COURSE Documentary Film Production

MEETINGS Fridays, 10:00 am to 2:40 pm  
August 29th to December 5th (14 class sessions)

LOCATION COMM 108/Billy Wilder Suite

FACULTY Alex Farnsley  
afarnsley@mail.sdsu.edu

TA Ziryab Ben Brahem (Ben)  
ziryab92@gmail.com

OFFICE HOURS Before or after class or by appointment

PREREQUISITES Please see the catalog for courses required

Overview  
The primary focus of this class will be the production of two or three nonfiction films:

*Project 1:*  
A poetic/experimental nonfiction film about a process – 3 to 5 minutes  
**Paper:** a brief description of your process, successes and failures – 1 to 2 pages

*Project 2:*  
A documentary film:  
Option A – 2 films – 10 to 12 minutes each  
Option B – 1 film – 20 to 28:30  
**Paper:** a Production Book for each Project 2 film  
**Paper:** a confidential personal Weekly Journal reflecting on your personal experiences throughout the Project 2 process.  
**Peer Evaluations:** a peer and personal evaluation will be submitted for Project 2 film(s).  
**Industry Budget:** you will prepare a “market rate” budget for one of your Project 2 films.

In this course we will touch on most aspects of the non-fiction filmmaking landscape: traditional documentary, television documentary series, and reality television. You will be asked to expand your filmmaking vocabulary with non-traditional techniques and to make a concerted effort to stray from the ordinary.

Many of the classes will be conducted as development and production meetings might be in a production company, and the expectation will be that you perform to the level that would be required to retain your position in an upper-level industry environment. This is not to say that the scholarly aspects of our investigations will be ignored. Critical and theoretical analyses will play a role in discussions and class work.

Areas of Study  
*The Modes of Documentary and the Market Landscape*  
What are the genres and sub-genres and what is commercially successful in today’s rapidly changing market landscape and how creativity relates to the economic environment – what flies and what doesn’t.  
We will touch on the trajectories of content and analyze successes, excesses, and failures.

We will briefly explore: how various markets regulate the output by genre, economics, and politics; who the players are for non-fiction content in theatrical, broadcast, cable, VOD, Netflix, iTunes, Hulu, DVD, and other delivery channels.

We will explore how the deals go down: who pays and how much; where the money comes from and where it goes.

*The Production Cycle*  
The phases of manufacture: development, preproduction, production, post, and the distribution and marketing of content.
We will explore research sources and techniques. We will discuss workflow, media management techniques, and rights management strategies. We will acquaint ourselves with delivery requirements, insurance, festival markets, and all rights and licensing fees for non-fiction material.

Content Analysis
We will explore the response gamut, which can be manipulated by the filmmaker, to achieve the genre expectations and planned reception by distribution outlets and the target audience.

Objectives
Knowing the market is key to success in any commercial and creative endeavor. Knowing the market in narrative and non-fiction filmmaking is mandatory at any level in this highly competitive market. The velocity of change in the entertainment industry is unprecedented and filmmakers who do not stay abreast of the almost daily changes put their careers in jeopardy.

Upon completion of this course you should have a basic understanding of the career paths available in nonfiction entertainment. You should have advanced all of your nonfiction filmmaking business and creative skills. These enhanced skills should serve you in any area of filmmaking.

Class Sessions
Attendance in class is mandatory. Please notify me or the TA before class if you are ill.

Many classes will consist of meetings with your Production Company to discuss progress, review dailies, critique what has been accomplished, and to solve any problems that may have developed.

Participation in each of these meeting, which will be held during regularly scheduled class periods, is mandatory.

There will be occasional in-class critiques of dailies and rough cuts of portions of some films.

Classes will include discussions, screenings, guest lecturers from the industry, readings, and lectures.

Many screenings will not be from the traditional canon. We will explore the unusual, the rule-breakers, the poetic, and the unsuccessful.

Required Text
There is no required text. Readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Grades
There will be several components of the grading process:

- participation in class and your production company's activities;
- creativity, competence of work product, and timeliness of submission;
- peer review of analyses, work product, and group participation.

Evaluation Final grade range is A to F with +/- (SDSU policy = no A+ grade)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentary Project 1 (individual)</th>
<th>20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project 1 Reflection Paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentary Project 2 (group)</th>
<th>35%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project 2 Personal Production Journal</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project 2 Production Book(s) for Project(s)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project 2 Peer and Project Evaluation(s)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class Participation 10%

Delivery Dates and Deliverables
A schedule of all due dates will be posted in Course Documents. Each production company will create the projects with the required industry deliverables, as specified in the Project Brief in Course Documents on Blackboard.

Project 2 Personal Production Journal
This will be a weekly reflection on the progress of your Production Company's film, your reactions to the process. You will be responsible for at least one single-spaced typed page per week starting with the first week of development of your Project 2. Entries should be made at the end of the week. This will be a confidential document.
Project 2 Peer and Project Evaluations
This will be a private document in which you evaluate your participation in the project as well as the performance of your colleagues at the end of the semester. A form will be provided that you will complete, seal in an envelope and turn in with your Project Journal.

Cooperative Endeavor and Potential for Conflict
Filmmaking by necessity and tradition is based on teamwork, collaboration, and to some degree compromise. There will be overlapping responsibilities. Consider the key creative tasks: writing, directing, producing and production management, cinematography, picture editing and grading, and sound design. If conflict among group members develops, contact me for advice or intervention.

Contracts
Each Production Company is required to submit a contract, signed by all members, specifying how much each member is required to contribute to the project budgets, when it is to be paid, and a contingency plan for any over-budget expenses. A contract is required for each group project. *The form is available on Blackboard in Course Documents.*

Documentary Production Book
The required content of these notebooks will be described in the Brief for Project 2.

Content other than Original
Any content that is not specifically created by the project creators must be licensed and proof must be included in the Production Book. This includes music, archival footage, stills, etc.

Students with Disabilities
If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible.

Field Production
This course requires students to participate in fieldtrips, research or studies that include coursework that will be performed off-campus. Participation in such activities may result in accidents or personal injuries. Students participating in the event are aware of these risks, and agree to hold harmless San Diego State University, the State of California, the Trustees of the California State University and Colleges and its officers, employees and agents against all claims, demands suits, judgments, expenses and costs of any kind on account of their participation in the activities. Students using their own vehicles to transport other students to such activities should have current automobile insurance.

Note About Safety and Liability
For all projects releases must be signed by each participant, and liability forms and property release forms must be signed for all shooting locations. These forms are available on Blackboard in Course Documents. Copies of these are to be included in the Production Book for each project.

Shooting in SDSU Classrooms
http://theatre.sdsu.edu/html/TFMforms.html for full directions (the link: Directions for reserving a room on campus for film shoots and auditions.)