



D O C U M E N T A R Y

681 Syllabus

Hello & Welcome

Course Information

Room CA 60
681 MW 11:15 - 1:00PM

Professor

Ligaiya Romero
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Office Hours

Office // CA 79
Tuesdays 1-5PM

Please try and meet with me during office hours, but if you cannot I will be happy to schedule an appointment.

Required Text

One mind-blowing photography book of your choice. See me for recommendations.

Grade Breakdown

Your final grade will be determined out of a 1000 point scale:

Final Doc Project - 300
Weekly shoots - 400
(worth 50 points each)
Proposal & Roadmap - 100
Beyond the Box Assign - 100
Participation - 100

Grade scale:

A = 93-100% / A- = 90-92%
B+ = 87-89% / B = 83-86%
B- = 80-82% / C+ = 77-79%
C = 73-76% / C- = 70-72%
D+ = 67-69% / D = 60-66%
F = less than 60%

Courtesy

BE ON TIME.

Please turn off and put away phones.
Please use laptops and class computers for in-class exercises only.

This syllabus is flexible.
Be prepared for change.

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.... Show a people as one thing — as only one thing — over and over again, and that is what they become.... How [stories] are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told — are really dependent on power.... Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The Danger of a Single Story

D O C U M E N T A R Y

681.1 Syllabus

Welcome to Documentary. In this course we will seek to strengthen your foundation of technical and journalistic skills, and help guide you into leveraging the power of visual storytelling to engage and affect your community.

It is a tremendous privilege to be able to share people’s lives and tell their stories. With this privilege comes a responsibility for accuracy, accountability, commitment and hard work. Deep listening and critical thinking are essential to challenging systems of oppression and narratives of power. We work with our communities to magnify voices of the unheard, or the systemically silenced, not “give a voice to the voiceless.” We recognize that there is no impact without accountability. We will discuss this more in class.

Many photographs simply state fact as the photographer recorded it. Within this class we will create photographs – not just photographs but idea photographs – that tell stories, photographs that educate and reach into the social conscience. Not every documentary picture story uncovers social problems, however, and that is okay. Sometimes the best thing we can do is understand which stories are ours to tell, and which ones are not.

Effective documentary storytelling is impossible without a commitment to get beyond the surface – to spend time, do the research, build relationships and design impact strategy. The “quick-hit” approach, projecting an incomplete and stereotypical understanding of a given subject, is sadly prevalent in today’s media. The antidote is time and an unselfish commitment to truth – and this is what it will take to succeed in this class.

LONG-TERM PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY / DOCUMENTARY VIDEO

The heart and soul of this class will be a long-term photographic essay or documentary short film. Either way, you must focus on visual storytelling.

This project will involve:
Research, Impact Strategy, Photographic Storytelling and Final Presentation.

We will stress the vital elements of compelling storytelling:
Character, Conflict, Dramatic Tension, Unfolding Action, and Resolution.

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly Shoots

You will be turning in weekly shoots worth 50 points each. You will turn in a catalog of your entire shoot that must total at least 500 frames each week. You will present every frame in class in the order you made the images. We will critique, not the single image, but your approach, style, visual variety and how well you worked each situation. If video is the best medium through which to tell your story, then you will submit roughly edited scenes each week.

Beyond the Box

Early in the semester, I will give you creative, conceptual assignments to help you prepare for the final project. They will be graded for a potential total of 100 points.

EXPECTATIONS & HOPES

Take ownership of your work and your process. Be open, be a humble learner. Be actively involved in class conversations and exercises.

As your teacher in this capstone course, I do have some core journalistic expectations. Here they are:

1. I expect you to create content that is technically advanced. By this point in your training, your technical skills should be nearly intuitive. I expect images to be in focus (with rare exception), exposed well and toned correctly.
2. I expect images and footage to communicate and connect.
3. I expect you to be striving to make images and footage that contain one, or preferably all, of the key elements of a successful photograph: **MOMENT, LIGHT, COMPOSITION.**

4. I expect you to think creatively, critically and independently when approaching any assignment/project, and I expect content to reflect this thinking.

5. I expect professionalism in all areas including presentation, ethics and caption writing.

I am here as your guide. My goal is to create an environment in which your potential can explode. I will facilitate discussion, offer difficult questions and feedback, challenge weak or oppressive narratives, and support your learning process.

More than anything, I hope you leave this class with the ability to think critically about everyday narratives of power – and how visual storytelling can feed systems of oppression, or dismantle them.

GRADE DETERMINATION

For the purposes of this class, I am the editor, and I will evaluate your work based on image quality, technical skills, content, ethics and aesthetics. I will do my best to be fair and accurate, but to do this there must be some very specific guidelines and boundaries. Here they are:

1. Assignments and/or shoots are due at the very minute class begins!
2. Any assignment not turned in will, obviously, receive zero points.

PHOTO NIGHTS

Photo Night is a monthly speaker series that is held usually on the last Tuesday of every month. Presentations are from 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. Attendance at Photo Night is considered part of the class and is mandatory and will be recorded.

“What we often miss in character-driven films designed to build empathy towards individuals is an understanding of the structures and narratives that shape our attitudes and behaviors towards entire communities....

It is time those in the documentary film community concerned with social change move beyond using film to simply build empathy, and instead think about how film can serve the harder, messier, but ultimately more transformational work of building solidarity.”

Sonya Childress

Beyond Empathy

CRITIQUES

Critiques are essential to growth. I ask everyone for their active participation. We all owe each other our full attention, honest feedback, and thoughtful discussion. Participation in class is worth 100 points of your final grade.

The critiques need to be constructive. You can be tough without tearing each other apart. Find the balance, and, when in doubt take the higher road. When receiving a critique of your work, you need to maintain a similar balance. There is a fine line between defending your position and making excuses. Don't be so connected to your work that you lose sight of how it could be better.

REQUIRED EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

You will need a digital 35mm SLR camera with manual controls and interchangeable lenses. Best case scenario would be a HD SLR camera, allowing you to shoot video. Although you can check out through the school, you **MUST** start acquiring your own gear if you plan to survive out there. If you rent from the school, realize you are responsible for any lost, damaged, or stolen equipment, and your access to gear will be limited. You will definitely need buy your own CF cards - as large as possible. Also you need two hard drives for your personal photography archive, video and Premiere projects. One is for backup. I suggest you get at least 1TB drives, 7200 rpm, and USB 3.0 or Thunderbolt. Hard drive failure will not be accepted as an excuse for not completing projects.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

It is critical that you attend every class. You **CANNOT** miss a class in order to shoot an assignment. You must be in class to present your work for critique. Turning in an assignment on the server alone does not count as a turn-in. Part of your

completion of the assignment is the critique. You will be allowed 2 unexcused absences; after that 2 percentage points will be deducted from your FINAL GRADE. The only exception to this will be a serious medical condition.

INCLUSIVE AND ACCEPTING SPACE

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

The University's Statement

UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities based on age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

The School of Media and Journalism Diversity and Inclusion Mission and Vision Statements with accompanying goals can be found at this site:

<http://www.mj.unc.edu/diversity-and-inclusion>.

ACEJMC

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program.

Learn more here: <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on points 5-10 and 12, under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.

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.