

SM6341: INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Independent Documentary Production

Subject Code

SM - School of Creative Media

Course Number

6341

Academic Unit

School of Creative Media (SM)

College/School

School of Creative Media (SM)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This will give students a hands-on experience of independent documentary making. Many great filmmakers have made documentaries, and today the form is more relevant and popular than ever. Students will be guided through each step in the making of a 10-15 minute documentary: preliminary research, production planning, treatment writing, shooting, editing and test screening. As students need to deal with different subjects living in various socio-cultural conditions, they are encouraged to take up the challenge of establishing a comfortable and positive relationship between their camera and their subject(s), and, to explore various techniques of effective documentation when the use of camera is limited. Methods of material organization, interviewing, and narrative are introduced to prepare students for future work in the making of non-fiction works.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	To identify a theme of interest, subject(s) for shooting, and production plan;	25	x	x	x
2	To be able to follow a documentary subject and production plan through the phases of production, and to overcome various obstacles in the shooting process;	25	x	x	x
3	To discover important questions raised from the shooting process, including subject behavior, ethical questions, and/or unexpected events;	25	x	x	x
4	To be able to organize disconnected materials into a relatively complete narrative or innovative documentary work.	25	x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures: Technical and problem solving skills	Lectures on step by step techniques of making documentaries, and how to foresee difficulties to be encountered.	1, 2, 3	1 hour/ week
2	Screenings: Conceptual skills	Watch and discuss examples of ethical, technical and creative dilemmas in documentary filmmaking.	2, 3	12 hours total

3	Seminar discussions: Interactive learning on creative and practical approaches	Seminar discussion about preparation, interview approaches, research techniques, writing, shooting and development in the understanding of selected subject; Extending understanding of creative expression beyond documentation, i.e. picture editing, sound, music.	1, 2, 3	2 hrs/week
4	Presentations	Students present works-in-progress for feedback and critique and final screenings for peer review at end of term.	4	8 hours total
5	Production & completion of original work: Self-initiated	Students must conceptualize, shoot and edit their own original creative work.	1, 2, 3, 4	100+ hours total

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Production plan and reflection	1	25	-	No
2	Shooting reports and footage presentation	1, 2	15	-	No
3	Screening discussions and critique	1	10	-	No
4	Treatment writing and paper editing	3	25	-	No
5	Final Version Screening and discussion	2, 3, 4	25	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Examination Duration (Hours)

0

Minimum Continuous Assessment Passing Requirement (%)

0

Minimum Examination Passing Requirement (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

Production Plan (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

- Clear articulation of the steps for initiating production
- Time management is well outlined
- Production needs are well outlined
- Project Feasibility

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Excellent grasp of steps for documentary production, demonstrating firm knowledge of the field
- Rich content, exceptional research and planning ability
- Design and research is firmly built on excellent knowledge of subject matter
- Excellent grasp of structure necessary to execute documentary

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Firm grasp of steps for documentary production, demonstrating firm knowledge of the field
- Adequate content, good research and planning ability
- Design and research is firmly built on good knowledge of subject matter
- Adequate grasp of structure necessary to execute documentary

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Comprehensive grasp of steps for documentary production, demonstrating firm knowledge of the field
- Adequate content, fair research and planning ability
- Design and research is firmly built on fair knowledge of subject matter
- Weak grasp of structure necessary to execute documentary

Marginal

(D)

- Loose grasp of steps for documentary production, demonstrating firm knowledge of the field
- Weak content, fair research and planning ability
- Design and research is marginally built on subject matter
- Poor grasp of structure necessary to execute documentary

Failure

(F)

- Poor grasp of steps for documentary production
- Inadequate content
- Fail to make reasonable research and planning
- Fail to grasp structure necessary to execute documentary

Assessment Task

Shooting Report and Footage Presentation (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

- Footage is well shot with good sound and image quality
- Key concepts and scenes are starting to emerge in initial footage

- Student understands and can articulate the stage current footage is at, and step towards its completion
- Content is compelling and rich
- Student takes in comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Rich content, excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources
- Well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing work
- Readiness to respond to peer opinion and other views initiated in class discussion

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly differentiated issues, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Sufficient responses to peer comments to sustain a discussion

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Relevant points made to the subject matter in question
- Ability to respond to other statements and engage in class discussion

