

AUDIO VIDEO INFORMATION GATHERING

visual storytelling

*"Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die,
we can't remember who we are or why we're here."*

-Sue Monk Kidd

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce you to the tools and skills needed to engage in quality storytelling with audio and video. Emphasis is in mastering technical and aesthetic aspects of audio and video information gathering. As this course is intended to give you insight into what you may expect as entry-level employees or interns in "the real world," attention to detail is key, as is timeliness, thoroughness and active participation in course activities. This is a very hands-on course with a flexible syllabus and course schedule. Things are subject to change, so be open-minded and adaptable.

Course objectives: Learn the basic technical and aesthetic components of video, learn how to identify and tell an engaging story, enhance video interviewing techniques, achieve proficiency in Adobe Premiere Pro.

PROJECTS & ASSIGNMENTS (% of final grade):

Project 1 – Poetry in Motion (15%)

What: This assignment is to get students to think visually. You will be given a series of adjectives and will be tasked with gathering shots that illustrate these words. *Remember to grab wide, medium and tight shots!* You will then edit a short video (~1 minute) set to music, showcasing your illustrated words.

Why: One of the challenges of visual journalism is having to illustrate complicated ideas – and being too literal can be boring. Challenge yourself to think outside the box here. Envision having to illustrate a poem. Above all, take creative risks and have fun!

Project 2 – Moment of Clarity (15%)

What: Everyone has had a moment in their lives where they've had some sort of revelation – big or small – where things just suddenly seemed clear. You will interview a classmate on one of these revelations and edit it into a piece that is a maximum of two minutes long. You will be using your video camera to film the interview (so you can practice setting up interview shots and using your camera), but the final piece will be audio-only (so you can concentrate on just telling a good story).

Why: Another challenge in visual journalism is brevity. How do you tell a story that is not too long, but still makes an impact? This project will help you get to the core of storytelling – getting a good anecdote & reflection, then editing it

succinctly. It will also help you to learn good interviewing techniques – getting what you need, but not taking three hours of interviewing to do so.

Project 3 – Profile Piece (20%)

What: There are many interesting people in this world. Find one, then create a short (2-3 min) documentary-style piece that sums up what they are all about. This project is about capturing the essence of a person – what this person, thinks, believes, sees, feels, maybe even what he or she eats (if that adds to the story). You will need to pay attention to details that give away hints of personality.

Why: Doing a profile or a “day-in-the-life-of” is a common news feature assignment. This will help you learn to get the footage and interview material you need, while finding ways to add depth to an otherwise mundane assignment. Like a writer working on a feature, you will work to discover context clues that give a more complete picture of a person.

Project 4 – Sports Story (30%)

What: Sports are more fun when you have someone to cheer for or root against. The goal (no pun intended) of this project is to tell a great story about an athlete, a coach or a team, etc. Your subject can be any age, doing any sport (or retired from any sport), as long as it’s a good story and you can sell me on the pitch. If you locate your subject early on, you may even have the opportunity to document the person or team as they play throughout the semester, letting the story develop in real time (which is always exciting). In the end, you will have an approximately 3 minute documentary-style piece that will draw upon all the skills we learn throughout the semester.

Why: Sports are filled with great stories and fantastic life lessons. There’s a built-in conflict, both internal and external, with every game, season, career, etc. and there’s always some knowledge to gain from participating, regardless of the outcome. The problems you may run into are also common problems you may encounter when working in the field: athletes can sometimes be lousy interview subjects, sports are fast-paced and require lots of practice to shoot (good thing they’re repetitive), there’s often bad lighting and there are generally rules about where you can and can’t shoot.

Course Assignments (15%)

There will be weekly in-class exercises and/or quizzes or take-home assignments throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, your grades for each of these assignments will be averaged into an overall course assignments grade. Course assignments are likely to include (but are not limited to):

- Lynda.com quizzes
- Introductory camera techniques assignment (light/exposure, composition, sequencing, etc.)
- Audio gathering assignment
- Color correction assignment
- Video editing assignment

Participation (5%)

Your participation grade will be heavily influenced by your participation in class discussions and critique sessions. Be engaged, be thoughtful, and be polite and constructive in your feedback.

Photo Night

Every month, usually on the last Tuesday of the month at 7:30pm, we invite prominent photographers and producers to speak to our students. Over the years some of the best in the industry have visited UNC: Ed Kashi, Ami Vitale, Chris Hondros, Sam Abell and Brian Storm to name a few. They are veritable rock stars of the photo/video world and to have them at our footsteps is an enormous opportunity. You will be required to attend at least two of these (I will have a sheet you will need to sign at the beginning and the end of the sessions). If you cannot attend due to schedule conflicts, you can talk to me and we will work out an alternative assignment (usually a review of the speaker’s work or of a documentary piece).

This will count towards your participation grade.

EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES:

Required

Canon Vixia Kit (includes mic and tripod). This can be checked out with Matt Bachman in the Equipment Room on the second floor of Carroll. **The rental fee is \$50/student for the semester.** This can be paid (with exact change or check) to Linda Peterson in the Dean's Suite. She will give you a receipt to present to Matt. Due to limited quantities, students will pair up and share kits. Coordinating shooting schedules will be left up to the partners. Be considerate and plan ahead!

Memory Card for video camera. A SDHC 8GB class 6 (or higher) will work. If you can find a good deal, going up to a 16GB card will help you from running out of card space too quickly.

External Hard Drive 250 – 500 GB (*Must be Mac Compatible so you can use the software in the classroom*). I personally use LaCie hard drives because they are pretty durable, but use whatever you are comfortable with. If you plan on using a drive you already own, know that it will need to be formatted/reformatted for Mac OS.

Headphones

Lynda.com subscription (~\$30/\$35semester) I will send you an email with info on how to enroll.

CRITIQUES:

The goal of a critique is to discover what makes strong, innovative, communicative storytelling. To do so, we will uncover the highs and the lows, the good and the bad, and set you on a path to making better work each time. Critiques are essential to growth and are part of the editing process for even the top professionals in the field. You would never want to turn in a paper without having someone to proofread it first – this is the same thing.

Everyone needs to be active and involved in the critique process, and the critique needs to be constructive. You can be tough and honest without tearing someone apart. Find the balance and, when in doubt, take the higher road. Likewise, when you are receiving a critique of your work, you need to maintain a similar balance. Critiques are for providing helpful suggestions to improve your work. If you refrain from being defensive, you'll gain much more from the feedback. Don't be so connected to your work that you lose sight of how it could be better.

HONOR CODE:

Students will operate within the requirements of the honor code. All work must be your own, must be done specifically for this class, and should be done with the high level of honesty and integrity that this University demands.

ATTENDANCE:

If you must miss this class (for legitimate excuses cleared by me first), you must turn in your assignment the day it is due to receive a grade.