NYU Accra, Ghana – 2011

**COURSE: Documenting The African City**
**COURSE CODE: V11.9424001**
Class meets on Tue 3:30-6:30pm

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**Course Description**

The current state of documentary has been shaped by the work of countless filmmakers and theorists over many decades. Going back over a century to the beginnings of moving pictures, the history of documentary film is steeped in philosophical reflection and debate about the implications of visual representation. In this course, we will focus on the basics of documentary production and the kinds of documentary story telling. In a series of short workshops, we will review the basic concepts of video shooting: basic framing, composition, sound and lighting techniques; researching, scripting and directing; and the fundamentals of video editing and post-production. In a more generalized way we will touch on the communicative “problems” of documentary, especially its contentious epistemological and ethical claims to represent reality, by examining selected films that work with and against notions of objectivity, subjectivity, power, knowledge, truth and performance. The documentary film is potentially a powerful and expressive means by which to educate and enlighten providing the viewer with revealing insights and perspectives into the many-faceted realms of human activity. The course will prepare you for work in the many varieties of non-fictional filmmaking, and emphasize the dynamic interplay between reality, experience and representation. By the end of the course, you will be able to produce a short documentary that will include some of the theoretical frameworks that will inform the direction of your production.
Practical Assignments: Students will shoot and edit class assignments and a final project. We have digital cameras, sound equipment, and dedicated Final Cut editing suites that will be shared with students on a scheduled basis.

Bookings Camera/Sound Equipment: can be checked out from the NYU academic center in accordance with your shooting schedule. Equipment request forms will be filled and approved by instructor a week prior to shoot dates. Time slots and sign-up sheets which will be posted on the door to the editing room. Please pay close attention to these times to plan your equipment pick-up and drop-off. All equipment will be signed out for your use in that day but must be returned same day based upon prior arrangement with our production coordinator. NEVER LEAVE EQUIPMENT UNATTENDED OUTSIDE THE EQUIPMENT ROOM. If you do, you will lose equipment privileges. And, you are responsible for any damage or loss! Students will keep their tapes and make sure they bring them to class sessions.

There are Documentary films that will be screened in class and students must prepare for discussion by prior viewing of films to help with exploring/analyzing the content, stylistic, formal and technical issues of the film.

Journal: You are encouraged to keep a diary of your experiences to help you record your progress, especially your projects. In addition it would help if you keep a journal of ideas, observations, people, places, situations, images and sounds that strike you and later you may use them as inspiration for your projects. I will inspect your journals periodically and grade them.

Final Project: A 10-15 minute video documentary. Final projects will be screened in class and at an end of semester screening which will be open to public. Date will be assigned in the last week of classes.

Grading: Your grade will be based on your effort and creative approach to the execution of your assignments, scripts, rough and fine cut, and screenings of your projects; class attendance, participation, and the in-class presentations. The grades awarded in this course will bear some reasonable relation to established NYU practices with respect to distribution of grades. The grade points are calculated as follows:

INDIVIDUAL MARKS
- Production Pitch 10%
- Journals 5%
- Attendance 5%
- Assignments/ Participation 25%

GROUP MARKS
- Treatment 10%
• Production Package 10%
• Film 40%
• No incompletes

Plagiarism: The course will follow NYU-Accra’s plagiarism policy with respect to “Intellectual Honesty” and “Academic Discipline.”
Absences: No unexcused absences are permitted. Excused absences can only be given by the Director, and students will lose 2% of their grade for each unexcused absence.

Weekly Course Schedule

Wk 1. Jan 18

Topic: Introduction to course, Process and Equipment

• Introduction of Course
• Uncovering your voice: Introspection
• Introduce Assignment #1 idea for 3 min short film. The film must include an Interview of at least one subject+Shots of subject being talked about: DUE JAN 25
• Assign film viewing for FEB 1 Class: Nanook of the North and Man with a movie camera.

JAN 21 FRIDAY: FIELD TRIP - The city of Accra

Wk 2. Jan 25

• Uncovering your voice: Inquiry & Intuition
• Assignment #1 Discuss short film idea
  (Interview/s of at least one subject Shots of subject being talked about, B roll and visual shots of environment/Close ups ...etc.)

  This material will be used in the editing room to edit a short 2-5 min short exercise during wk5.

