

AIS 501/WOMEN 510, Spring 2015
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DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES

Course Description

This course will focus on research methods for documentary production. Issues to be explored include collaboration and reciprocity, oral traditions, film and historiography, intellectual property rights, the ethics of representation, documentary, archives and fair use, and documentary aesthetics. Project work will be organized around doing research and planning for traditional and contemporary media documentary productions that can be produced in subsequent quarters.

Texts

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2nd edition).
Rabinger, Michael. 2014. *Directing the Documentary* (6th edition).
Nichols, Bill. 2011. *Introduction to Documentary* (2nd edition).
Wilson, Shawn. 2008. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*.
Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara. *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, 1999.

Evaluation

4 Brief Assignments – 25 points each
Form, Method and Technique Presentation – 100 points
Final Project – 200 points

Requirements

This class is organized in an effort to tap into the unique gifts that each of you has by creating a cooperative learning environment. We utilize reading, screenings, discussions, research, and writing in the development of your ideas.

Class Discussion and Presentations

This is a seminar course where much of the learning occurs in class discussion. All students are expected to complete the readings assigned for each class meeting, and be prepared to discuss them candidly, critically, and in depth. As you are reading, mark passages that you would like to ask about or comment on in class.

Four Brief Assignments

Please note that these assignments are exercises designed to give you experiences that will be helpful in creating your final proposal. You will be asked to share your research, discoveries, and decisions with the class.

1. Ethics Exercise: Find a film, news or journal article, or website, in which a story, individual, or community is represented in an ethically problematic manner. Briefly describe what is ethically problematic about the representation, and articulate a methodological approach that would be ethically sound. **Due: 4/9**

2. Project Statement: This assignment will include a brief synopsis of your project idea; an assessment of the feasibility of the project and accessibility issues; a statement concerning your personal connection to the project; a initial survey of existing literature on topic, including an annotated bibliography of at least 10 sources, which can include newspaper stories, background articles or books, and a listing of any films already made upon the subject. **Due: 4/30**
3. Interview and Character Resources: This is an initial list of potential characters and interviewees, and sample interview questions for one interviewee. **Due: 5/14**
4. Survey of Archival Resources: Primary resources (e.g. photos, films, other potentially filmable graphics) from both institutional and private archives. The idea is to locate items pertinent and specifically useful to your project. **Due: 5/21**

Documentary Form and Aesthetics Presentation

Each student will conduct a one-half hour presentation consisting of film clips and an analysis of the clips. The idea in this assignment is to find a body of work, a single film, a particular director's approach, or a single scene that represent a model for a methodological and stylistic approach that interests you in your proposed project. **Due: either 5/26-28 or 6/2-4**

Schedule of Readings and Activities

Week One: 3/31 - 4/2

Introduction to the course: Documentary research as connected to, yet distinct from other forms of academic research, community research and personal research.

Readings: Nichols: Chapters 1 and 2

Screening: *Mohawk Girls*

Week Two: 4/7-9

Indigenous research methods and documentary practice: documentary within the critique of western research traditions. Documentary, acquisitiveness, colonization and western ethnographic practices

Readings: Smith, chapters 1- 5

Screenings: (excerpts from) *Nanook of the North* and *Dear Little One*

Assignment: Ethics Exercise

Class Leader(s): whole class, via Ethics Exercise

Week Three: 4/14-16

Developing ideas for documentary, Part 1

Readings: Smith, chapters 6 - 12

Screening: *From Ikpeng Children to the World*

Class Leader(s): _____

Week Four: 4/21-23

Research, relationships, and personalizing methodologies

Readings: *Research As Ceremony*

Screening: *Smokin' Fish*

Class Leader(s): _____

Week Five: 4/28-30

Developing ideas for documentary, Part 2. Storytelling in documentary, documentary aesthetics, documentary research and growing a narrative.

Readings: Rabiger, Chapters Parts 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7a
Nichols, chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8

Screening: *Club Native*

Class Leader(s): _____

Assignment: Project Statement

Week Six: 5/5-7

Interviews, orality, and Indigenous historiography

Readings: Angela Wilson, "Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Oral History in a Dakota Family"

Miller, Susan, "Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm of American Indian History"

Martha Norkunas, "Teaching to Listen: Listening Exercises and Self-Reflexive Journals"

Rabiger, chapter 30

Janice Hladki, "The Subversive Practices of Aboriginal Film and Video"

Screening: (excerpt from) *The Place of the Falling Waters*

Buffalo Bone China

The Cave

Class Leader(s): _____

Week Seven: 5/12-14

Documentary and the ethics of representation

Readings: Cal Pryluck, "Ultimately We Are All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filmmaking."

Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara. *The Art and Science of Portraiture*

Screening: *Nobody's Business*

Class Leader(s): _____

Assignment: Interview and Character Resources

Week Eight: 5/19-21

Visual archives and documentary research: the methodologies of Digital Storytelling

Readings: Bronwen Thomas, "Songlines in the Streets Story Mapping with Itinerant Hypernarrative"

Joe Lambert, "Digital Storytelling Cookbook"

Plus, additional handouts relating to Fair Use law and archival research.

Screening: *Family Gathering* and *The Ballad of Crowfoot*

Class Leader(s): _____

Assignment: Archival Resources

Week Nine: 5/26-28

Student presentations on visual style and methodological approach.

Week Ten: 6/2 (No Thursday class)

Student presentations on visual style and methodological approach.

Finals Week Meeting - Monday, June 8, 10:30-12:20 p.m.

Presentation of final proposals

Final Research Projects/Documentary Proposals

This is a pre-production class for documentary production; therefore, students will carry out documentary research projects. The objective for the course is to complete the initial pre-production research and planning for a short documentary, which may be filmed and edited in future courses. Each proposal can contain:

- (1) A brief synopsis or overview, usually no more than one page, describing the project.
- (2) Description of major issues, themes, and conflicts in story.
- (3) Background and theoretical basis for the project. This should take the form of a personal statement concerning major theoretical and methodological issues informing your project, documentary theory, aesthetics, and ethics, and any major background issues that the project touches upon. At least 8 pages.
- (4) List and presentation of any archival materials (photocopies of photos, other documents)
- (5) List and description of on-camera interview subjects, and/or major characters, and a description of your methodological ideas about how to conduct and use these interviews.
- (6) List of action sequences: describe scenes to be filmed and what they contribute to the narrative. You might not know many specifics at this point, but you can both list what you do know, as well as describe possibilities.
- (7) An annotated bibliography.