

JR472 TV News Magazine & Documentary

Fall 2019 | T 6–9:45 p.m. | Walker 418

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Office Hours: Thursday 11 a.m.–1 p.m. & By appointment | Walker 608

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Overview of Course

This course will develop your skills in nonfiction narrative storytelling, and explore current trends in journalistic documentary film. The course focuses on the technical, theoretical, and journalistic aspects of contemporary documentary. From the inception of a story idea, through researching, sourcing, field production, writing, fact-checking, editing, and distribution or exhibition of a film. At each stage of the production, you will receive feedback from me and your peers. The final outcome will be a 7-12-minute documentary, plus an accompanying viewers' guide. You will work in teams of 3-4.

Learning Outcomes

1. Critically examine and analyze non-fiction narrative video across platforms
2. Demonstrate advanced reporting methods, including sourcing and fact-checking; working on deadline; and ethical storytelling
3. Examine the latest trends in documentary, within the fast-evolving journalistic landscape
4. Acquire the technical skills needed to produce professional documentary journalism
5. Develop leadership skills that demonstrate (a) editorial knowledge, (b) the ability to work in a team environment, (c) creative initiative, and (d) problem-solving skills

My Teaching Philosophy

For you to thrive as a journalist or media practitioner, you must have both the technical expertise needed to produce multimedia, and the theoretical knowledge necessary to think critically about the business of news, the ethics of newsgathering, and the social relationships that are inherently part of knowledge production.

Expectations

You will be expected to perform to the highest professional standards in this class, show initiative, creativity, and problem-solving skills, and an ability to work in a team environment. The course has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism and dishonesty of any kind.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED OR GRADED

ASSIGNMENTS (deadlines in schedule)

- Initial pitch
- Refined pitch
- Production plan, 1st draft
- 1-minute sequence
- Production plan, 2nd draft
- Interview questions
- Interview with primary subject
- Outline and production schedule
- Selects
- Viewers' Guide
- Script
- Rough Cut
- Fine Cut
- Screening presentation

There will also be screenings, readings, and discussions.

BREAKDOWN

Story Pitch: 5%

Production Plans and Interview Questions: 5%

Outline and 1-minute sequence: 5%

Rough Cut: 5%

Viewers' Guide: 15%

Script: 15%

Fine Cut: 15%

Screening Presentation: 15%

In-class Discussion and Participation: 20%

GRADING

Students understand that an "A" is for *outstanding* work. Students who earn an "A" have gone beyond the class requirements. "B" is above average work and indicates that a student has displayed due diligence and standards of excellence while completing the requirements. "C" represents an average performance, indicating merely that the class requirements have been completed. "D" indicates below average performance by a student. "F" indicates a student has not met the requirements and will not receive credit for the course.

The grading scale is as follows:

A 93-100	B+ 87-89	B- 80-82	C 73-76	D 60-69
A- 90-92	B 83-86	C+ 77-79	C- 70-72	F 59-00

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The focus of final projects will be determined collectively, based on the viability of student pitches. You will work in 3- or 4-person teams, sharing skills and learning from each other. While you will likely split up technical roles, each team member is responsible for reporting and writing the documentary and the viewers' guide.

We will screen films and story elements every week. The only way to improve your journalistic and media production skills is to watch, read, and listen, across media, ideologies, and geographic boundaries.

Always identify yourself as an Emerson journalism student on assignment working on a story that could be published. **I do not allow the use of unnamed sources**, except under rare circumstances to protect the interview subject, which must receive prior approval by me. You must get the first and last names of everyone you interview, as well as their contact information.

Your script must be thoroughly annotated and fact-checked. Wikipedia entries *will not* be considered a primary source, though you may use Wikipedia as a launching point to identify potential primary sources. Expect to spend at least one full day a week on this course outside of class, doing production work, research, or reporting in the field.

Your work will be critiqued constructively by your peers and me in class. We will share experiences and explore techniques and ideas. Your participation in these discussions is required and is part of your final grade.

CLASS ORGANIZATION

Be on time. Attendance is mandatory. Classes may include: Discussion of weekly themes. Workshop with guest speaker. Story pitch meetings or updates of working stories. Screenings of your work (rough, fine, and final cuts), and documentary films provided by you.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Each team needs SD cards and a portable hard drive. I recommend at least 1 TB (~\$60). You *cannot* edit your films from cloud storage (e.g., Google Drive or Box) or from laptop storage.

