

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Summer 2012

Discipline: Media Studies

MDST 4801-501: Introduction to Documentary Filmmaking

MDST 4801-502: Introduction to Documentary Filmmaking

Division: Upper

Faculty Name: Paul Wagner

Pre-requisites: Introductory coursework or experience in shooting and editing motion pictures. All students must own, and be able to operate, their own digital video cameras and editing software.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Before he was a filmmaker, the man known as the “father of documentary filmmaking” was an explorer. In 1913, Robert Flaherty brought a camera along on a journey to the Hudson Bay region of Canada. The result was *Nanook of the North*, widely regarded as the first documentary film. Following in Flaherty’s footsteps we will learn the art and craft of the documentary film and apply those skills to the creation of films documenting our voyage experiences. Emphasis will be on production and post-production concepts, including directorial point-of-view, camera style, scene coverage, story construction, editing rhythm, appropriate technology and the filmmaker-subject relationship. Instruction in, and the practice of, these production techniques will be complimented by consideration of the theory, history, traditions and ethics of documentary filmmaking.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To acquire and practice accepted standards of documentary craftsmanship.
- To conceptualize and articulate a fluent story in filmic form.
- To develop one’s personal artistic vision as a filmmaker.
- To gain a historical and critical understanding of the practice of documentary filmmaking.
- To creatively and ethically document our voyage experiences.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Patricia Aufderheide
TITLE: *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*
PUBLISHER: Oxford University Press
ISBN #: 978-0-19-518270-5 (pbk.)
DATE/EDITION: 2007
COST: \$11.95 (\$9.56 on amazon.com)

AUTHOR: Steven Ascher and Edward Pincus
TITLE: *The Filmmakers Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age*
PUBLISHER: Plume
ISBN #: 0452286786
DATE/EDITION: 2007

COST: \$25.00 (\$15.75 on amazon.com)

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Class 1

- Lecture/discussion on the nature of documentary filmmaking.
- Explanation of course goals, requirements, evaluation and the honor system.
- Assignment of Film One.

*Reading: Aufderheide, Chapter 1 Defining the Documentary
Ascher/Pincus, pp 109-120 in Chapter 3 The Video Camcorder*

Class 2

- Shipboard location demonstration on the craft of camera and sound recording, including framing, movement, lighting, microphone selection and control, etc.

*Reading: Ascher/Pincus, pp 141-158 in Chapter 4 The Lens,
and pp 443-449 and pp 476-480 in Chapter 12 Lighting*

Class 3

- Review of shipboard demonstration footage.
- Discussion of student film concepts, including subject choice, research, story treatment, stylistic approach, coverage, crew responsibilities and scheduling.

Reading: Ascher/Pincus, pp 311-367 in Chapter 9 The Shoot

Class 4

- Presentation and discussion of edited version of shipboard footage emphasizing relationship between shooting coverage and editing.
- Continue discussion of student film concepts.
- Lecture/discussion on documentary film ethics and the filmmaker-subject relationship

Reading: Nichols, Chapter 1 Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?

Class 5

- Lecture/discussion on documentary film conceptualization, including analysis of story / theme / characterization, and creative approach, including directorial point-of-view / style / tone.
- Lecture/discussion on documentary film history, including the screening of an excerpt from *Nanook of the North*.

Reading: Sherman, Chapter 5 Projecting the Self: Filmic Technique and Construction

Class 6

- Film One due.
- Assignment of Film Two.
- Continue lecture/discussion on documentary film history, including the screening of an excerpt from *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Reading: Nichols, Chapter 7, How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?

Class 7

- Quiz on camera, elements of production, and documentary film conceptualization.
- In-class screening and critique of Film One films.

Class 8

- Continue in-class screening and critique of Film One films.
- Grades on Film One and quiz returned to class.

Reading: Ascher/Pincus, pp 486-501 in Chapter 13 Picture and Dialogue Editing

Barcelona, Spain – Field Lab: the 1st day (section 501) or last day (section 502) in port, students will participate in a filming exercise with instructor in a Barcelona neighborhood and restaurant.

Class 9

- Review Barcelona FDP footage
- Lecture/discussion on topics in editing craft/theory, including the evaluation of footage, story construction and the writing of an editing script.