Marginal

(D)

- Weak content, limited use of resources
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions
- Ability to respond to other comments in simple terms

Failure

(F)

- Inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources
- Irrelevant points to the subject matter, no ability to interpret opinions
- Fail to respond to other comments

Assessment Task

Final Screening Discussions and Critique (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

- Creativity Form and Content
- Coherence / Research
- Technical ability (sound, picture, music integration)
- Personal Style
- Ability to deal with critique and feedback

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Excellent short documentary in form and content
- Sound, Music and Picture quality is high
- Student has integrated lessons learned into a compelling documentary output
- Student takes in comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Well done short documentary in form and content
- Sound, Music and Picture quality is well done
- Student has integrated lessons learned into a well done documentary output
- Readiness to respond to comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Adequate short documentary in form and content
- Sound, Music and Picture quality is adequate
- Student has integrated lessons learned into a decent documentary output
- Ability to respond to comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Marginal

(D)

- Weak short documentary in form and content
- Integration of Sound, Music and Picture quality is weak
- Student has moderately integrated lessons learned into a documentary output
- Weak ability to respond to comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Failure

(F)

- Failure to complete a short documentary
- Failure to integrate Sound, Music and Picture
- Failure to integrate lessons learned into a documentary output
- No ability to respond to comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Assessment Task

Treatment and Paper Editing (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

- Creativity
- Personal style
- Clarity
- Coherence

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Work has strong affective quality and the articulation of personal styles and signature
- Work raises questions and instill insights about the process of conception, creative strategization and production
- Efficient adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Work has articulation of personal styles and signature
- Work shows important issues that requires exploration
- Proper adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Work is relatively complete and comprehensible
- Limited ability to demonstrate creative thinking or exploration
- Fair adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Marginal

(D)

- Work is not affective at all
- Marginal ability demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Limited adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Failure

(F)

- No appreciation of the aesthetics and expressive qualities of the medium
 - Fail to create work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
 - No adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources
-

Assessment Task

Final Version Screening and Discussion (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

- Coherent documentary work
- Creative style
- Clear point of view
- Compelling subject matter
- Understanding of the medium
- Articulate discussion

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Work has strong affective quality and the articulation of personal styles and signature
- Work raises questions and instill insights about the process of conception, creative strategization and production
- Excellent reception from viewers and peers

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Strong exploration and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Ability to create work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Good reception from viewers and peers

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Basic appreciation and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Limited ability to create work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Fair reception from viewers and peers

Marginal

(D)

- Marginal appreciation of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Marginal ability to create work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Poor reception from viewers and peers

Failure

(F)

- No appreciation of the aesthetics and expressive qualities of the medium
- Fail to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Very poor reception from viewers and peers

Assessment Task

Production Plan (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

- Clear articulation of the steps for initiating production
- Time management is well outlined
- Production needs are well outlined
- Project Feasibility

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Very clear articulation of the steps for pre-production
- Production schedule well outlined
- Project feasibility well evaluated

Good

(B+, B)

- Clear articulation of the steps for pre-production
- Production schedule outlined
- Project feasibility not evaluated

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Unclear articulation of the steps for pre-production
- Production schedule outlined
- Project feasibility not evaluated

Failure

(F)

- Fail to deliver any of the above
-

Assessment Task

Shooting Report and Footage Presentation (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

- Footage is well shot with good sound and image quality
- Key concepts and scenes are starting to emerge in initial footage
- Student understands and can articulate the stage current footage is at, and step towards its completion
- Content is compelling and rich
- Student takes in comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Rich content, excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources
- Well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing work
- Readiness to respond to peer opinion and other views initiated in class discussion

Good

(B+, B)

- Adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Sufficient responses to peer comments to sustain a discussion

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Relevant points made to the subject matter in question
- Ability to respond to other statements and engage in class discussion

Failure

(F)

- Fail to make reasonable research and planning
 - Fail to grasp structure necessary to execute documentary
-

Assessment Task

Final Screening Discussions and Critique (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

- Creativity Form and Content
- Coherence / Research
- Technical ability (sound, picture, music integration)
- Personal Style
- Ability to deal with critique and feedback

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Excellent short documentary in form and content
- Sound, Music and Picture quality is high
- Student has integrated lessons learned into a compelling documentary output
- Student takes in comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Good