RESOURCES

Templates

[Shot List Template](#)
[Audio Script Template](#)
[Audio Script Tips](#)
[Subject Release Form](#)
[Video Storyboard](#)

Writing Support

[Peer Tutoring](#)

Databases and Research

[NYTimes, The Weekly](#)
[Poynter](#)
[NPPA](#)
[Emerson JRN Databases](#)
[Using Public Records](#)
[Columbia Journalism Review](#)
[FAIR](#)
[Field of Vision](#)
[Fact Check](#) | [PolitiFact](#)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: We will adhere to this schedule as much as possible, but we will adjust the schedule to take advantage of guest speakers. I also want to remain responsive to your requests, if there is a consensus that we need to review a topic or take a deeper dive in a given area.

WEEK 1: September 10 | Introduction to Documentary Film

Who we are, why we're here, what we hope to accomplish this semester. *What is documentary?*

READ: Grierson, "The Story of the Documentary Film," in *The Fortnightly Review* (1939; Drive)
SCREENING: [Black Sheep](#) (2018, directed by Ed Perkins)

We'll share examples of and critique documentaries each week. How were they shot and edited? What narrative structure(s) and visual style(s) were used? The importance of scenes and great characters, focus, access, pacing, structure and writing.

Each week, students will share a documentary film, and lead a discussion and critique of it. Links to films, which must be under 15 min., must be posted to the sign-up sheet in our shared Drive folder, by the Monday before that class at noon.

The importance of editors and constructive criticism are important to documentary production. We will foster a culture of critique in class, and talk about dealing with feedback on your work.

What makes a good pitch? You will be expected to pitch projects next week. We'll discuss what makes a good pitch and how to best present your ideas.

ASSIGNMENT: Pitch your idea next week in class (5 points). I will provide a format for presentations, including elevator pitch, story treatment, intended platform and audience. Not all pitches will become projects; we'll select the best ideas and form teams.

WEEK 2: September 17 | The Pitch

Student pitch, 5-minutes each. We will discuss and decide which ones to pursue. We will form teams and produce the stories approved collectively by the class.

READ: Sean Patrick Ferrell, "[Video storytelling—yes, you can](#)"
ArtsEdge, "[Teaching Students to Critique](#)"

SCREENING AND DISCUSSION: Possible areas to focus: Identify the nut graf, sign-posting, narrative tension, nat sound, and the importance of great opening and closing shots.

FOCUS: How to find and define your focus. What's your story? How do you keep your story on track? What is a narrative arc? Begin drafting questions for principal interview, and discuss how they develop your focus.

ASSIGNMENT: In your groups, refine pitches and post to Drive by September 24 at 10 a.m.

WEEK 3: September 24 | Writing for Video

Screening and discussion. We will green light stories and make production teams.

READ: Sean Patrick Farrell, [“Viewfinder: We need to talk”](#)
Charles, “News Documentary and Advocacy Journalism” (Drive/Canvas)

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Read 2 print articles: Which is best for video and why? Are there narrative techniques used in these stories that can be used in yours?

SCREENING AND DISCUSSION: Begin thinking about production plans. How do you obtain the material you need to create a compelling story? What is the beginning, middle and end of your story? Create a plan that allows for spontaneity. Know when you have what you need.

Introduction to Sony a7iii: Mastering the camera checklist. Basic camera and audio techniques. Shooting sequences. Shooting a walk and talk. Collecting and using natural sound. Shooting scenes and capturing events are essential to bringing energy and immediacy, and creating a sense of place.

ASSIGNMENT: Create first draft of production plan. Upload to Drive by October 1 at 10 a.m.

WEEK 4: OCTOBER 1 | The Art of Interviews

Review refined pitches and status of your reporting. How will you tell your story? (narration, first person, no narration, text on screen) What’s your visual style?

Your Team: What are your skills? Analyze a successful team effort.

Review production plans and feedback from your initial research for your story. Negotiating access: Finding characters, making your approach, art of the character narrative.

READ: [Getting it right: ethical reporting on people affected by trauma](#), [Conducting Interviews with Survivors of Sexual & Gender Based Violence](#), & [Interviewing children: multidisciplinary approaches](#)

WATCH: [Create a Comfortable Space \(video\)](#)

Preparing for your principal interview is the first stage of writing your final story. Shaping the interview and knowing what to ask is crucial to a successful documentary film. The art of the follow up question. Script writing begins when you write your interview questions. Ethical interviewing is crucial. Great filmmakers recognize the importance of empathy and awareness of their interview subject’s point of view.

