject to total revision as the semester progresses)

Week of

Jan. 25  Intro to class

Assign Documentary Presentation. You are going to have 10 minutes (max) to present a documentary. Use the proposal guidelines above, maybe do some research on the internet, and show and tell the class about the documentary you watched with a special emphasis on the style or approach your documentary uses; the kind of production crew used and any special problems the production had to face; the time it took to make. View this as sort of reverse engineering. Is there anything is your documentary that is worth borrowing for your own documentary? Is a project of this type & style possible to do in a single semester? You can show ONE very brief clip from the documentary to support your presentation. Pick a documentary you really like…something you’d like to emulate.

Documentary Proposal Assignment: Using the guidelines suggest above, I want each of you to write a documentary proposal that you will present on Feb. 8. Even if you are already working on a documentary, this is an individual assignment. Everyone needs to write a proposal and pitch it.

Feb. 1  Documentary Presentations (presenting the doc you watched). Reverse engineering: Could a documentary like this be done in a semester? How big a crew would it take? Is there something we could use from this example? Style? Music?

Feb. 8  Present Documentary Proposals (for the doc that you want to make) Bring your handouts (1 page max) to class to distribute and prepare a pitch to the entire class. We’ll vote on the projects at the end of the presentations and then put together preliminary crews. This will be a very long class.

Feb. 15  Preproduction We’ll have one last brief class meeting and then you will break out into your crews. From this point forward we are simply going to work in and out of our regularly scheduled class time on our projects. Everyone needs to attend this class to finalize crew assignments and responsibilities. I expect the director and/or producer to check in with me weekly, in person or via email. I’d expect to see rushes as they become available.

Mar. ?? TBA  Meeting with Dean Pullen to discuss legal issues you might have.

May 17  Final Screening 1:30 p.m.  T.B.A. (but probably our regular classroom)