

Abilene Christian University
JMC465 Documentary Storytelling
Course Syllabus - Semester/Year

Instructor:

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Office Hours: M-F 3-5 p.m.

University Mission

The mission of Abilene Christian University is to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

College of Arts & Sciences Mission

The mission of the College of Arts & Sciences is to educate students for worldwide Christian service and leadership through programs of study and other learning experiences that blend a liberal arts education with professional and career education.

Departmental Mission

Our mission is to engage students in critical and creative thinking in the classroom, in the laboratory and through mentoring relationships, leading them to become exceptional, ethical and agile communicators in a rapidly changing media environment, embracing technology, valuing diversity and embodying Christ-centered service.

Integration of Faith and Learning

The ACU mission has special significance in the field of Journalism & Mass Communication. The role of the Christian mass media practitioner will be discussed and evaluated throughout the semester. Every student has a responsibility to himself and to God to use his talents and to reflect high moral standards before the public. The teacher and students will apply Biblical principles and Christian ethics to the field of journalism and to the study of documentary journalism.

Diversity Statement

Those who control the flow of information in the mass media have a responsibility to their audience to communicate messages in a fair and truthful manner, without bias or prejudice, and with careful consideration to creating content that does not reinforce societal stereotypes.

See the ACU/JMC diversity policy:

- <http://www.acu.edu/academics/cas/jmc/resources/policies/diversity.html>

Course Overview

Purpose of the Course

This course will provide an introduction to documentary storytelling and will emphasize hands-on experience in pre-production, production and post-production. Students will study the history of documentary film and filmmakers with a critical analysis of form and technique. Production lessons and skills exercises will teach various techniques and technologies of modern documentary storytelling. Students will work individually or in teams while learning all roles in production.

Rough-cuts and finished productions will be presented in class and analyzed through constructive critical discussions.

Catalog Description

Documentary Storytelling (3-0-3), fall, odd years. Principles and practices of documentary storytelling. Students will experience all areas of production while planning, producing and editing documentary projects. Prerequisites: JMC260 or instructor approval.

Intended Audience

This class is a menu option for multimedia majors and available as an elective for other JMC majors and to other students with a working knowledge of production methods and an interest in documentary production or filmmaking. Admittance requires fulfillment of prerequisites or request instructor approval.

Required Materials

Textbook

- *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction On Screen*, 4th Edition, by Sheila C. Bernard, Focal Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780415843300

NOTE: Students can expect reading and viewing assignments in association with course lectures and assignments. In most cases these are freely available online or through popular streaming services.

Recommended Reading

- *Documentary Filmmaking: A Contemporary Field Guide*, 2nd Edition, by John Hewitt and Gustavo Vazquez, Oxford University Press 2014. ISBN: 9780199300860

Suggested Documentaries

- *See the list of suggested films at end of this document.*

Hard Drive

- External hard drive to store project media files and other class-related materials
- Mac OS compatible with 500 GB minimum capacity
- FireWire 800, Thunderbolt or USB 2.0/3.0 connectivity
- 7200 rpm drive is recommended

Flash Memory Card

- SDHC format - Class 10
- 16 GB minimum capacity
- One is required, two is recommended

Course Objectives and Outcomes

Competency	Measurement
1. Students will be able to recognize the elements of an effective documentary production.	Analysis presentation, exams, production exercises and completed projects
2. Students will integrate understanding of legal and ethical practices into their work.	Production exercises and completed documentary projects
3. Students will combine aesthetic, communication and technical skills to create documentary stories.	Production exercises and completed documentary projects
4. Students will be able to effectively plan, produce and edit a documentary project.	Completed documentary projects
5. Students will submit their finished project to a film festival or similar juried competition.	Completed project submitted to festival or competition

Assignments

Documentary Analysis Presentation

Students will select a documentary film and deliver a 2-minute presentation on its strengths, weaknesses and appeal.

Production Projects

Students will expand their understanding of video and audio production technologies and techniques by creating videos of specified subjects to showcase different production techniques. Results will be presented in class and posted online.

Documentary Proposal

Knowing how to write an effective documentary treatment is an important first step in a successful production project. Students will pitch, research and propose a documentary project.