CAMERA AND SOUND WORKSHOP @ 4:30 Camera + tripod in yard with Yao

Wk 3. Feb. 1

Brief introduction to history of non-fiction film

Screen films: Excerpts:
  Nanook of the North, R. Flaherty, (1922, 60 mins)
  Man with a Movie Camera, D. Vertov, (1929, 68 mins)

• Realism and Illusion in Flaherty. Provocative experiment by Vertov
• Cinema Verite'/Observational Cinema
• How to pitch
**Wk 4. Feb. 8**  
**SHOOT ASSIGNMENT #1 (3.30pm -5.30pm)**

**CLASS RESUME 5.30pm – 6.30pm**
- Re-enactments, Reconstruction, and Docudrama
- Structure/style
- Assignment #2 Individual film ideas due week 5: Students will make presentations in class and grouping of ideas will follow.
- Film viewing: *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs); *Bowling for Columbine* (Michael Moore); *Skin Canvas* (Anita Afornu-Nafti)

**FEB 11 Editing workshop #1 @ 3.30pm**: Introduction to Final Cut Pro/computer and editing. (E.T. Mensah)

**Wk 5. Feb. 15**  
**Topic: Kinds of Documentary, Documentary Theory and the issues of Representation**

- Students to pitch film ideas. Discuss film ideas and finalize groupings and topics for films.
- Students proceed to write first version of group project Assignment#3 - Due next class week 6
- Treatment writing
- Screening: *Shoot the Messager*, (90 mins)

**FEB 18 FRIDAY: Editing Workshop #2**: Class will move to the editing room in Basement where students will edit what they shot. (E.T. Mensah)

**Wk 6 Feb 22**  
**Topic: Pre-Production**

- Group Treatments due. Discuss Treatments and give feedback on projects
- Start pre-production.
- Treatment and Shooting Script
- Production meetings
- Shooting Schedule
- B roll shots

**Wk 7 March 1 (FESPACO : 26th February – 6th March)**: Assign a THREE page Critique of any film viewed at FESPACO: Students’ critique should reflect their interactions with the filmmakers. Assignment #4 Due week 8.

**Wk 8 March 8**  
**Wk Topic: Production**

Assignment#5 Group final Treatments for projects due in class.
• Students shoot.
• Interviewing techniques
• Shooting, Do’s and Don’ts
• Location/crew/equipment
• Discussion of final projects/Form production teams today
• Equipment Review in Class Camera and Sound.
• Review shooting scripts, pre-production packages
• Work on production scheduling and Production Packages of Final Project.
• Finalized the interview dates and locations.

Wk 9 March 14

SPRING BREAK

Wk 10 March 22, Topic: PRE PRODUCING THE POST PRODUCTION

• Use of music, archives, stills, Internet etc. in editing your films. Edit the short story
  View...Review Solve problems. SHOOTING DATES FINALIZED START SHOOTING FINAL
  PROJECTS!!!!

• PRODUCTION PACKAGES DUE TODAY!!!

• Setting up the computer by groups (folders/hard drive designation)/Students sign up for
  editing sessions on edit room door.

Wk 11 March 29, Topic: Shooting and Viewing of Rushes/Dailies

Wk 12 April 5 Topic: Postproduction

• Class continue to edit Discussion on style and structure.

• Editing and Post-production of projects.

Next Class Assignment: Continue shooting and editing of projects

Wk 13 April 12 Topic: topic editing final project

Screening and critique of rough cuts

Final Production ends post continues.

Critiques given on individual group basis.

Wk 14 April 19 Topic: Editing and Post-production.
Screening and critique of fine cuts. Students will screen their Work in progress. Discussion feedback of structure.

**Wk 15 April 26.** Class screenings and feedback of FINAL PROJECTS. This week students accommodate feedback and make changes on editing their final cut. Students to make final changes, export films exported out to tape, and copy projects to DVD.

**Wk 16. May 3**

Class screenings and Assessment of FINAL PROJECTS

**May 6** Public screening Invite cast crew and friends.

**May 14** STUDENTS DEPART

References:

- Rudolph Arnheim, *Film as Art*
- Patricia Aufderheide: *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*
- Bordwell & Thompson, *Film Art: an Introduction*
- Grant & Sloniowski, Eds. *Documenting the Documentary*
- Lapsley & Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*
- Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 3*
- Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*
- Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*
- Bill Nichols, *Ideology & the Image*
- Michael Renov, Ed., *Theorizing Documentary*
- Alan Rosenthal, Ed, *New Challenges for the Documentary*

DVD Films On Reference:

- Nanook of the North
- Borom Sarret
- The Man with a movie Camera
- Triumph of the Will
- Paris is Burning
- Roger & Me
- The Thin blue Line
- The Ties that bind
- Thriller
- Sink or Swim
- In the Year of the Pig
- Tongues Untied
- San Soleil
- Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision
- Don't Look Back
- Night and Fog
- Regret to Inform
- Long night’s Journey Into Day
- Zan Boko
- Lumumba
- Conakry
- Bamako

Plus more VHS films on Reference check with Instructor