(B+, B)

- Well done short documentary in form and content
- Sound, Music and Picture quality is well done
- Student has integrated lessons learned into a well done documentary output
- Readiness to respond to comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Adequate short documentary in form and content
- Sound, Music and Picture quality is adequate
- Student has integrated lessons learned into a decent documentary output
- Ability to respond to comments from fellow classmates and tutor

Failure

(F)

- Failure to complete a short documentary
 - Failure to integrate Sound, Music and Picture
 - Failure to integrate lessons learned into a documentary output
 - No ability to respond to comments from fellow classmates and tutor
-

Assessment Task

Treatment and Paper Editing (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

- Creativity
- Personal style
- Clarity
- Coherence

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Work has strong affective quality and the articulation of personal styles and signature
- Work raises questions and instill insights about the process of conception, creative strategization and production
- Efficient adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Good

(B+, B)

- Work has articulation of personal styles and signature
- Work shows important issues that requires exploration
- Proper adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Work is relatively complete and comprehensible
- Limited ability to demonstrate creative thinking or exploration
- Fair adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Failure

(F)

- No appreciation of the aesthetics and expressive qualities of the medium
- Fail to create work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- No adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources

Assessment Task

Final Version Screening and Discussion (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

- Coherent documentary work
- Creative style
- Clear point of view
- Compelling subject matter
- Understanding of the medium
- Articulate discussion

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Work has strong affective quality and the articulation of personal styles and signature
- Work raises questions and instill insights about the process of conception, creative strategization and production
- Excellent reception from viewers and peers

Good

(B+, B)

- Strong exploration and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Ability to create work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Good reception from viewers and peers

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Basic appreciation and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Limited ability to create work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Fair reception from viewers and peers

Failure

(F)

- No appreciation of the aesthetics and expressive qualities of the medium
- Fail to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Very poor reception from viewers and peers

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Interview Techniques, Cinema Verite, Documentary cinema, Treatment writing, Script Writing, Post-Production, Directing, Editing, Paper Editing, The art of reality, Non-Fiction filmmaking, Ethnography, Human Subjects, Socially engaged filmmaking, Point of View, Character-driven documentary, First-Person narrative, Ethics in filmmaking, Structure, Time and Space in Documentary Filmmaking, Talking-head interviews, Narration, Truth.

Reading List**Compulsory Readings**

Title	
1	Eckhardt, Ned. Documentary Filmmakers Handbook. Jefferson: McFarland, 2012.
2	Hewitt, John and Gustavo Vazquez. Documentary Filmmaking: A Contemporary Film Guide.
3	Jolliffe, Genevieve. The Documentary Film Makers Handbook. NY: Continuum, 2006.
4	Nichols, Bill. Introduction to Documentary. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Rabiger, Michael. Directing the Documentary.
2	Hewitt, John and Gustavo Vazquez. Documentary Filmmaking: A Contemporary Film Guide.
3	Rascoroli, Laura. The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film Wallflower, London, 2009.
4	Roscoe, Jane and Hight, Craig, Faking It: Mock- documentary and the subversion of factuality, Manchester University Press, 2001.
5	Russell, Catherine. Experimental Ethnography: the Work of Film in the Age of Video, Duke, Durham, 1999.
6	Smaill, Belinda, The Documentary: Politics, Emotion, Culture, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2010.
7	Stubbs, Liz. Documentary Filmmakers Speak. New York: Allworth Press, 2012.
8	Baker, Maxine. Documentary in the Digital Age. Oxford: Focal Press, 2006.
9	Baddeley, W. Hugh. The Technique of Documentary Film Production. London: Focal Press, 1969.
10	Turin, Svetla, Ezra Winton, (eds) Screening Truth to Power: A reader on documentary activism. Cinema Politica, 2014.
11	Films:
12	Cousins, Mark. 2011. The Story of Film: An Odyssey.
13	Wintonick, Peter. 2006. Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment, the story of non-fiction film making. National Film Board of Canada.
14	Ferrari, Pepita. 2008. Capturing Reality: The Art of Documentary. NFB/Mongrel Media.

15	Heycock, David. Paul Watson: Documentary Film Maker/ BBC Television Training. Princeton: Films for the Humanities, 1993.
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