Final Documentary

Each student will work individually to produce a 10-20 minute documentary project. Rough edits and finished products will be presented in class and online.

Production Notebook

The production notebook contains every detail related to a documentary production.

Peer Evaluations

Group feedback and critique are essential parts of a successful production process. Students will complete critique forms for each work presented in class.

Course Policies

Course Grading

Your grade for this course will be based on the evaluation of your performance on assignments, exercises, exams and a project. Percentage values are as follows:

- 40% - Assignments and Production Videos
- 20% - Exams
- 30% - Final Documentary Project & Production Notebook
- 10% - Peer evaluations

Letter grades will be determined by the following scale:

- A = 92-100
- B = 91-83
- C = 82-74
- D = 73-65
- F = Below 65

Assignment and project grades may be interpreted according to the following rationale:

- A Exceptional work that goes beyond the expectations of the course
- A- Superior work, very high quality
- B+ Work of high quality, much better than average
- B Very good work, meets all expectations
- B- Good work
- C+ Satisfactory work that indicates a basic understanding of the course material
- C Satisfactory work, passable
- C- Passing work, but below reasonable expectations
- D Barely passing, less than satisfactory
- F Unacceptable

Grade values are assigned to student work based on point-based system of performance assessment, as well as on the professional, educated observations of the instructor.

Extra Credit Opportunities

Students have several opportunities for extra credit available during the course. These opportunities vary by semester as they often are tied to attending and/or volunteering service at various noted events. These opportunities are generally announced in class but it is the student's responsibility to be aware of available opportunities.

Assignments, Deadlines, and Late Work Policy

Each student is required to produce regular assignments during the semester. The assignment subject matter and due-dates are noted on the schedule. All assignments are due at class time unless stated otherwise.

No late work will be accepted for full credit. Work not submitted by the required date will be considered late and subject to penalties. All late assignments will automatically have 10 points subtracted from the highest possible grade.

No assignments will be accepted later than one week.

The instructor is the final arbiter in all course-related matters and reserves the right to control the assignment process, including the selection and placement of students into production roles should such actions be deemed necessary for students to meet course goals.

Use of JMC Equipment

Video production equipment will be available for use on your assignments in this course and a usage fee will be charged to your account. Checkouts and returns will be made through the JMC Equipment Desk only during specified times on designated days. More than one class shares the use of this equipment and therefore imperative that all equipment is returned on or before the required deadline. Late returns or other equipment policy violations may result in a reduction of overall grade points, fines and even removal of all checkout privileges.

You are responsible for all departmental equipment while checked out in your name. If items are lost, stolen or damaged due to negligence you may be held responsible for the cost of repair or replacement. Students wishing to use equipment from any other source do so at their own risk. The JMC department and ACU are not responsible for loss or damages.

Equipment may not be checked out over the weekend or taken outside a 50-mile radius of Abilene unless approved by the instructor. Use of JMC equipment for any reason other than class-related activities is not permitted. Equipment policy violations may result in a reduction of overall grade points, fines and even removal of checkout privileges.

Participation in this program constitutes agreement with these terms.

Content Warning

We will watch or reference numerous films during our study of the documentary genre. Some of these films could contain content considered offensive or unsupportive of Christian values. Please speak to me in advance of any screening if you think such material will bother you. Students will not be forced to watch something they would rather not see.

University Policies

ACU Dress Code

Students are encouraged to demonstrate by their dress and appearance a mature Christian attitude and the ability to discern propriety. The university also seeks to prepare students for professional

careers where certain standards of dress are required for employment. Part of the educational process, then, is learning to dress appropriately. The following standards and guidelines will assist students in making decisions about their dress and appearance on campus, in class, in Chapel and at all university-sponsored activities, including athletics events.

See the complete ACU Dress Code policy:

- <http://www.acu.edu/campusoffices/studentlife/Policies/index.html>.

Racial, Sexual Harassment Policy

Racial and sexual harassment is a violation of the code of conduct as described in Section 2-02 of the ACU Student Guide and will not be tolerated during class or class-related activities. Harassment is any action, including a joke or suggestion, that creates an intimidating, hostile or degrading environment and would have such an effect on a reasonable person of the alleged victim's status. Violations of this section will be referred to Campus Life.

