

Documentary Journalism I, Fall 2009

Monday-Wednesday-Friday 1:30 p.m. -2:20 p.m.

Weinstein Hall, Room 418

Robert Hodierno, instructor

Office: 424 Weinstein Hall

Office hours: 2:30-5 p.m. Monday and Wednesday

Telephone: 287-6049 (o), 484-4759 (h)

rhodiern@richmond.edu

Text: “Documentary Storytelling: Making Stronger and More Dramatic Nonfiction Films,”
by Sheila Curran Bernard

Equipment: You will need an external hard drive of at least 250GB capacity. These are available in a variety of styles with prices in the range of \$120. These drives are a good investment and you’ll use it long after this class.

This will be a blend of survey course and practicum. We’re not just going to study documentaries; we’re going to produce them. In addition to the videos that you will create as part of training exercises, you will produce short (1:00 to 1:30 minute) films for use on The Collegian’s Web site. As your final exam, each of you will be expected to produce a five-to-eight minute documentary.

On the survey side, we will watch 12 full-length documentaries, about one a week. You will be expected to watch those on your own time. They will be on reserve in the library. (See the list below.) You will be assigned a paper about each documentary. The subject of the papers will vary depending on the nature of the documentary. In addition, each of you will be assigned one of those documentaries as a special project. The week before the class watches “your” documentary, you will make a presentation to the class that tells us about the filmmaker and puts the film in a wider context.

We will also be reading “Documentary Storytelling,” and for each reading assignment there will be a quiz. The quizzes will be easy – if you do the reading.

On the practical side, there is no way in one semester to make you an accomplished videographer and video editor. Both of those skills can take years to perfect. But you will be amazed at how much you will learn in short order. By the end of this course you will be comfortable shooting and editing short videos.

We will shoot our learning exercises and documentaries on the Panasonic AG-DVC7P. This is a capable camera that shoots on Mini DV tapes. **You will be expected to provide your own Mini DV tapes.** If you have your own camera that you’d like to use, that camera must be equal to the Panasonic in video quality. It must also have the capability of using an external microphone. One way to get a head start in this class would be to read the user’s manual for the Panasonic camera. You can find it online here:

http://www.fixya.com/support/p399870-panasonic_proline_ag_dvc7_mini_dv/manual-

[8440](#). We will spend only one class session learning the camera's operation. You will be expected to master its operation during the field exercises. I will be available outside of class if you have problems.

There are only six of these cameras. They come packed in a bag with all of the accessories you need – batteries, battery charger, shotgun mic, lavalier mic and cables. You will check those out from either me or the department's administrator, Linda Caperton. You can check them out for 24 hours, at which point they must be returned. If you check out a camera on Friday afternoon it is due back first thing Monday morning. If no one else is on the waiting list you can check it out again. If you lose a piece of equipment you will be expected to pay for its replacement. A special place in hell is reserved for those who bring back equipment with spent batteries.

We will edit our videos using Final Cut Pro HD Studio 2.0. Again, if you want to get a head start in this class, get busy learning FCP. There are many tutorials online. We will “publish” our exercises to DVD. **You will need to provide you own blank DVD-R discs.** There will be only two class sessions devoted specifically to learning FCP but obviously you'll pick up many tricks along the way. Again, I will be available outside of class to help. There are five computers in the journalism department with FCP. The TLC in Boatwright has five editing stations with FCP. You will need to work ahead and manage your time well because these editing stations are in frequent use.

Unlike writing a book, which is a solitary endeavor, making documentaries is a collaborative effort. For many of the exercises and the final project we will create *ad hoc* teams.

Since I believe the heart of any documentary is characters, and since the most common way we learn about characters in documentaries is through interviews, we will spend a fair amount of time learning how to shoot video interviews. For the first few interviews I will let you interview other students. This is why the university gave you a roommate. But once you've got the basics down you will be expected to venture into the outside world with the camera.

Grading: You will get a letter grade for the papers you will write about the documentaries we watch. You will get a letter grade for the presentation you make about the documentary you were assigned and for the practical exercises. You will get letter grades for quizzes on the reading assignments. The final project, the short documentary, will count for one-third of your grade. It will be due Dec. 4, the last day of classes.

Grading of the written assignments will put emphasis on clarity of expression and the quality and originality of the ideas expressed. Papers will earn an “A” by meeting those standards and by avoiding all spelling and grammar errors. You cannot get an “A” if you misspell any word in the paper. A “C” paper will reflect a kernel of an idea whose development lacks clarity and originality. The easiest way to get an “F” is to turn a paper in late. “B” and “D” papers falls somewhere in between.

The technical exercises will be a trove of good grades. If you accomplish the assigned technical task with flair and originality you will get an “A.” If you accomplish the assigned technical task in a boring manner that reflects little thought you’ll get a “C.” You know what happens if it’s late. On those assignments where you are paired with a team member, each member will get the same grade.

Your oral presentation will be graded with the same standards as the written work with the additional evaluation of your stage manner. You must speak in complete sentences, you must make eye contact, you must not say the word “like,” as in, “It was, like, a totally awesome documentary.” You should practice this presentation.

Attendance: Missing a class is not an excuse for failing to do the work assigned in that class. Ask your classmates or ask me what the assignment was. There will be no make-up quizzes for missed classes. If there’s a good reason you missed the class, talk to me. But it had better be good. We have only 40 class sessions and a lot of ground to cover.

Deadlines: No late assignments will be accepted. Part of learning to be a journalist is meeting deadlines. Use your time efficiently. Plan for things to go wrong – cameras to malfunction, microphones to break, tapes to fail, software to crash, meteors to hit campus. Sailors say: Hope for the best, plan for the worst. So, too, with video producers. If you come to me and say my computer took longer to render than I thought I’m going to say, you should have started earlier. Media editors do not tolerate those who miss deadlines.

Punctuality: You are expected to be in class on time. Each class will start promptly. If you cannot get to class on time, please drop the course now. The door will be closed at the start of class and you will not be allowed to enter.

Cell Phones: No cell phone use, either voice or text, is allowed during class. If your cell phone goes off, you will be asked to leave the class and not allowed to return.

Reaching me: I will be in my office from 2:30-5 pm Monday and Wednesday. Feel free to call me at 484-4759 Monday through Saturday from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. If you need me in person at other times that can be arranged by appointment. You may e-mail me at rhodiern@richmond.edu. But a special note about e-mails to me: Treat them like the business communication they are. Begin with a conventional salutation (Dear. Prof. Hodiern) and end with a polite closing (Sincerely, Jane Doe). Write in complete sentences with proper capitalization and punctuation. I don’t think emoticons are cute. Finally, I don’t respond to text messages, IMs, Facebook postings or Tweets.

Here are the documentaries we will be watching with their discussion date, that is the date on which papers about that documentary are due.

Nanook of the North	Aug. 31
The Man with the Movie Camera	Sept. 7

The Plow that Broke the Plains	Sept. 14
Let There Be Light	Sept. 21
Crumb	Sept. 28
Invisible Children	Oct. 5
Young at Heart	Oct. 19
Brooklyn Bridge	Oct. 26
Hoop Dreams	Nov. 2
Fog of War	Nov. 9
Roger and Me	Nov. 16
Times of Harvey Milk	Nov. 23
Gimme Shelter	Nov. 30

If you do this course right, it may well be the most fun you'll have in a college classroom. If you don't do the work, it will be painful. Do the work.