**COURSE SYLLABUS**
**(Spring, 2016)**
**Documentary Film and Inquiry**

EDP 396K (Honors) (Unique # 10580)/LAH350  (Unique # 29200)

**INSTRUCTOR:**            Ricardo C. Ainslie, Ph.D.
**CLASS MEETING TIMES:**  T-Th 11:00 - 12:30, SZB 439B
**OFFICE HOURS:**         Tues. 10-11, Thurs. 10-11, SZB 262D
**CONTACT EMAIL:**        rainslie@austin.utexas.edu

**Course Description**
The primary focus of this course is teaching students to make short documentaries inspired by student-generated topics. We will also learn about the elements that make documentaries effective as a means for communicating about ideas and issues. The documentary projects are also a vehicle for exploring methodological issues over the course of the semester.

Students will work in teams to develop and carry out 20-minute documentary video projects. In the process, you will learn about interviewing, filming with video cameras, lighting, and sound, in addition to learning the basic elements of editing. The projects will be selected from idea proposals that students submit (we have covered a wide array of interesting topics in this class). Working collaboratively in teams, your team will conceive of the project, research it, film interviews and shoot other material related to it, and edit your material into the 20-minute documentary. I will provide ongoing consultation on your project and the documentaries will be screened at the end of the semester. **No previous experience with documentary work is required**.

The primary thesis underlying this course is that documentary film is an example of qualitative approaches to inquiry, including ethnography, interviewing, and narrative description. It is a unique methodology that can help us examine and understand the meaning of social incidents and controversies, cultural transformations, and other questions of interest.

# Course Grading & Requirements

Your grade for the course will be based on the following:
      Project Proposal 10%
      Project Implementation Plan 10%
      Project Sketch & Interviews 15%
      Class Project 45%
      Class Attendance, participation, Collaboration Rating 20%

**PROJECT PROPOSAL** (10% of course grade)*
      **\*This assignment is due on January 26th.**

Many foundations and granting sources invite potential applicants to submit an initial letter describing the project for which they are seeking support.   You are asked to write a proposal that attempts to "sell" a project idea.  Your proposal should be as compelling as possible, but also realistic and practical. The project description should include the following four elements (consider these headings for your proposal):

1) **"The Project":** a clear description of the event, topic, or setting that would be the focus of this documentary project
2) **"Rationale":** a description of why this is an important or worthwhile topic to address, including a conceptual or theoretical rationale for the project
3) **"Implementation":** a step-by-step description of how the project will be implemented
4) **"Special Requirements":** description of any special requirements that would need to be met in order to carry this project out

Length: two pages (double-spaced) **MAXIMUM**.

I will review the proposals and select 6-8 of them for this semester's class projects. Once selected*, these will be posted on Canvas where you'll be asked to rank them in order of your top three choices. I will then form the semester's project teams.  I will make every effort to assign you to one of your three selections (although I cannot guarantee that the numbers will work out this way).  Along with your rankings you may include any special reasons for being assigned to a given project (such as expertise with the topic, access to people or settings that form its subject matter, etc.).

> *Note: Once teams are formed, all team members will have equal "ownership" of the project. Selection of a proposal to be one of the class projects will have no bearing on your grade on this assignment. For example, a good, workable idea may not be adequately proposed, thereby garnering a lower grade even though the project is selected.

**PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:** (10% of course grade)
This is a 1-2 page plan that each team creates after the team has discussed plans/objectives of their project. The plan should outline the following: a) paragraph summarizing your team's ideas about the primary theme(s) of your film; b) names of potential interviewees and what they will contribute to the project; c) list of potential b-roll shoots. Be clear and succinct.
**Due February 11.**

**PROJECT SKETCH AND INTERVIEWS** (15% of course grade)

Between March 1 and March 10 each team will present a sketch of their respective projects to the class.  Each team's Project Sketch will be 30 minutes long and will include the following elements:

1) A clear, concise description of the topic and your aims for the documentary, including the conceptual rationale;
2) At least 10 minutes of un-edited footage, including material from at least 2 interviews. You may also include b-roll footage. The selected interview clips should capture the key ideas engaged by the project, or illustrate problems with which the team is struggling in terms of implementation;
3) The status of the project in terms of its implementation.
4) 5-10 minutes for Q&A

Think of your Project Sketch presentation as an opportunity for the class to consult on your project.

