

NINT 5335: Reading and Making Documentary
Course Syllabus
Spring 2010

Meeting: Monday 8.00pm - 9.50pm

Instructor: Nerina Penzhorn

Course Outline:

The class will combine hands-on training in video production with an exploration of various kinds of short-form non-fiction video on the web. The goal of the course is for each student to develop, pitch, shoot and edit a 3-7 minute short form documentary in the duration of a semester.

When creating non-fiction video for the web, budgets are much smaller than for television or film and filmmakers and video journalists must often work as a crew of one, handling camera, lighting and audio equipment simultaneously and skillfully all by themselves. Students will learn about focus, exposure, white balance and composition as well as how to record quality audio. Finally students will learn basic concepts of non-linear editing on video editing software.

Companies like Current TV, VICE and the New York Times all feature online videos. NGOs and small businesses are also increasing their use of short docs on their websites. Students will review a variety of online short-form documentaries to explore different visual and storytelling methods. We will have guest lecturers who work as independent producers and video journalists who will talk about pitching stories as well as their production and storytelling techniques.

Students will write a short pitch for their projects with a specific online distributor in mind, and shoot and edit a short piece as a final project.

Required Texts:

Anthony Q. Arti. 2008. *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide: A Down & Dirty DV Production*.

Course Requirements:

20% Class Participation
40% Class Presentations and Assignments
40% Final Project

Week 1: January 25th: Course introduction and Syllabus Overview

Week 2: February 2nd: Storytelling methods

Reading:

Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, "The Director's Role". Chapter 1.

Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, "Story Basics". Chapter 2.

Assignment: Find a short-form doc online that you like. Be ready to share with class and discuss.

Week 3: February 8th: Producing Fundamentals

Reading:

Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, "Developing your story ideas". Chapter 11

David Houts, "Lessons in Salesmanship". *The Independent*, May 2000

Assignment: Complete 'Producing Fundamentals Worksheet' and prepare 2 minute pitch for next class.

No class on February 15th

Week 4: February 22nd: Interview techniques

Reading:

Anthony Q. Arti. 2008. *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. Chapter 8

Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, "Interviewing". Chapter 24

Assignment: Write up questions for your main interview subject/s

Week 5: March 1st: Introduction to camera equipment and formats

Reading:

Anthony Q. Arti. 2008. *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. Chapter 1

Week 6: March 8th: Camcorder Operation: Image basics

Reading:

Anthony Q. Arti. 2008. *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. Chapter 3.

Assignment: Shoot Broll for your story

No class on March 15th. Spring break

Week 7: March 22nd: Composition, light and audio

Reading:

Anthony Arti. 2008. *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. Chapter 4, 5, 6

Week 8: **March 29th:** Guest speaker, television and documentary film producer Betsy Rate, takes us through the process of scripting a story.

Reading:

Michael Massing "Out of focus: How indie dogma undercuts the documentary".
Columbia Journalism Review, March/April 2008

Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, "Writing Narration and Voice Over". Chapter 14.

Week 9: **April 5th:** **Editing: Capturing and overview of Final Cut Pro**

Reading:

Anthony Q. Arti. 2008. *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. Chapter 9
Sheila Curran Bernard. *Documentary Storytelling*, "Editing". Chapter 13.

Assignment: Capture b-roll and interview footage

Week 10: **April 12th:** **Editing: Introduction to Final Cut editing techniques**

Assignment: Create a script of your cut.

Week 11: **April 19th:** **Editing: Intermediate Final Cut Pro techniques**

Assignment: Create rough cut of your story

Week 12: **April 26th:** **Guest speakers** from the National Black Programming Consortium

Week 13: **May 3rd:** **Compression and exporting for the web.**
Critique of rough cuts

Assignment: Complete short doc and upload to class blog

Week 14: **May 10th:** **Screen student work**