

## COURSE SYLLABUS

# Documentary Filmmaking for the Social Sciences and Humanities

### **Instructor:**

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Central European University

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Course level: MA

2 Credits (# ECTS Credits)

Course e-learning site:

Office hours: by appointment

### **Course Description**

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

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

The course provides students a grounding in the craft of video production, and the creation of moving images, instructing them in basic skills that they can apply to projects and research in their respective disciplines, 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, students will complete 2 short, video-based exercises exploring and developing individual production skills, and one larger, final project, a 5-8 minute, short documentary film. The assigned final project will be a character study of a single subject, though students are encouraged to submit an alternate proposal, which may entail addressing subject matter relevant to their discipline.

### **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**

- (1) Final Film (40% of the final grade). A 5-8 minute documentary film. Suggested topic: create a character study of a single character. Ideally this character should be engaging in a struggle in their life, or striving to achieve a goal, which can serve as the basis for the dramatic, and visual, action that takes place. You are encouraged to tailor this project to your respective discipline, and you may also propose an alternate form of documentary that relates to your discipline. 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) Final Film Pre-production package and pitch (20% of the final grade). 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 crew list, a budget and equipment list, and a locations summary. In addition, an in-class presentation of the concept of the film.
- (3) Midterm Exam (20% of the final grade). An evaluation of a student's comprehension of the technical, aesthetic, and theoretical principles introduced in the course.
- (4) Participation in critiques, exercises and class discussions (20% of the final grade). 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 of the critique, when they may ask questions, and they must take notes during

their critique. 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.

The exercises are video-based, completed in pairs or 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 should be uploaded to the internet and turned in via email as a link, and will be viewed and critiqued in class, time permitting.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

*Prior to week 1, read ch 1 & 2., Documentary Voice and Vision*

### **Week 1: Course Introduction**

Introduction to the participants; What is documentary? Documentary forms and genres; Storytelling basics

-Review syllabus

-introductions

-story structure & elements, character and Point of view

-Elements of documentary: Interview, Action and B-roll

-view examples of documentary films

READ: ch 3-6 in Documentary Voice and Vision

### **Week 2: Documentary Planning**

Documentary ethics; Planning the documentary; Documentary treatments and proposals

-View examples of documentary films

READ: ch. 7-10 in Documentary Voice and Vision

### **Week 3: Cinematography**

Cinematography basics; Video technology basics, in-class technical instruction on the camera; assign exercise 1 (due via upload)

-Shot scale, angle, composition

-Lenses; aesthetics

-Pans, tilts, handheld

-Technical functions: focus, exposure, lens length, white balance

-scene staging

READ: ch. 17 in Documentary Voice and Vision

### **Week 4: Editing 1**

Adobe Premiere Pro; assign final project & pitch

READ: Ch. 13-14 in Documentary Voice and Vision

**Week 5: Production Sound**

Microphones and location sound recording; screen project 1; assign exercise 2  
-directionality  
-location considerations: construction, environment  
-the art of laving

DUE: Exercise 1

VIEW: video on interviewing

READ: ch 11, 12, 15 in Documentary Voice and Vision

**Week 6: Lighting; The Interview**

Review lighting equipment; stage interview;  
-interview preparation & techniques  
-interview staging

READ: articles related to the type of doc you plan on making (Kony, video essay)

**Week 7: In class pitches**

Each group pitches their project to the class, receives feedback  
DUE: Pitches, Exercise 2

READ: ch. 18, 19 in Documentary Voice and Vision

**Week 8: Editing 2**

Editing concepts and principles; Screen exercise 2; Preproduction due  
-The interrelationship of perspectives, Point of view  
-Pacing and psychology  
-Transitions  
DUE: Final project production packages

READ: ch, 20, 21 in Documentary Voice and Vision

**Week 9: Post-production Sound**

Sound Editing, narration, music;  
-Soundtrack elements

READ: ch. 22 in Documentary Voice and Vision

**Week 10: Edit Lab**

Open edit time prior to rough cuts due next week; individual feedback given as requested

**Week 11: Rough Cuts**

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

**Week 12: FINAL SCREENING**

Screen and critique final projects  
DUE: Final film