



## FS 250 DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

IES Abroad Rome

### DESCRIPTION:

This Introduction to Documentary Filmmaking will enable students to develop a critical, aesthetic and ethical approach to visual representation. Through selected documentary viewings, readings, class discussions, research projects and the completion of a final documentary project, students will acquire the necessary tools that will help them understand the process needed for making an audiovisual product. The making of a short documentary project on a selected topic will be proposed by the students and approved by the instructor. The documentaries will be based on the new reality in which students will be living and will focus on the differences between cultures, religions, politics, arts, architecture and lifestyles. Students will capture aspects of Italian culture with the advantage of being able to observe it as spectators with a certain amount of detachment. Students will develop the ability to observe, explore, and investigate reality around them. The course fosters a new mode of attentiveness and observation that stimulates and allows students to turn their ideas, intuitions and emotions into visual narratives. Students will learn and discuss all steps involved in the making of documentaries from the conception of the idea to the final film. This process will allow them to develop, in a written form as well, a research project structured in four parts: Theme; Characters; Locations; Story. Students will be trained in the basic technical and creative skills of digital video production and postproduction under the guidance of an experienced filmmaker. They will transform selected research projects into documentaries working in small groups. Students will film and edit also outside class time if necessary. The course will consider historical, theoretical and methodological information about documentary production through lectures, readings and film discussions.

**CREDITS:** 3 credits

**CONTACT HOURS:** 45

**LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION:** English

**PREREQUISITES:** Students must bring their own video camera, or digital camera with video recording function (video DSLR) and instruction manual. It is also possible to use tablets or any mobile device with HD video camera. Students should keep in mind that if they plan on buying a video camera, device prices are generally lower in the U.S.

**ADDITIONAL COST:** \$200

### METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

- Lectures
- Screenings
- Readings
- Discussions
- Field research

Shooting and editing are completed under guidance and supervision of the instructor and her collaborator (professional cinematographer and editor), who will teach basic technical and creative skills of video and digital technology.

### REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Class participation (20%)
- Research Project (20%)
- Pre-production package (20%)
- Final Project: completed documentary short (40%)

**DETAILS OF REQUIRED WORK:** The research project is a creative process from the investigation of the subject matter to its development into a story. The research project is structured in four parts: Theme; Characters; Locations; Story. Students will write a minimum of 3 pages for each part. The research project to be developed into a documentary will be discussed in class and approved

by the instructor. Students are divided in small groups (2/3 students per group depending on the number of participants) and each group has to develop one of the research projects selected into a pre-production package which includes the script for a 10-minute documentary and a production schedule. Each group has to produce, shoot and edit a Final documentary (approximately 10 min.).

#### Grading Rubric for student participation:

<b>A</b>	<b>Excellent participation</b> The student's contributions reflect an active reading of the assigned bibliography. Skillfully synthesizes the main ideas of the readings and raises questions about the applications and implications of the material. Demonstrates, through questions and comments, that he or she has been capable of relating the main ideas in the readings to the other information discussed in the course, and with his or her own life experience. The student makes informed judgments about the readings and other ideas discussed in class, providing evidence and reasons. He/she respectfully states his/her reactions about other classmates' opinions, and is capable of contributing to the inquiry spiral with other questions. The student gets fully involved in the completion of the class activities.
<b>B</b>	<b>Very good participation</b> The student's contributions show that the assigned materials are usually read. Most of the time the main ideas are identified, even though sometimes it seems that applications and implications of the information read were not properly reflected upon. The student is able to construct over others' contributions, but sometimes seems to interrupt the shared construction to go over tangents. He/she is respectful of others' ideas. Regularly involved in the activities but occasionally loses concentration or energy.
<b>C</b>	<b>Regular participation</b> The participant evidences a regular reading of the bibliography, but in a superficial way. He/she tries to construct over others' ideas, but commonly provides comments that indicate lack of preparation about the material. Frequently, contributions are shallow or unarticulated with the discussion in hand.
<b>F</b>	<b>Insufficient participation</b> Consistently, the participant reads in a shallow way or does not read at all. Does not participate in an informed way, and shows lack of interest in constructing over others' ideas.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Define documentary filmmaking and its various modes of expression.
- Recognize the issues and concepts concerning the representation of reality
- Research the surrounding environment in order to select a subject matter that can be developed into a documentary.
- Select individuals to be interviewed.
- Interview selected characters.
- Elaborate and structure a research project intended to be translated into a visual narrative.
- Practice basic production techniques following the different steps needed for the making of a documentary: preparation, shooting and editing.
- Distinguish and treasure their roles and responsibilities in media making.

#### ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance is mandatory for all IES classes, including field studies. If a student misses more than two classes, 2 percentage points will be deducted from the final grade for every additional absence. Any exams, tests, presentations, or other work missed due to student absences can only be rescheduled in cases of documented medical emergencies or family emergencies.

#### CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments
------	---------	-------------

<p><b>Week 1</b> (3 hours)</p> <p><b>Session 1</b></p> <p><b>Session 2</b></p>	<p><b>Introduction to documentary.</b> Elements of history; definitions of “documentary”; identification of the various subgenres and modes of expression.</p> <p><b>Fiction versus documentary.</b> Analysis of the differences between documentary and other film genres using as case study the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. Selected scenes from Michael Moore’s documentary <i>Bowling for Columbine</i> (USA, 2002) and Gus Van Sant’s film <i>Elephant</i> (USA 2003) will be viewed and discussed during class to point out the differences between fiction and documentary when approaching the same subject.</p> <p><u>Film viewing (selected scenes in class):</u> <i>Bowling for Columbine</i> by Michael Moore; <i>Elephant</i> by Gus Van Sant.</p>	<p><u>Assigned Readings:</u> Nichols Bill, <i>Introduction to Documentary</i>, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2nd edition, 2010. Chapters 1 and 2. (pages 1 to 66).</p> <p><u>Assigned Readings:</u> Nichols Bill, <i>Introduction to Documentary</i>, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2nd edition, 2010. Chapters 3 and 4. (pages 67 to 199).</p>
<p><b>Week 2</b> (3 hours)</p> <p><b>Session 3</b></p> <p><b>Session 4</b></p>	<p><b>Observation and representation of reality: issues and concepts.</b> Class discussion on how to observe reality and what is the right approach to reality for a documentary filmmaker. Considerations on why ethical issues are central to documentary filmmaking. The role of documentaries in shaping public opinion and their power to bring about social change and raise awareness.</p> <p><b>Different styles of documentary filmmaking.</b> Class discussion of selected scenes of the following documentaries: <i>Nanook of the North</i> by Robert J. Flaherty (1922), <i>Italianamerican</i> by Martin Scorsese (1974) and <i>Hidden Island</i> by Mariarosy Calleri (1998). Internal knowledge versus external knowledge, personal gaze versus objective gaze, experimental narrative versus linear narrative.</p>	<p><u>Assigned Readings:</u> Nichols Bill, <i>Introduction to Documentary</i>, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2nd edition, 2010. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. (pages 120 to 252).</p> <p><u>Assigned Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nichols Bill, <i>Introduction to Documentary</i>, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2nd edition, 2010. Chapter 9. (pages 253 to 271).</li> <li>Rabiger Michael, <i>Directing the Documentary</i>, Focal Press. 5th edition, 2009. Part 1. You and Your Ideas. Chapters 1 to 4. (pages 1 to 63).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 3</b> (3 hours)</p> <p><b>Session 5</b></p>	<p><b>Finding the subject.</b> Class presentation of students’ <u>Research Project, Part 1: Theme</u>. Choosing the subject</p>	