In-Class Behavior Policy

Computers, tablets, mobile phones, pagers and other electronic technology will be turned off during class sessions or confiscated. Behavior that inhibits the learning of others will result in dismissal from the class period or being dropped from class if egregious or persistent as determined by the instructor.

Disability Statement

Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodations for any recognized disability must submit requests in writing to the instructor by the end of the second week of the semester. This documentation must come in writing from ACU's Alpha Academic Services, which can be contacted at 2667. The ability to consistently meet deadlines is an essential requirement of most media and media related professions. Thus, in JMC courses subsequent to this one where meeting deadlines is an inherent element of instruction, extended time for some types of testing or other assignments may not always be an option.

Diversity Statement

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JMC Department Policies

Academic Integrity

Violations of academic integrity and other forms of cheating, as defined in ACU's Academic Integrity Policy, involve the intention to deceive or mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying and represent actions contrary to the behavioral norms that flow from the nature of God. Violations will be addressed as described in the Policy. While the university enforces the Policy, the most

powerful motive for integrity and truthfulness comes from one's desire to imitate God's nature in our lives. Every member of the faculty, staff and student body is responsible for protecting the integrity of learning, scholarship and research.

Three elements of contemporary journalism and mass communication pose unique integrity challenges for faculty, staff, students and practitioners:

- the public nature of journalism and mass communication in society
- the absolute necessity to build and maintain credibility and reliability
- the dangers brought on by the ease with which digital data can be stolen, copied, multiplied, manipulated and used to mislead and deceive.

Breakdowns of all forms of academic integrity in JMC classrooms, labs and student media are condemned categorically by the faculty of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication: in group projects, research papers, exams, out-of-class assignments, in-class work, individual projects, lab work, material prepared for public distribution via departmental media, internships, résumés and in JMC-sponsored organizations.

See the JMC Academic Integrity Policy:

- <http://www.acu.edu/academics/cas/jmc/resources/policies/integrity.html>

See the ACU Academic Integrity Policy for information about the appeals process:

- <http://www.acu.edu/campusoffices/studentlife/Policies/index.html>

Student Complaint Policy

The Student Complaint Policy, as adopted by the JMC department and approved by the university, is viewable online.

See the JMC Student Complaint Policy:

- <http://www.acu.edu/academics/cas/jmc/resources/policies/complaints.html>

JMC Attendance Policy

The JMC faculty values attendance at every class session. We believe students with superior attendance perform better than students with average or poor attendance. The teacher may require student to produce documentation of absence causes. Penalties will be imposed for excessive absences unless they are caused by:

- Serious illness of the student.
- Death or critical illness in immediate family.
- Approved university off-campus activities.
- Other absolutely unavoidable occurrences.

Penalties:

Students whose absences do not meet above criteria may be penalized:

- 5 MWF absences = minus one letter grade
- 4 MW or TR absences = minus one letter grade
- 2 one-day-a-week classes = minus one letter grade

Withdrawals Tied to Absences:

When a student's absences reach these levels, including university approved absences, the student will be withdrawn from the class:

- 9 MWF classes,
- or 6 MW or TR classes,
- or 3 one-day-a-week classes, the student will be dropped from the class regardless of the reasons for the absences. The grade will be WP if the absences fit the criteria described under "Value of Attendance." Otherwise the grade will be WF.

University Activity Participation:

Under university policy, a student who is required to miss a class to participate in a school activity by the academic administration will not be penalized by the teacher for missing that class. The student should not be penalized for the absence approved under this policy if he or she has satisfactorily made up the missed work within the time limit and in the way agreed upon by the student and the professor. Each professor may, but is not required to, drop a student from his or her class for nonattendance (absences in excess of 20 percent of the total meetings of the class) or for disruptive behavior in classrooms.

See the JMC Attendance Policy:

- <http://www.acu.edu/academics/cas/jmc/resources/policies/attendance-and-grades.html>

Course Schedule

Note: The instructor reserves the right to modify the course schedule as needed to maintain structure and to ensure success for all involved. All schedule adjustments will be communicated to students as early as possible.