**CLASS PROJECT** (45% of Course Grade)
The most important component of this course involves the development of an 18-20 minute documentary project.  Early on in the semester the class will be formed into project teams organized around the selected Project Proposals.  These teams will consist of 2-4 people.  Occasionally, solo projects may be feasible depending on the character of the project and your ability to implement it.  The class will receive some instruction on interviewing, filming, and editing, as well as on-campus resources that will be available to you for your projects (video cameras, computer storage and editing software, etc.).  I will meet with each of the teams for individual project consultations periodically throughout the semester.

The proposals that form the basis for the class projects as just that: proposals.  It is anticipated that key ideas will evolve and change as they benefit from further reflection by the team.  Each project's shape will also be altered as it is put into play in the "real world".  In other words, once teams have been established, it is likely that the projects will undergo a natural evolution.  For this reason, the final project, as presented in class later in the semester, may be a distant relative of the project originally proposed.

These are to be *collaborative* efforts in terms of the evolving concept of the project as well as in terms of the work required.  In other words, the selection of a Project Proposal as the organizing idea for a team's project is *not* intended to confer the role of Director upon its author.  All members of a team are expected to contribute to the evolving ideas about the project and to take turns interviewing, filming, logging, etc.  I will attempt to assess that everyone on each team is doing their part.

It is ESSENTIAL that you not underestimate the amount of time it will take to develop, implement, and edit your project.  Editing, in particular, ALWAYS takes much more time than you anticipate.  You will need to begin your projects early and work on them consistently.  You will also need to plan ahead so that equipment and editing facilities are reserved.  Remember that there are multiple projects going on at the same time and everyone will be in need of the same equipment and facilities.  For this same reason,

please be considerate of others: don't reserve time or equipment that you don't need and return equipment when it is due.

On the day that your project is presented in class, your team will be required to turn in a copy of the project. Be sure to title/label it clearly.

Because this is a collaborative effort, team members will typically receive the same grade for the project **except when there is compelling reason to do otherwise**, such as inadequate participation by a team member.  You will be asked to fill out a **Team Collaboration Rating Form** where you assess your fellow team members' participation in the team's work.

## CLASS DISCUSSION, ATTENDANCE, AND PARTICIPATION (20% of Course Grade)

**Attendance:** It is important that you come to every class (on time) and that you participate actively in discussions.  **If you are unable to attend a class, you need to notify me in advance via e-mail** and indicate the reason for your absence.  Missing class will cost you points unless you have a medical excuse.

**Final Project Feedback**: You will be asked to provide feedback to each of the OTHER projects presented at the end of the semester on a Project Rating Form.  You should send me that feedback in an email with the title of the project in the subject heading.

**VERY IMPORTANT: PLEASE NO TEXTING, EMAIL CHECKING, OR NON-CLASS-RELATED INTERNET USE DURING CLASS TIME.**

## CLASS SCHEDULE

**January 19 - Introduction and Course Overview**
- Fundamentals of Documentary Filmmaking
- Sample class projects I
- Proposal Writing Process: Sample Proposal

**January 21 – Equipment overview and past projects discussion**
- Sample class projects II
- LTC equipment and check out procedures (Rob Donald)*

**January 26 – Filming, lighting, sound: Part I**
- *Aesthetics of Cinematography* (composition & movement)

   **Suggested Readings:** Documentary Work as Method
   Becker, H. "The epistemology of Qualitative Research"
      In: Emerson (Ed.) Contemporary Field Research (2001)
      Prospect Heights (Il): Waveland (pp 317-330)
   Geertz, C. (1973).  "Thick description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture"
      (pp 3-32) The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books.

