

CMI 318 - Documentary Production and Narrative

Instructor: Kwanshun Sherwin Lau
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the newsreel and travelogues of the early 20th century to films such as *The Thin Blue Line* and *Hoop Dreams*, documentary film and video has played a central role in shaping the lives of individuals and opening the world to society as a whole. This class will emphasize the power of documentary and its potential to address issues of social significance.

This class will explore documentary video production beginning with an overview of the history and major trends in documentary production and subject matter choice. The course will integrate critical viewings with practice in documentary production.

This class will operate in a workshop format, requiring participation and collaboration among the class members. We will view and critique a range of historical and contemporary documentary films, discuss the techniques employed and put them into practice. You will learn to breakdown documentaries at the same time that you learn to critically construct them in the form of a final piece. As the final project, you will form groups and develop your own subjects for documentaries.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Plan and create documentary videos which communicate specific, identified messages to particular audiences;
- Utilize visual and audio technology in a technically competent and creative way;
- Successfully operate a variety of video cameras
- Act as a member of a video production team

Required Text

None required

Final Project

The final project for this class will be shooting a documentary in Hong Kong and completing the post-production back at CMI. Using what you have learned and seen while exploring the city, you will form 3-4 person teams and propose at least two ideas for a documentary. With the remainder of the time, you will complete pre-production and shoot the documentary as a team.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Because of the schedule, attendance is mandatory. We only have a few weeks together so each class meeting is extremely important.

PROFESSIONALISM

Since CMI tries to prepare you for careers in the real world, we feel it is our obligation to communicate to you what the consequences of certain actions or lack of actions would be in the work place. By so doing, we maintain and improve our reputation in the academic and professional worlds, thereby increasing the value of a CMI degree for past, present and future students. Thus, if a student performs an action or fails to perform an action that would likely lead to being fired or reprimanded in a "real world," professional position, s/he will AT A MINIMUM receive an automatic "F" for the project or unit in progress and/or for any crew work/class participation element of the final course grade. Given the weighting of each project in most CMI classes, an "F" will significantly reduce the final course grade. If there is a second offense, another "F" will be assigned for the current project, thereby in all likelihood leading to a failing grade for the course.

If an offense is sufficiently serious, e.g., it disrupts a CMI department-wide production or if it disrupts the overall schedule of any production class, it may warrant an "F" as the final course grade.

Criminal behaviors such as theft or software piracy at NMSU facilities also can warrant an "F" as the final course grade.

Examples of "inappropriate behaviors" include, but are NOT limited to:

(1) using CMI equipment for personal or income-producing work not explicitly a part of a CMI course or faculty-approved project or checking out said facilities or equipment under your name for such use by another person.

(2) committing misdemeanor or criminal violations or otherwise being removed or detained by police while in a CMI class or working on a CMI project

(3) behavior that proves embarrassing to the CMI during a class or while working on a project, especially if the incident takes place in or is seen by members of the public.

(4) Illegally copying software licensed to NMSU or in any way corrupting or undermining CMI's software or hardware.

(5) creating an educational or work environment that disrupts or negatively impacts the members of a class or project group

(6) changing script copy without permission and notification of the instructor or appropriate student members of the course or project

(7) adding obscene or inappropriate language or other material to script material, prompters, graphics, packages, or other material

(8) not giving the proper, professional, respectful attention to any crew assignment especially if such behavior negatively impacts on the performance of another student or a faculty or staff member

(10) showing up to a class or production session or using CMI equipment in a

impaired state due to use of alcohol or other substances

(11) not submitting properly completed elements of a group project in a timely and appropriate manner

(12) erasing, moving or altering the material of another student or faculty or staff member without the explicit advance permission of that student or of the relevant faculty or staff member

(13) using equipment or facilities during a time reserved by other students, faculty or staff unless you receive explicit advance approval to do so

The above are merely a list of examples of inappropriate behaviors. It is offered only to give SOME operational examples of the concept. If there is a dispute over whether an action or lack of action by a student would be such an infraction, the student can ask the entire full-time CMI faculty to review the behavior in question to receive a ruling on whether it qualifies as an inappropriate behavior worthy of sanctions. The CMI faculty ruling will be the final decision on the matter. Students may, of course, pursue a formal grade appeal after the final course grade has been given.

Please also note that some of the above behaviors can also lead to the student being referred to university bodies for disciplinary actions. Some behaviors, e.g., use of illegal drugs or use of state equipment for personal projects, can lead to expulsion from the Creative Media Institute as well as civil and/or criminal penalties.

The CMI faculty fully realizes that these policies are unnecessary for 99% of the students currently in CMI. These rules have been put into effect to prevent abuses by the other 1% and to swiftly deal with those abuses that do occur. The desired outcome is to never have to apply any of these rules and, by publishing them in advance, to reinforce in CMI students' minds how important it is to act professionally, responsibly and respectfully in a production context, whether it be here in CMI or in the work world. If that desired outcome occurs, the CMI experience will be a better one for present and future students. If that desired outcome does not occur, these rules will hold the relevant students responsible and have them face swift, real consequences. In that event, we will hopefully reduce the number and scope of such violations and minimize whatever negative impacts do occur.

ASSIGNMENTS

Documentary Video Project - 40%

Ideas Assignment/Proposal - 10%

Documentary Filmmaker Biography - 10%

Attendance and Participation - 40%

GRADING SCALE

100-94 = A
93-90 = A-
89-87 = B+
86-84 = B
83-80 = B-
79-77 = C+
76-74 = C
73-70 = C-
69-67 = D+
66-64 = D
63-60 = D-
59-0 = F

2008 Summer Class Schedule

Week 1

Introduction to Course - Begin discussing ideas for a documentary.

Overview of documentary style and process.

Discussion of principles and techniques of documentary filmmaking.

Assignment: Documentarian biography and analysis.

Week 2

Form 3-4 person team to develop ideas for a documentary.

Learn to operate cameras and address technical issues with recording picture and sound.

Assignment: Turn in two ideas for documentary.

Week 3

Finalize documentary idea and form production teams

Begin preproduction.

Assignment: Turn in documentary proposal

Week 4

Documentary production

Week 5 (Meets Monday 9:00 - 11:30am and Thursday 1:30 - 4:00 pm)

Complete Documentary Production