DGM 1520: Introduction to Non-Fiction Film Production

Class Description:

This course introduces professional video production techniques used for non-fiction digital cinema projects. The course covers production processes such as working with subjects/participants, crafting a story, filming techniques, basic lighting, production management, and basic post-production work. This course will require focused participation in a semester-long project where you will produce a non-fiction (documentary) project through the pre-production, production, and post-production process.

Class outcome: By the end of the course, you should be competent enough to make a short non-fiction film on your own.

Skills outcomes/competencies from the course: At the completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Plan/Organize a non-fiction film production
- Develop an engaging story that is shared cinematically and is compelling for an audience to watch
- Create quality questions for interviews
- Set up and shoot professional looking interviews with basic camera, sound, and lighting equipment
- Set up and effectively capture quality audio with both lavalier mics and shotgun mics
- Shoot and edit meaningful B-roll footage / scenic content that supports the story
- Complete a short non-fiction film or corporate video project
- Deliver the finished project in the specified format from a basic non-linear editing software

Class Rules:

1. Contact me through Canvas and/or Teams. All teacher-student communication is designed to go through the Canvas "Inbox" or Teams messaging system. Please use the Canvas "Inbox" to email me or Teams chat to message me; I check it frequently.

2. Participation is mandatory. Being in class, participating with peers, and having a hands-on learning experience is an essential part of this course.

3. Check the Canvas calendar and ANNOUNCEMENTS often. The calendar may change during the course of the semester, but it's the quickest way to see where we are.

4. Submit assignments through Canvas. Follow the instructions of the specific assignment, but submissions will generally be through a YouTube link. Make sure the link is publicly visible (upload as "unlisted") and therefore doesn't require a login to your account.

5. Late work is marked down 10% each day it is late automatically. Extra credit is available because life happens to all of us, but late work is generally not an option in the real world so this will give you an opportunity to make up some points. *Leave time to make sure to avoid technical problems*. Do not postpone rendering something until the last minute. Computer issues or internet problems are expected and therefore not an excuse.

6. There is the assumption that all of our students have had some camera experience and some editing software experience (you have your phones). There will be a range of experience coming into this course, however. If you have had less experience in the field, it is expected that you spend lots of practice time with your equipment.

7. It's likely you'll have an absence or two because…life. I don't want sick people coming to class, but I also don't want anyone to skip class unnecessarily. Please, at the very least, review the content covered while you were absent and ask a peer what else was discussed upon your return. I *expect* every student to have the occasional medical emergency, family event, etc. I have easy extra credit assignments built into the course precisely for this. That said, if you have something going on that means you'll be repeatedly absent (e.g. an ongoing medical condition) please talk to me if you're concerned with your grade. Communication is key.

8. There are no text books required in this class; it's all online. However, you will need to purchase a few films on Amazon or iTunes/Sundance tickets, and you do need to purchase an external hard drive for storing files related to this class. Please make sure to have at least 1TB of space and, at minimum, USB 3.0. You can find one for under $100. It is your responsibility to make sure it works with the school's Mac computers (format to HFS+ or APFS).

9. Please participate in Cineskype, Film Club, etc. Network with people here before they're famous. Film school is all about making friends.

10. ASK QUESTIONS. APPLY YOURSELF. PARTICIPATE. ENJOY. It's a fun class, and you will get out of this class what YOU put into it.

11. Your video camera MUST be turned on during our synchronous class times. We are creating a virtual classroom community that values participation, inclusion, and support. To do that, we need to be present, active, and engaged in learning together.

Class Structure:

This class has a few assignments and quizzes, but the majority of the work this semester will be focused on your semester-long film project that you will be able to share with the world! All of Module 1 and its assignments are stepping stones for the assignments in Modules 2 & 3.

Here's how it breaks down:

Module 1: Interview/B-roll scene

1. Using good questions that are open-ended (not yes/no questions), you will complete a news or nonfiction interview that is at least 20 minutes long. After you interview your subject, you'll transcribe (type out) the entire interview once it's completed. This is one method of editing a documentary, and it is called a "paper edit" on your final project. Consider interviewing someone on a topic related to what you'd like to use for your final project as this interview could potentially be included if the class picks your idea. This interview should be well framed and have EXCELLENT sound quality.
2. Create a 3-5 minute interview edit. It should have 2-3 "reveals" of your subject so we see them, and the interview should progress so that you are crafting a good story from the interview with a beginning, middle, and an end. Add moving photos, archival footage, and stock video to create visual interest (you may use stock footage).

3. You will shoot a "B-roll or observational scene" with a minimum of 10-12 shots. You will edit that footage into a "montage" that has a beginning, middle, and ending, includes a variety of shots, and SHOWS us what is happening on screen (rather than tells us).