   **\*\*\* PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE \*\*\***

**January 28 - Filming, lighting, sound: Part II**
- *Camera Fundamentals* (assembly & operation)

   **\*\*\* PROJECT TEAMS ASSIGNED \*\*\***

**February 2 – Filming, lighting, sound: Part III**
- *Audio Fundamentals* (equipment, operation, and concepts)

**February 4 - Interviewing**
- The interview environment (creating the space)
- Interview procedures & techniques (questions, listening cues, etc.)
- **Interviewing illustrations**
- Students will meet briefly with their teams to discuss content and strategy

**February 9 – Practice Session\***
- Tara Room Equipment Practice Session
- \* Following this class meeting, teams may begin shooting for their projects

**February 11 - Storyline and Treatment**
- Elements of Story (Three-part structure, Characters)
- Writing a treatment for your project

   **Project Summary DUE:** Teams will turn in project 1-2 page summary with a) paragraph summarizing your team's current ideas about the primary theme of

your film; b) names of potential interviewees and what they will contribute to the project; c) list of potential b-roll shoots

## February 16 – Filming, lighting, sound: Part IV
- *Lighting Fundamentals* (operation, assembly, safety, concepts)

## February 18 - Impact & Intervention in Documentary Work
- Screen excerpts from completed social issue documentary projects

**Suggested Reading:** Ethical Issues
Hampe, B. (1977) "Ethics in making Documentary" In: Making documentary films and reality videos: a practical guide to planning, filming, and editing documentaries of real events.  New York: Holt, 77-89.

## February 23 - Individual Project Consultations
- Individual project consultations with instructor
- Lynda.com video instruction

## February 25 - Individual Project Consultations
- Individual project consultations with instructor
- Lynda.com video instruction

### Suggested Reading: Field Research
Robert Emerson, (1983).  Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings.
Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc.
Introduction          pp. 173 - 189
Wax Chapter          pp. 191 - 202
Johnson Chapter     pp. 203 - 215

## March 1 - Project Sketches & Interviews*
- Each team will present:
  - (1) An overview of their project (concept & plan)
  - (2) Clips from at least two interviews
- Lynda.com video instruction

## March 3 - Project Sketches & Interviews*
- Each team will present:
  - (1) An overview of their project (concept & plan)
  - (2) Clips from at least two interviews
- Lynda.com video instruction

## March 8 - Project Sketches & Interviews*
- Each team will present:
  - (1) An overview of their project (concept & plan)
  - (2) Clips from at least two interviews
- Lynda.com video instruction

## March 10 - Project Sketches & Interviews*
- Each team will present:

(1)   An overview of their project (concept & plan)
(2)   Clips from at least two interviews
- Lynda.com video instruction

**MARCH 14-18          SPRING BREAK**

**March 22 – Editing with Adobe Premiere - Part I\*\***
- Workshop on the software we will use to edit projects

**March 24 - Key Concepts in Editing**
- Class Handout, Illustrations

**\*\* NOTE: It is anticipated that by this date teams will have shot most of their material with perhaps a few of interviews and some b-roll to go.**

**March 29 - Editing with Adobe Premiere - Part II**
- Workshop on the software we will use to edit projects
(The class will meet in the Mac lab in SZB 439B)

**March 31 - Editing with Adobe Premiere - Part III\***
- Workshop on the software we will use to edit projects
(The class will meet in the Mac lab in SZB 439B)

**April 5 - Individual Project Consultations**
(in class editing time)

**April 7 - Individual Project Consultations**
(in class editing time)

**April 12 - Individual Project Consultations**
(in class editing time)

**April 14 - The importance of "Characters" & Narrative**
[Class Examples]

**April 19 - Transitions**
[Class Examples]

**April 21 - Last-minute Problem Solving on Projects**
- Open Class discussion issues/problems/concerns

**April 26 - May 5   \*\*\* PRESENTATIONS OF CLASS PROJECTS \*\*\***

**NOTE:** Everyone in the class will provide feedback to each project (other than your own).I'll provide you with forms for this feedback.