

Producing Documentaries
Professor David Grubin – Fall 2011

Monday – 3 hours. 2:00-5:00 P.M.

An exploration of types of documentary narratives as they relate to the practical side of producing: researching, writing proposals and treatments, budgeting, funding and distribution as well as working with editors, camerapersons, writers, and composers. Students will examine a wide variety of documentary styles and subject matter as they consider the business of getting a documentary made and seen.

Class 1: Sept.12

Introduction to Producing Documentaries

Types, Styles, Techniques:

Cinema verité, historical/archival, historical/re-creations, investigations, essays, propaganda, biography, animation, “hosts/presenters”

Introduction to developing a concept, creating a proposal, and writing a treatment

Students share ideas for their own documentaries

Assignment for Class 2

Screen: *Hoop Dreams*

Articulate your concept for a documentary film in a short paragraph:

Complete by Thurs. and post on-line for others to read

Class 2: Sept 19

Producing cinema verité

Discussion - *Hoop Dreams*

Students discuss their documentary concepts

Assignments for Class 3

Screen: *The Trials of J. Robert Oppenheimer*

Read – *The Journalist and the Murderer: Janet Malcolm*

Class 3 – Sept.26

Producing History films: Using Archival Film and Recreations

Discussion - *The Journalist and the Murderer*

Discussion - *The Trials of J Robert Oppenheimer: Using Actors*

Discussion - *Man on Wire – Impressionistic Recreations*

Students discuss their documentary concepts

Assignment

Screen: *Food Inc.* and *The Thin Blue Line*

Consider how you would go about researching your documentary

List for class discussion: 3 places you would visit; 3 books you would read; 3 experts you would talk to.

Class 4: Oct. 3

Producing Essay Films

Discuss *Food, Inc.* and *The Thin Blue Line*

Screen Excerpts: *Inside Job*

Documentary Research

How to research a concept

Discuss student research ideas

Assignment

Begin to research your documentary concept:

Read, visit locations, interview key people

Screen: *Gasland*

Find 3 “reasons” or “facts” why fracking won’t harm the environment

Class 5: Oct. 10

Producing Essay Films: Propaganda

Discussion: *Gasland*

Screen Excerpts: “*Fritz Hippler*”

Bowling for Columbine

Discussion of Student Research

Writing a Proposal

How to write a proposal

Assignment

Screen: *The Wyeths: A Father and His Family*

Write the proposal for your film: 2-3 pages

Complete by Thurs. and post on-line for others to read

Class 6: Oct. 17

Producing Biographies

Discussion – *The Wyeths: A Father and His Family*

Screen Excerpts and discuss: *FDR*; *Bill Cunningham NY*

Discuss student proposals

Assignment

Screen: *My Architect: A Son's Journey*

Class 7: Oct.24

Producing Personal Biographies

Discussion: *My Architect: A Son's Journey*

Screen excerpts and discuss: *The Gleaners*

Finish Discussing Student Proposals

Writing a Treatment

Assignment

Screen: *The Buddha*

Begin writing the treatment for your documentary

Class 8: Oct. 31

Producing Animation for Documentary

Discussion: *The Buddha*

Screen Excerpts: *Waltz with Bashir*

Screen excerpts: Animation from *The Secret Life of the Brain*

Budgeting and Scheduling a Documentary

Screen Billy Collins Poem as basis for a budgeting exercise in class

Assignment

Prepare a budget for your documentary (not including post or deliverables)

Post your budget on-line by Thurs. for others to read

Continue to write treatment

Screen: *The Ascent of Man: Knowledge or certainty*

Question: Who was Jacob Bronowski?

Read - *The Limits of Measurement* – R. Furth (Scientific American July 1950) You are responsible for first 2 pages and last page, but you are of course welcome to read the entire 6 pages.

Where would you look for funding for your documentary?

Class 9: Nov.14

Working with a host/presenter

Discussion: *The Ascent of Man: Knowledge or Certainty*

Screen Excerpts: *Civilization, The World of David Rockefeller, The Story of India,*

Budgeting and Scheduling a Documentary

Discuss budget for student films

Funding Documentaries

Targeting the Funders
How do you get grants
Making Sizzlers

Assignment

Prepare to Pitch your documentary
Screen Cameraperson's film
(Cameraperson will be in class next week)
Prepare a list of 5 interview questions for your documentary

Class 10: Nov.21

Pitching Documentaries

Students pitch their documentary to class

Working with a Cameraperson

Discuss Cameraperson's film
Practical demonstration: Shooting an interview

Discuss Interviewing for Documentary

Assignment

Screen Editor's Film
(Editor will be in class next week)

Class 11: Nov.28

Students finish pitching their documentaries to class

Posting The Film and Deliverables

Working with an Editor

Discuss Editor's film
Screen: Excerpts from editor's other films

Assignment

Screen Composer's Film
(Composer will be in class following week)
Complete budget on your documentary: Include Post and Deliverables
Read: *Archival Storytelling: A Filmmaker's Guide to Finding, Using, and Licensing Third-Party Visuals and Music* by Sheila Curran Bernard and Kenn Rabin
Read: *Documentary Filmmaker's Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use*

Class 12: Dec.5

Working with a Composer

Discuss Composer's Film

Screen: Excerpts from composer's other films

***Archival Rights: Music, Films, Photographs,
Fair Use***

Assignment

Complete Treatment

Complete by Thurs. and post Treatment and Budget on-line

Screen *Banksy*

Class 13: Dec.12

Pushing the Limits of Documentary

Discuss Banksy

Screen and Discuss Excerpts: *Client Number 9: The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer*

Screen

Discuss Student Treatments and Budgets

Marketing the Documentary

Film Festivals, social outreach, sales and distribution, international and domestic, DVDs/VOD

REQUIRED READING:

Janet Malcolm: *The Journalist and The Murderer*

*Archival Storytelling: A Filmmaker's Guide to Finding, Using, and Licensing
Third-Party Visuals and Music*

*Documentary Filmmaker's Statement of Best Practices in Fair
Use*

Computation of grade breakdown:

50% Attendance

25% Participation

25% Assignments

Course will be graded on Pass/Fail basis