Module 2: How-to Video

Here you'll create a single video demonstrating how to create or accomplish a topic of your choosing (i.e. How to bake a cake, How to walk a dog). You're being graded on how well you use the visual artistic tools available to you (e.g. composition, exposure, multiple angles, focus) to accurately and effectively SHOW the process in a visually pleasing way with music, instruction, and titles.

Module 3: Final Documentary Project

1. Individually, everyone should come up with their own idea. Then you will have the option to work on your own or in a team with ONE or TWO other students.
2. Next, you will create a pitch proposal, which is sometimes called a Treatment.
3. As you work on the film, you will create an Assembly Cut and a Rough Cut. You will turn in the Rough Cut. This is where my notes and notes from peers will be more detailed, and you must have the edited project open in class (or onscreen so we can screen share) so we can work on it together.
4. Turn in your Final Cut (no longer than 6 minutes). This will be graded on the topics we have covered (storyline and arc, good cinematography, a sound mix with music, color correction, final titling and graphics, etc.). There is also a digital .pdf "production book" requirement containing paperwork including your proposal, production schedule, and releases.

In Class Camera/Sound Gear & Editing Group Assignments:

1. Camera & audio setup and basics
2. Interview framing, three-point lighting & mock interview questions
3. Logging, Organizing, Backing Up, and Editing Demo
4. Exteriors/Transition shots
5. How to Peel a Clementine
6. Editing Analysis
7. News Anchor Shoot (over the shoulder/match frame)

Assignments/Class Topics & Lectures/Camera workshop days:

Weeks 1 & 2

August 21: IN PERSON: DX Building. Welcome, syllabus review, and class expectations.
Assignment #1: Put your photo on Canvas. **Assignment #2:** Introduce yourself on Camera, Selfie Video.

August 26: ONLINE: Microsoft Teams. Lecture: Making Pretty Pictures Part 1: Cinematic storytelling, light, framing, and tone. Gearing Up: Looking at and understanding basic camera & sound gear. **Assignment #3:** Watch documentaries: Joe's Violin & Meet Me at the Stairs.

August 28: IN PERSON: DX Building. In class basic camera & audio setup. **Assignment #4:** watch short film Distance.

Weeks 3 & 4

September 2: NO CLASS: LABOR DAY HOLIDAY.

September 4: IN PERSON: DX Building. Audio Recording.

September 9: ONLINE: Microsoft Teams. Lecture: Storytelling and Story Structure. Interviewing and Filming Tips.

September 11: IN PERSON: DX Building. Three-point lighting, interview framing, focus work in class. **Assignment #5:** Complete online Quiz on Joe's Violin, Meet Me at the Stairs & Distance.

Weeks 5 & 6

September 16: ONLINE: Lecture: Making Pretty Pictures Part 2, Creating a Shot List. Review camera and audio setups, story structure, and finding interesting topics.

September 18: IN PERSON: DX Building. Shooting Exteriors and transition shots, group assignment. **Assignment #6:** Watch Walk, Run, Cha-cha. **Module 1.1 due at the end of this week.**

September 23: ON LINE: Lecture: Basic Editing Tips. Pre-production planning, shots lists, and shooting schedules. **Project Review:** Review of Interview and transcript assignment.

September 25: IN PERSON: DX building editing trailers. Editing exercise TBD. **Assignment #7:** Films to watch: Innocente & Listen. Answer the questions in Canvas. **Module 1.2 due at the end of this week.**

Weeks 7 & 8

September 30 : ONLINE. Lecture: Pitching Ideas, Finding Gigs & Selling Work. Giving productive feedback. Come prepared to work in breakout groups and discuss the films Inocente & Listen.

October 2: IN PERSON: DX Building. How to Peel a Clementine group assignment. **Module 1.3 due at the end of this week.**

Weeks 9 & 10:

October 7: ONLINE. Lecture: The Stages of Post Production. Group Editing Analysis exercise in breakout groups.

October 9: IN PERSON: DX Building. News Anchor Shoot group exercise. **Module 2.1 due at the end of this week.**

October 14: ONLINE: **Project Review:** "How To Videos" are due! Watch and critique HOW TO VIDEOs.

March 6: IN PERSON: **Project Review:** Watch and critique HOW TO VIDEOs. Review of final documentary assignment and production book.

OCTOBER 17-19: FALL BREAK: NO CLASSES

October 21: CLASS CANCELLED FOR FALL BREAK. **Module 3.1 due by end of the day.**

October 23: IN PERSON: Film Proposals and Pitches.

Weeks 11 & 12

October 28: ONLINE: Film Proposals and Pitches.

October 30: IN PERSON: Lecture: Music is Magic! Post Production Sound and music. **Assignment #8:** Watch Film: Transmormon.