Week 1	Course Introduction What is documentary storytelling? What makes a good story?
Week 2	Deconstructing the documentary Documentary forms and filmmakers Ethics in narrative storytelling
Week 3	Visualizing the Story Equipment demonstrations Single-camera production techniques DUE: <i>Documentary Analysis Presentation</i>
Week 4	Equipment demonstrations Planning and shooting effective Interviews Production: Creative Camerawork DUE: <i>Documentary Proposal</i>
Week 5	Equipment demonstrations Production: The Natural Interview DUE: <i>Creative Camerawork Video</i>

Week 6	Planning and shooting effective scenes Production: Creative Sound in Video DUE: <i>Natural Interview Video</i>
Week 7	Editing and story structuring Production: The Production Team Production roles and techniques DUE: <i>Creative Sound Video</i>
Week 8	Editing scenes and sequences Premiere Pro Workshop DUE: <i>Team Production Video</i>
Week 9	Editing extras: Narration, VO, text, music, effects Premiere Pro Workshop
Week 10	Documentary Planning Update Production problems and solutions
Week 11	Goals of the Rough Cut Premiere Pro Workshop
Week 12	Rough Cut Screenings DUE: <i>Rough Cut Edit</i>
Week 13	Audio Sweetening, Color Correction, Titles Premiere Pro Workshop
Week 14	Work Day Individual Consultations
Week 15	Screening and Discussion DUE: <i>Final Documentary</i> DUE: <i>Production Notebooks</i>

JMC465 - Suggested Documentary Films

Note: Students are encouraged to seek out any of the films listed below either out of their own curiosity or due to references made in class. The instructor may assign a particular film for viewing and discussion. Also, students may select a film from this list as the subject of their Documentary Analysis Presentation. Students are encouraged to find these films either through local rental or through a popular streaming service like Netflix or Hulu. Students may also search the holdings of the Abilene Library Consortium as some titles may exist there as well. In any case, locating and accessing a film is the responsibility of the student, including any fees or penalties incurred.

Nanook of the North (1922), by Robert J. Flaherty
Battleship Potemkin (1925), by Sergei Eisenstein
Man with a Movie Camera (1929), Dziga Vertov
Primary (1960), by Robert Drew
Crises (1963), by Robert Drew
The Endless Summer (1966), by Bruce Brown
High School (1968), by Frederick Wiseman
Salesman (1968), by Albert and David Maysles
On Any Sunday (1971), by Bruce Brown
Grey Gardens (1975), by Albert and David Maysles
Harlan County (1976), by Barbara Kopple
Gates of Heaven (1978), by Errol Morris
Vernon, Florida (1981), by Errol Morris
The Thin Blue Line (1988), by Errol Morris
Roger and Me (1989), by Michael Moore
The War Room (1993), by Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker
Hoop Dreams (1994), by Steve James
When We Were Kings (1996), by Leon Gast
Don't Look Back (1997) by D.A. Pennebaker
Buena Vista Social Club (1999) by Wim Wenders
Cinema Verite (1999) by Peter Wintock
Trekkies (1999), by Roger Nygard
Go Tigers (2001), by Kenneth A. Carlson
War Photographer (2001), by Christian Frei
Startup.com (2001), by Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker
Dogtown and Z-Boys (2001), by Stacy Peralta
Spellbound (2002), by Jeffrey Blitz
The Fog of War (2003), by Errol Morris
Capturing the Friedmans (2003), by Andrew Jarecki
Super Size Me (2004), by Morgan Spurlock
March of the Penguins (2005), by Luc Jacquet
Helvetica (2007), by Gary Hustwit
The King of Kong (2007), by Seth Gordon
Man On Wire (2008), by James Marsh
Jiro Dreams of Sushi (2011), by David Gelb
Muscle Shoals (2012), by Greg "Freddy" Camalier
Blackfish (2013), by Gabriela Cowperthwaite
Finding Vivian Maier (2014), by John Maloof and Charlie Siskel