ASSIGNMENT: (1) Write 10-12 interview questions for primary subject of your film. (2) Revise production plans (5 points). Both must be uploaded to Drive by October 8 at 10 a.m.

WEEK 5: October 8 | Social Documentary, Networked Audiences, & Distribution

Best practices and trends in social (viral) publishing.

WATCH: NowThis, Vox, AJ+, NYTimes, VICE

DISCUSS: Social media. User-generated content in docs, the strengths and weaknesses of social platforms.

Introduction to Video Editing

Discuss the basics of project management, creating bins and timelines.

Refine production outlines, shooting scripts, and production schedules. Review potential story elements for your films.

ASSIGNMENT: (1) Write detailed outline. (2) Produce 1-min sequence with footage from your doc without using narration, and post to Drive. Both are due by October 15 at 10 a.m. (5 points)

WEEK 6: October 15 | Revise Production Plans & Outlines

REVIEW: Review your 1-minute sequences, story outlines, and production plans. Is your plan realistic? What is your plan B? What is your budget? How do you calculate a budget?

ASSIGNMENT: Principal interviews, with transcript, must be uploaded to Drive by October 22 at 10 a.m.

WEEK 7: October 22 | Rough Cuts and Fact-checking

SCREENING & DISCUSSION: Dissect story structure, looking at nut graf, characters, scenes, etc. Artful transitions—linking content seamlessly and ‘syncing’ your focus. Establish pacing that drives to a conclusion. Avoid multiple endings.

Manage the flow of information and form a coherent structure. Do you have a consistent focus? Are your characters compelling?

ASSIGNMENT: (1) Share example of a viewers’ guide to Drive by October 29 at 10 a.m. (2) Scripts are due next week at the end of class.

Work ahead on rough cuts. How to make the most of your material (e.g., selects), and organize for your edit. In-class review in 2 weeks. Post to Drive by November 5 at 10 a.m. (5 points).

WEEK 8: October 29 | Viewers' Guides & Audience Engagement

READ: Karlin & Johnson, "[Measuring Impact: The Importance of Evaluation for Documentary Film Campaigns](#)"

Work on viewers' guides. What is a user profile? Discuss impact and engagement.

DUE: Script, upload to Drive by the end of class (15 points)

ASSIGNMENT: Rough cut, upload to Drive by November 5 at 10 a.m. (5 points)

WEEK 9: November 5 | Rough Cut Review

We will review rough edits and discuss the process of refining and developing the next iteration of the piece. We will also review our earlier scripts. Do you have the ingredients for compelling sequences? What provides the narrative tension? Review the use of natural sound for transitions, pacing, and focus.

Annotating your script and fact checking.

ASSIGNMENT: Next cut due in 2 weeks. Post to Drive by November 19 at 10 a.m.

WEEK 10: November 12 | No Class, Monday schedule

WEEK 11: November 19 | Ethical Filmmaking

Discuss how exposure to traumatic stories in the field and online can negatively impact a journalist's psyche, current psychological research on journalism and trauma, and strategies for mitigating it.

READ: "[Journalism and Vicarious Trauma: A Guidebook](#)" & "[Handling Traumatic Imagery: Developing a Standard Operating Procedure](#)"

ASSIGNMENT: Viewers' guides due to Drive by November 26 at 10 a.m. (15 points)

WEEK 12: November 26 | Fine Cut Editing

Fine cut: Working with photos, text, graphics, music, color correction.

Discuss music and the role it plays. When to use it or not; is it a crutch?

Review fine cuts in class and discuss specific changes required to proceed.

ASSIGNMENT: Fine cut uploaded to Drive by December 10 at the end of class (15 points)

WEEK 13: December 3 | Fine Cut Continues

We will continue fine cut reviews and discuss specific changes needed.

Guest speaker TBA

WEEK 14: December 10 | Wrap Up and Course Reflections

Edit support for final export of your finished video project.