November 4: ONLINE: Lecture: Color and Transition Work. Finish your interviews and pickups this week so you can start working on your Assembly Cut for final film projects.

November 6: IN PERSON: **HOLD FOR GUEST SPEAKER TBD.** Work on your final production shoots, and make sure you have ALL ASSETS (archival photos, B-roll, observational scenes).

November 11: ONLINE: Final Exam Review Sheet.

November 13: IN PERSON. OPTIONAL LAB/EDITING DAY. Assembly Cut Consultations. **Module 3.2 is due by the end of this week.**

Weeks 13 & 14:

November 18: ONLINE: **Project Review:** Rough cuts are due! Rough Cut Critiques and Feedback

November 20: IN PERSON: **Project Review:** Rough Cut Critiques and Feedback

NOVEMBER 25 - NOVEMBER 30: THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASSES

Weeks 15 & 16: PLEASE NOTE. BOTH CLASSES ARE IN PERSON THIS WEEK!!! Module 3.3 is due by the end of this week.

December 2: IN PERSON: Final film production and production books are due! **Project Review:** Fine Cut Critiques and Feedback

December 4: IN PERSON: **Project Review:** Fine Cut Critiques and Feedback

December 6: CLASSES END, ALL EXTRA CREDIT IS DUE BY TODAY!!!

December 11: **FINAL EXAM** (asynchronous)

Homework: Expect to have a lot of outside-of-class work in this class, both individually and as a group.

Canvas: The assignments and screenings revolve around the CALENDAR in Canvas. Check it often. Because of holidays and the time it might take for some assignments, the due dates might shift to accommodate changes in the course.

Tests/Quizzes: All tests/quizzes are given online within Canvas. I will try and give you a heads-up for upcoming quizzes, but it is ultimately your responsibility to look at the calendar in

Canvas, keeping track of when tests are given. Tests have a due date and a 'locked' date. If you miss a test without prior approval from the instructor, there is NO making it up.

Participation: 100 points. 100-80 (great/good participation and attendance), 80-50 (mediocre participation and has missed more than 2 classes without notification), 30 and below (poor participation and attendance).

This is a grade for your level of effort, engagement, and participation in the class. Participation is extremely important. You must come to class prepared to share ideas, to show and discuss your work, and to ask questions. The more energy, effort, and attention you put into this class, the more you will get out of it.

Your personal schedule: Be advised that taking a family vacation or some other external event that causes you to miss class without notification will not be excused. Personal emergencies or personal commitments, with notification and communication, can be handled appropriately.

Assignment submission: The production industry has strict guidelines for submission of productions and paperwork. This course will have several of each. Each assignment will have the required submission details included and all assignments need to be submitted through CANVAS.

Film viewing: We will watch some films in class. These films are of a variety of subjects and are for a variety of audiences. Some may include what may be described as mature content.

Equipment: You may use your own equipment or you may check out equipment from our DGM Equipment Checkout (DX Building), the Fulton Library, or the DGM Audio Studio. Please research requirements and protocol prior to checking out equipment and use your due diligence.

Test and practice equipment before leaving checkout. Late fees, missing/damage fees, and restrictions apply with varied consequences. Typically, any lost or damaged parts of the camera systems will be charged to your student account. Those fees will have to be paid before you can register or obtain your grades from the university. You can't use the equipment for commercial/paid jobs. This violates Utah State Laws and will result in the suspension of privileges.

I expect you all to shoot with at least a DSLR (for varied lens choices) or of a higher caliber. If you have an alternative you'd like approved, just let me know, and we can talk about it.

Our department is equipped with all the software you need for this course in our classroom, the Digital Media Lab (DX Building). This includes Adobe Premiere Pro and Davinci. As a UVU student, you have access to Microsoft 365, Adobe Creative Cloud, and LinkedIn Learning for a wide variety of tutorials and training. I highly recommend you take advantage of the many resources available to you.

Storage Drive: Please prepare to have a portable hard drive — your "working drive." This means it's the drive that you bring to class, bring to the Lab, that you edit on, and that travels

with you. DO NOT EDIT OFF OF THE COMPUTER as your files may not be saved. In general, we recommend that you shop for portable drives with the following features:

- Multiple ports or interfaces (USB or Thunderbolt; most newer Macs support both Thunderbolt and USB, however, you can get adapters for Firewire cables if your drive also has those ports)
- Are at least 1TB in size
- Are compatible with Macs (if you use a Windows machine at home, then have one that is Mac/Windows compatible)
- We recommend G-Raid, Western Digital, Seagate, and LaCie brand drives and that you purchase a case for your portable drive

Grading:

- 95% and above   A
- 90 to 95%   A-
- 85 to 90%   B+
- 80 to 85%   B
- 75 to 80%   B-
- 70 to 75%   C+

Ethics and Professional Standards: This course involves group activities and other opportunities for self-disclosure. Your classmates, instructor, and/ or guest speakers may reveal something personally or professionally important and private in discussions. Professional behavior dictates that you will maintain this person's privacy and trust. Therefore, all information shared in class is private. If you feel there has been a breach of professionalism, ethics, or law, please come to me with your concern.