<b>Session 6</b>	<p>matter based on facts or stories, detection of “good stories”, developing the themes and identification of related characters.</p> <p><b>Course-related trip to Piazza Vittorio and the Esquilino Neighbourhood</b>, to discover the sets of the docu-musical <i>L’orchestra di Piazza Vittorio</i>: we’ll visit the gardens with the magic door, the exotic multiethnic market, the colorful Indian stores and the Apollo Cinema.</p>	<p><u>Assigned Readings</u>: Rabiger Michael, <i>Directing the Documentary</i>, Part 6: Documentary Aesthetics. Chapters 17 and 20; (pages 257 to 334)</p> <p><u>Film viewing (before meeting)</u>: <i>L’Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio</i> by Agostino Ferrente (2006) winner of the 2006 Nastro D’Argento and Globo d’Oro.</p> <p><u>Film viewing (before next class)</u>: <i>Citizenfour</i> by Laura Poitras (2014) Academy Award Winner for Best Documentary Feature at the 2015 Oscars.</p>
<p><b>Week 4</b> (3 hours)</p> <p><b>Session 7</b></p> <p><b>Session 8</b></p>	<p><b>How to prepare and film interviews.</b> Class presentation of students’ <u>Research Project, part 2: Characters</u>. Overview of the different ways of recording and shooting an interview.</p> <p><b>Film Grammar and Equipment.</b> Students will learn the fundamentals of film language and practice manual control of camera image, synchronous sound and techniques of sequence building and shooting under the guide of a professional camera and sound person.</p>	<p><u>Assigned Readings</u>: Rabiger Michael, <i>Directing the Documentary</i>, Part 2: Documentaries and Film Language. Chapters 5 and 6; (pages 67 to 117). Part 3: Preproduction. Chapters 7 to 8 (pages 121 to 139).</p> <p><u>Assigned Readings</u>: Rabiger Michael, <i>Directing the Documentary</i>. Part 4: Production. Chapters 13 to 16. (pages 205 to 254)</p>
<p><b>Week 5</b> (3 hours)</p> <p><b>Session 9</b></p> <p><b>Session 10</b></p>	<p><b>Script and Schedule.</b> Students learn how to write a documentary script and prepare the shooting schedule based on the script. Understanding the interdependence of the different roles within a crew.</p> <p><b>Directing and Editing Styles.</b> Overview of the main directing and editing styles. Class discussion of Nathaniel Kahn’s documentary <i>My Architect</i>, Malik Bendjelloul’s <i>Searching for Sugar Man</i> and Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s <i>Chronicle of a Summer</i> to evaluate filmmaker’s personal involvement in the making of a documentary and to analyze the creative process in discovering and revealing real characters. Students propose selected scenes from the above documentaries to be reviewed and discussed in class.</p>	<p><u>Films viewing (before next class)</u>: <i>My Architect</i> by Nathaniel Kahn; <i>Searching for Sugar Man</i> by Malik Bendjelloul and <i>Chronicle of a Summer</i> by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin.</p> <p><u>Assigned Readings</u>: Rabiger Michael, <i>Directing the Documentary</i>, Part 7A: Advanced Preproduction. Chapters 21 to 24. (pages 339 to 382)</p>
<p><b>Week 6</b> (3 hours)</p>		

<p><b>Session 11</b></p>	<p><b>From the Idea to the Storyline.</b> Discussion on students' Research Project, part 3 e 4: <u>Locations and Story</u>. Students have to present their final individual Research Project including a story developed into a narrative structure. Class discussion and selection of students' proposals.</p> <p>The projects to be developed into short documentaries (approximately 10 minutes) are chosen by the instructor and students are teamed in groups of 2/3 students depending on the number of participants.</p>	<p><u>Assigned Readings:</u> Rabiger Michael, <i>Directing the Documentary</i>. Part 5: PostProduction. Chapters 13 to 16. (pages 205 to 254)</p>
<p><b>Session 12</b></p>	<p><b>Class presentation of group projects.</b> Feedback on scripts and production schedules regarding narrative structure, ethical responsibilities, aesthetics issues and feasibility of the projects.</p> <p><u>Film viewing:</u> <i>Land of Silence and Darkness</i> by Werner Herzog.</p>	
<p><b>Week 7 (3 hours)</b></p>	<p><b>Shooting.</b> Each group performs some camera and audio tests for shooting in HD quality.</p> <p><b>Shooting.</b> Each group starts shooting HD material for documentary project.</p>	
<p><b>Session 13</b></p> <p><b>Session 14</b></p>		
<p><b>Week 8 (3 hours)</b></p>	<p><b>Viewing and evaluation of the documentary material (Part 1).</b> Checking the technical quality of the footage that each group has filmed. Discussion about the results after the first week of shooting to assess if expectations are met. What can be improved, changed or shot again to accomplish the established goals?</p> <p><b>Shooting.</b> Each group continues shooting HD material for documentary project.</p>	
<p><b>Session 15</b></p> <p><b>Session 16</b></p>		
<p><b>Week 9 (3 hours)</b></p>	<p><b>Production. Viewing and evaluation of the documentary (Part 2).</b></p>	
<p><b>Session 17</b></p>		