Guest speaker TBA

DUE: Fine cut, upload to Drive by the end of class (*15 points*)

WEEK 15: December 17 | Public Screening

Screening Presentation: *15 points*

Course Policies

Technology

We will be collaborating using Google Apps and Canvas. You can access the site using your ECNet login and password. These will be common sites where we will share and coordinate projects. Training for Google Docs, e-mail, and other IT issues can be obtained through the Academic Computing Help Desk at x8080. You are also expected to be proficient with Canvas.

Because we are making media in this class, you will need to bring your smartphone and laptop, with chargers. You are able to take notes on a tablet or electronic device; however, refrain from surfing the web, online shopping, and browsing social media. It is disrespectful and distracting to your classmates who are prepared to discuss course concepts. Video/audio recording in class is not permitted, unless approved by the professor and your classmates.

Attendance

In accordance with College, absences are not classified as “excused” or “unexcused.” Emerson students may find the College’s policy here: [http:// www.emerson.edu/policy/attendance](http://www.emerson.edu/policy/attendance).

Students who miss more than two classes will not earn a passing grade. A tardy or early leave will count as half of an absence. I will contact the Office of Student Success if a student misses two consecutive weeks of classes, as recommended by College policy.

Civility and Inclusion

I will do my best to treat you with respect and to try to make decisions that are fair for all. Sometimes you won’t agree with my decisions, but I hope you trust that I take creating a welcoming and respectful classroom extremely seriously.

Good journalists listen and ask questions to try and understand nuance within opinions. As a profession, we protect everyone’s right to express themselves, even when we believe a viewpoint to be abhorrent. The act of understanding why we disagree can be as important as the positions we take. I hope that when we disagree, you will engage and explain your point of view. I hope we can include, respect, and recognize all students’ experiences.

Personal threats, attacks or disruptions will not be tolerated because they hurt the ability for others to learn and express their views. In extreme cases, students will lose 10 percentage points from their course grade for violating the civility of this class.

Title IX

I am a responsible employee at Emerson College, which means I am not a confidential resource and am, therefore, required to report disclosures that may violate Emerson’s Sexual Misconduct Policy. If you need to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the offices of Violence Prevention and Response, Counseling and Psychological Services, or Health and Wellness. If you would like to report an incident involving a possible violation of Emerson’s Sexual Misconduct Policy, contact the Title IX Coordinator at titleix@emerson.edu or 617-824-8999.

Children in Class

Currently, the College does not have a policy on children in class. This statement is a reflection of my beliefs and commitments to students, staff, and faculty parents:

- 1) All exclusively breastfeeding babies are welcome in class;
- 2) For older children and babies, I understand that unforeseen disruptions in childcare often put parents in the position of having to miss class to stay home with a child. While this is not meant to be a long-term childcare solution, occasionally bringing a child to class to cover gaps in childcare is fine.
- 3) I ask that all students work with me to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity, including diversity in parenting status;
- 4) In all cases where babies and children come to class, I ask that you sit close to the door so that if your little one needs special attention and is disrupting learning for other students, you may step outside until their need has been met;
- 5) I understand that often the largest barrier to completing your coursework once you become a parent is the tiredness many parents feel in the evening once children have finally gone to sleep. While I maintain the same high expectations for all students in my classes regardless of parenting status, I am happy to problem-solve with you in any way that makes you feel supported as you strive for student-parenting balance.

Plagiarism & Cheating

There is nothing more central to the credibility of journalism and the trust of readers, listeners and viewers than the implicit promise that the information provided is original and truthful. Journalists who make things up, or who steal the work of others and pass it off as their own, undermine not only their own careers, but the public's trust and the credibility of the profession.

This department will not tolerate fabrication or plagiarism. Any Emerson student caught making up quotes or sources, or presenting the work of others as their own, will automatically fail this course and face possible suspension from the College. If you have any question about how to attribute appropriately, quote or footnote, it is incumbent on you to consult your professor.

Ignorance is not a defense against cheating. The department's standard is based on the Emerson College plagiarism policy, which states in part, "the attempt of any Emerson Journalist to present as his or her own work, the work of another or any work which he or she has not honestly performed ... renders the offender liable to immediate suspension."

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Emerson is committed to providing equal access and support to all students who qualify through the provision of reasonable accommodations, so that each student may fully participate in the Emerson experience. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Services at SAS@emerson.edu or 617-824-8592 to make an appointment with an SAS staff member. Students are encouraged to contact SAS early in the semester. Please be aware that accommodations are not applied retroactively.