Office of Accessibility Services: Students who need accommodations because of a disability may contact the UVU Office of Accessibility Services (OAS), located on the Orem Campus in LC 312. To schedule an appointment or to speak with a counselor, call the OAS office at 801-863-8747. Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals, email *nicole.hemmingsen@uvu.edu* or text 385-208-2677.

A Respectful Classroom: As a public institution, Utah Valley University exists for everyone, and I recognize that everyone has a story to tell, no matter their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, faith tradition, or physical/emotional/mental disability. My class is not just about tolerance, but about TRUE RESPECT. We are all different human beings, and we are here to embrace and celebrate our differences.

Please let me (and your classmates) know how to address you and refer to you in class conversations. For example, which pronouns do you use, and how is your name pronounced? In the creation of your class projects, please be sensitive in how you depict people and groups.

Support Services: Often, the stress of adjusting to college, being away from your typical social support systems, and balancing work, homework, and life, can have a deep impact on your

state of mind. Many students find themselves dealing with issues like depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns for the first time. Please remember that *you are not alone* in these experiences and that there are plenty of resources out there for you.

If you find yourself dealing with a mental health issue, it is not your "fault," and you are not just "making excuses," but you *do* need to take it seriously and get help. *You* are what is most important. There is no shame in acknowledging the issue and talking to someone. Please let me know, talk to your academic advisor, or reach out to Student Health Services in SC 221 or 801.863.8876.

If you are in crisis, please call or text 988 - The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, go to the nearest emergency room, or call 911. The University also has resources available at https://www.uvu.edu/mentalhealth/

If you are in need of other support services, many resources are also available at https://www.uvu.edu/studentcare/

Academic Dishonesty & AI: No academic dishonesty will be tolerated. The penalty for a first offense is an "F" for the assignment, and the assignment cannot be redone. A second offense means that you *fail* (forfeit credit) the course and will be reported to the Department Chair and to Student Advising.

AI programs are not a replacement for your human creativity, originality, and critical thinking. Writing, thinking, and researching are crafts that you must hone over time to develop your own individual voice. At the same time, you should be familiar with the capabilities of AI as well as its detractors.

You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content). Any use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited in order to stay within university policies on academic honesty.

Within the professional environment, the Archival Producers Alliance (APA) is on the verge of releasing a set of detailed guidelines regarding the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in non-fiction filmmaking intended to help filmmakers, funders, and distributors establish Best Practices. When this policy is officially released, it will be provided for your information. The overarching principles these guidelines rely on include:

1. Value of Primary Sources
2. Transparency
3. Legal Considerations
4. Ethical Considerations of Creating Human Simulations

Please be advised, that the use of GenAI may also be ethically questionable. The creation of large language learning models like ChatGPT as well as other GenAI platforms could be a violation of the intellectual property rights of creators like yourself. GenAI has serious

environmental impacts, particularly in relation to water usage. OpenAI and other developers are also reported to be exploitative of workers in the global south, especially in Kenya, the Philippines, and Colombia, as well as workers in prisons and refugee camps. Source: Olivia Stowell [@oliviastowell on X](#).

Colds and COVID: This is a hands-on cinema production course that is being held significantly face-to-face (in-person). It is my duty to provide you with an excellent educational experience and prepare you for other course work as well as a professional working environment, and we need to work together to ensure as few classroom disruptions as possible.

Because of the close proximity of our classroom, the group work we will be doing, and the use of shared film equipment, please come to class with a mask if you have been exposed to illnesses such as the Flu or COVID. We all want to stay healthy this semester, and in Hollywood, MANY people are still wearing masks on set.

Snow Storms: Given the Utah winters, there may be some changes in our online vs. in person class meetings, so please check your emails regularly in case snow is in the forecast.

Fluidity of Schedule & Assignments: Similar to any professional film and television production schedule, flexibility is the key to overall success in our industry and process. Our schedule, assignments, and criteria are fluid and may change throughout the term based on my observations and to account for unforeseen events, challenges, and opportunities that may arise. I will always inform you about schedule or assignment changes in a timely manner, but it's your responsibility to stay current and keep up-to-date.

In cases of force majeure, I may move the start or end of class time, have us meet virtually synchronously or asynchronously, or postpone/reschedule/cancel a session. Assignments and their criteria may also change depending on the severity of the circumstances.