<b>Session 18</b>	<p>Checking the technical quality of the footage each group has filmed and/or re-filmed during the week. Discussion about the results.</p> <p><b>Shooting.</b> Each group completes the shooting of HD material for documentary project.</p>	
<b>Week 10</b> (3 hours)  <b>Session 19</b>  <b>Session 20</b>	<p><b>Hands-on on Editing program.</b> Students learn how to use editing program and develop editing skills with a professional editor.</p> <p><b>Post Production (Part 1)</b> Students experiment editing tools using their own digitized footage: assembly, rough cutting, fine cutting and picture lock. Through the editing process students recreate characters, assemble scenes and story structure, establish pace and rhythm.</p>	
<b>Week 11</b> (3 hours)  <b>Session 21</b>	<p><b>Post Production (Part 2).</b> Students learn advanced editing tools such as key-framing, color correction and special effects with professional editor.</p> <p><b>Students can schedule an individual meeting with instructor and editor after class time.</b></p>	
<b>Week 12</b> (3 hours)  <b>Session 22</b>  <b>Session 23</b>	<p><b>Final Feedback on rough-cuts.</b> Class discussion on works-in-progress.</p> <p><b>Post Production. Editing Part 3.</b> Color correction, titles, credits, music and final sound mix.</p>	
<b>Week 13</b> (3 hours)  <b>Session 24</b>  <b>Session 25</b>	<p><b>Class Screenings and evaluation of the students' final projects.</b></p> <p><b>Screening in the auditorium with jury's nomination of Best Doc.</b></p>	

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

- Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2nd edition, 2010.
- Rabiger Michael, *Directing the Documentary*, Focal Press. 5th edition, 2009.
- Steven Ascher and Edward Pincus, *The Filmmaker's Handbook – A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age*

#### SUPPLEMENTARY SUGGESTED READINGS:

- Curran Bernard Sheila, *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*, Focal Press; 3rd edition, 2010.
- Paul Hockings, *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, Paul Hockings e Editor, late edition 2009.

#### FILMOGRAPHY:

- Nathaniel Kahn, *My Architect* (USA, 2003). One nonfiction film that truly creates a narrative journey, *My Architect* is filmmaker Nathaniel Kahn's engrossing search for his father. Louis Kahn, one of the most celebrated architects of the 20th century, died in 1974 and left behind a highly compartmentalized life, including two children born out of wedlock to two mistresses. Nathaniel interviews the members of this somewhat puzzled family, but his deepest experiences are visits to the buildings that his father made (such as the grand Salk Institute in La Jolla, California), culminating in an emotional trip to Bangladesh. Here, Louis Kahn designed a massive government complex, a soaring achievement (and fascinating paradox—a Muslim capital designed by a Jewish man). This film asks: where does an artist truly live? In his life, or in the work he leaves behind? Nathaniel Kahn takes an amazingly even-tempered approach to this, given his personal stake in the story, and the result is a uniquely stirring movie.
- Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine* (USA, 2002). Posing the question 'are we a nation of gun nuts or just plain nuts?', *Bowling for Columbine* takes a polemic pot-shot at American gun culture and the media that supports – and perpetuates – it. Revered by the little people, feared by the corporates and getting right up Charlton Heston's gun barrel, America's favorite whistle blower Michael Moore has armed himself with his own secret weapon – humor - to create this engaging, entertaining and thought-provoking documentary. Starting point is the harrowing 1999 Columbine High School massacre – in which 13 students were murdered. Before the two fellow students responsible carried out their killing spree, they had gone bowling.
- Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, *Chronicle of a Summer* (France, 1961). Few films can claim as much influence on the course of cinema history as *Chronicle of a Summer*. The fascinating result of a collaboration between filmmaker-anthropologist Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin, this vanguard work of what Morin termed *cinéma-vérité* is a brilliantly conceived and realized sociopolitical diagnosis of the early sixties in France. Simply by interviewing a group of Paris residents in the summer of 1960 —beginning with the provocative and eternal question “Are you happy?” and expanding to political issues, including the ongoing Algerian War— Rouch and Morin reveal the hopes and dreams of a wide array of people, from artists to factory workers, from an Italian émigré to an African student. *Chronicle of a Summer's* penetrative approach gives us a document of a time and place with extraordinary emotional depth.
- Laura Poitras, *Citizenfour* (USA, 2014). In January 2013, [Laura Poitras](#), an American documentary film director/producer who had been working for several years on a film about monitoring programs in the US that were the result of the [September 11 attacks](#), receives an encrypted e-mail from a stranger who calls himself, "Citizenfour." In it, he offers her inside information about illegal [wiretapping](#) practices of the US National Security Agency (NSA) and other intelligence agencies. In June 2013, accompanied by investigative journalist [Glenn Greenwald](#) and [The Guardian](#) intelligence reporter [Ewen MacAskill](#), she travels to Hong Kong with her camera for the first meeting with the stranger in a hotel, who reveals himself as Edward Snowden. Facing potential extradition and prosecution in the United States, Snowden schedules a meeting with the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) and applies for refugee status. On August 1, 2013, the Russian government grants Snowden temporary asylum for a period of one year. The film closes with Greenwald, Snowden and Poitras meeting once again in Russia.
- Gus van Sant, *Elephant* (USA, 2003). Winner of the Palme D'Or Award at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival, this controversial film by Gus van Sant portrays two days in the life of a suburban American high school that is set to become the scene of a Columbine-style massacre. Semi-improvised, using unknown teenagers rather than professional actors, the film adopts a fly-