Reading: Ascher/Pincus, Chapter 14, Editing Video

Civitavecchia/Naples, Italy

Class 10

- Continue lecture/discussion on topics in editing craft/theory, using an edited scene based on the Barcelona FDP footage as an example.

Reading: Ascher/Pincus, pp 625-626 and pp 632-638 in Chapter 16 Sound Editing and Mixing

Dubrovnik, Croatia

Class 11

- Lecture/discussion on documentary film genre, including a screening of examples of expository, scripted, verite/direct cinema, reflexive/personal, ethnographic and other forms.

Reading: Aufderheide, Chapter 2, Subgenres

Nichols, Chapter 6, What Types of Documentaries Are There?

Class 12

- Film Three assignment and discussion of student concepts.

Piraeus, Greece

Class 13

- Lecture/discussion on documentary film history, including a screening of excerpts of landmark films drawn from pertinent regions and periods.

Reading: Ellis/McLane, Chapter 17, English-Language Documentary in the 1990s and Beyond—Reality Bytes

Istanbul, Turkey – optional faculty-led field trip to visit with a filmmaker based in Istanbul.

Class 14

- Quiz on editing craft/theory and documentary film genre

Class 15

- Lecture/discussion on topics in documentary film theory, including semiotics and questions of meaning, audience and the contemporary media landscape.

Reading: Aufderheide, Chapter 3, Conclusion

Ellis/McLane Chapter 18, Some Other Ways to Think About Documentaries

Class 16

- Film Two due.
- Lecture/discussion on concepts of sound and music editing, including style and tone, use in montages and transitions, and technical considerations.

Class 17

- In-class screening and critique of Film Two films.

Class 18

- Continue in-class screening and critique of Film Two films.

Casablanca, Morocco

Class 19

- Continue in-class screening and critique of Film Two films.

Lisbon, Portugal

Class 20

- Screening/discussion of contemporary documentary films regarding subject matter, story and form.

Class 21

- Continue screening/discussion of contemporary documentary films regarding subject matter, story and form.

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Class 22

- Film Three due.
- Final exam review session.

Class 23

- Final exam on documentary filmmaking, emphasizing the synthesis of theory and practice.

Class 24

- Student Film Festival

FIELD LAB

The Barcelona Field Lab will consist of a one day filming excursion into a neighborhood near the ship in which students will work as a group with the instructor to film a short documentary scene.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each student will be responsible for shooting three individually produced films; two of these films must be shot in our ports-of-call. Topics in each port-of-call will be chosen by the student, devising his or her own subject or drawing from the array of Field Component offerings, such as cultural and architectural tours of the city, cultural or folkloric exhibitions and demonstrations, or family/home visitations. As is typical in the world of documentary making, student filmmakers will need to exercise spontaneous judgment regarding subject sensitivity, cultural understandings, alternative creative plans and options, personal artistic vision and the restrictions of time, budget and schedule.

Students will be responsible for providing their own digital cameras and digital editing systems for the production of their three films. The brand of camera and editing software is at the discretion of the student, but there will be no course instruction in the technical operation. Basic technical competence in the shooting and editing of digital films is a pre-requisite for the class. Films must be between 3 and 6 minutes TRT (total running time). Finished film projects must be submitted as QuickTime movies on a disk or thumb drive.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

Students will be evaluated on the following basis:

Quality of participation in class and in the Field Component – 20%

Quality of the three assigned films – 45%

Scores on two quizzes and final exam - 35%

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

AUTHOR: Bill Nichols
TITLE: Introduction to Documentary
PUBLISHER: Indiana University Press
ISBN #: 0-253-33954-5 or 0-253-21469-6
DATE/EDITION: 2001
COST:

AUTHOR: Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane
TITLE: A New History of Documentary Film
PUBLISHER: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc
ISBN #: 0-8264-1750-7 or 0-8264-1751-5
DATE/EDITION: 2007
COST:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The ship has a small collection of documentary film DVDs that will be used by the instructor for in-class screenings and will be available to students for viewing outside of class. Films will include Nanook of the North, Man With a Movie Camera, Man on Wire, and The Stone Carvers.