on-the-wall approach that surveys the various cliques and social strata of the school in a non-judgmental, documentary-like way. Against this background, two misfit friends, Eric and Alex, who spend their free-time collecting Nazi iconography and playing ultra-violent video games, are coolly planning an armed ambush on the school, drawing working diagrams of the school refectory during study period and buying weapons over the Internet. The film marks a return for Van Sant to the low-key style of his early independent films.

- Mariarosy Calleri, *L'Isola Sommersa - Hidden Island* (Italy-USA, 1998). An autobiographical account of the life of a woman born to Sicilian immigrants in Milan, this documentary weaves together a series of interconnected separations from one's homeland. In the landscape of Hidden Island, in which satellite are juxtaposed to Greek Temples, every event generates a separation, every decision to leave a craving for return. Memory as travel is the driving force of this documentary's narrative: memory, with its unpredictable twists and turns, its crossing and re-crossings, its mixing of seemingly unrelated moments. The American Psychological Association defines Hidden Island "an outstanding representation of *the trauma of departure*, illuminating many of the complex hidden social, political, psychological and historical realities of what it means to be Southern Italian, and a woman, who crosses cultural boundaries of class, gender, and ethnicity in Italy and the United States". An experimental documentary showing a woman's journey back to her roots.
- Martin Scorsese, *Italianamerican* (USA, 1974). Martin Scorsese interviews his mother and father about their life in New York City and the family history back in Sicily. These are two people who have lived together for a long time and know each other very well. They have retained individual identities and differing opinions, yet have found a way to live with each other, and both are fascinating story-tellers. Through his family's story, Scorsese retraces the history of Italian immigration in the US at the beginning of the 1900s.
- Agostino Ferrente, *L'Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio* (Italy, 2006). This documentary narrates the complex and fascinating story of a band of musicians coming from all over the world being put together in Rome. The whole subtext of anti-immigrant sentiment lingering in Europe is present in the film. Entertaining and thought-provoking at the same time, it's a very offbeat and fascinating documentary. The status of the musicians as "outsiders" is troubling (as was the poverty of the musicians in Buena Vista Social Club). The musicians, immigrants coming from many different ethnic backgrounds, struggle to survive in Rome under very extreme conditions but play their music with tremendous joy. The soundtrack is an incredible example of a musical melting pot made in Rome.
- Werner Herzog, *Land of Silence and Darkeness* – (Germany, 1971). This documentary explores the life of a remarkable and kind-hearted deaf and blind woman who has dedicated her life to helping the similarly afflicted. This film is a tribute to the triumphant nature of the human spirit and a glimpse into an existence so intense and abstract that at times it seems to reach great lyrical heights.
- Robert Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (USA, 1922). This American silent [documentary](#) film with elements of [docudrama](#) is a cinematic milestone that continues to enchant audiences. In the tradition of what would later be called [salvage ethnography](#), Flaherty captured the struggles of the [Inuk man](#) named Nanook and his family in the [Canadian Arctic](#). The film has been considered the first [feature-length documentary](#). Some have criticized Flaherty for staging several sequences, but the film is generally viewed as standing "alone in its stark regard for the courage and ingenuity of its heroes." In 1989, this film was one of the first 25 films to be selected for preservation in the United States [National Film Registry](#) by the [Library of Congress](#) as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".
- Malik Bendjelloul, *Searching for Sugar Man* (South Africa-U.S.A, 2012). The 2013 Oscar winner documentary on the hunt for Sixto Rodriguez a long-lost 70s music legend offers a brilliant insight into the nature of fame. It is a revealing tale of show business and its operations, of how someone could disappear almost without trace in a world where everything appears to be known and all information is available at the speed of a mouse. What makes it particularly intriguing is that the end is happy without being triumphalist. This modest, talented man didn't become a star and has been turned into one by rediscovery. But he seems to have had a fulfilling life in one of America's least welcoming rust-belt cities.





Global brilliance begins here.®

Institute for the International Education of Students

Africa | Asia Pacific | Europe | Latin America