SHIFTING FOCUS: VIDEO PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

OVERVIEW
The term "Video Activist" is a fairly late arrival to the lexicon of progressive struggle and political agitation, but community organizers and activists have been making and using film and video since the Film and Photo League of the 1920’s. The power of the moving image to galvanize public opinion and shape the course of history has not been lost on the generations of social and political activists that have picked up the camera or sat behind an editing machine in the hope that they will produce something that will make a difference. Never has this been more true than today, when rapid decreases in the cost of equipment, the creation of increasingly easy-to-use editing programs, and the ability to distribute video via the internet have inspired literally thousands of people to take up their cameras and begin to document the work and the events they see going on around them.

The course will explore the role of media as an advocacy and/or community organizing tool, by asking what the role of documentary is in social change movements and what types of media actually help to create change. What audiences are targeted by these films? What do we want the impact of the film on these audiences to be? We want to explore the use of varying styles of documentary to observe, document, inform, and impact audiences emotionally, intellectually and politically.

In this course we will put these theoretical questions to the practical test of actually producing, in collaboration with community organizers, short pieces of “tactical media” that the organizers can then use in the course of the ongoing work of social change.

GOALS
1. To learn the basics of video production from pre-production through post-production.
2. To learn how to work as a part of a team and collaborate with fellow students to produce meaningful work.
3. To understand basic communications strategy- why, when and in what form video can and should be used by community organizers to advance their work.
4. To take these lessons into the field, and collaboratively produce a short video piece, which can be useful to our community partner organizations.
**EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING**

In this class you will be asked to do a lot of work as a team, on your own time. The amount of time and effort that you put into that project will be a critical factor in your grade. In addition, there will be short writing assignments throughout the semester. But probably the most important thing you can do is to show up to class prepared and to participate in discussion. Here’s a guideline for how grading works in this class:

**Attendance and Participation: 20%**

**Come to class, on time, prepared, and participate:** The class meets only 13 times in a semester, so one absence is significant. Two is bad. Three is almost 25% of the class, which would be devastating to your grade. Three late arrivals (more than two minutes) will count as one absence. So, show up on time and prepared to participate. As far as excused absences, I make a simple and clear rule: its excused if you have a note from a doctor or a parent in the case of illness or family emergency/religious observances. Otherwise, the absence is just plain unexcused. Sorry, no exceptions.

**Papers: 40%**

**There will be significant written work for the class.** Most of the written work will come in the form of response papers, which will be 2-4 page papers in response to assigned readings. These are due at the beginning of class, printed, double spaced. Late papers are graded accordingly. I have posted sample response papers on NYU Classrooms to give you a sense of what I’m looking for. You get one “vacation.”

**Final Project- 40%**

- Research, Proposal, and Treatment- 33%
- Footage- 33%
- Edit- 33%

**Results matter, but so does process.** In the end, the quality of the work that you do is what will make you proud of yourselves, and that’s what matters more than any grade. But how you get there, the preparations you make and the process by which you make it all come together is something that I will pay attention to.

Finally, collaboration, collegiality and respect for one another are required. Students in one group may receive differing grades if it becomes clear that they are doing more or less work. I reserve the right to grade students separately from the rest of their group based on their contribution to the project.

**Academic Integrity**

You belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website ([http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html))
FINAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND TIMELINE
Over the course of two semesters, students will learn how video is and can be used as a tool of persuasion and advocacy in the advancement of a social or political goal. There is therefore in this course the very concrete goal of producing something that will be of use; something appropriate to screen in public and broadcast over public access cable.

*Video Production:* Each team will be required to produce a video, or several videos, in collaboration with an organization, or that could be used as a tool by organizers. The content of this piece will be entirely up to the teams and organizations involved, but will be arrived at over the course of the semester with the input and advice of the instructor and fellow students. A public screening of the work will be scheduled for the end of the semester, which will be an event open to the public.

*Community Organizing:* This is not a straightforward documentary film production class. Although we will study the documentary film tradition, and much of what students will produce will be rooted in that tradition, what is being produced for this class will be for the purpose of organizing people to take action of some kind or another.

For the Fall semester teams will focus on (a) selecting an organization to work with and developing a strong relationship with that organization; (b) developing a strong proposal and treatment for their videos, and (c) shooting footage that they will use in the video.

PROJECT DEADLINES
September 30th – Organizations Selected

October 7th – Video Proposal/Treatment

December 2 – Rough Cut Screenings

December 11th – Final Presentation/Screening

Bear in mind that, as this kind of work is bound to be less than predictable, a team may find itself shooting a lot of footage before proposals are due, or a team may find that they are not able to wrap shooting until later than called for. We will all try to remain flexible and open-minded throughout the process. Good Luck.

REQUIRED TEXTS

*Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction,* by Patricia Aufderheide

*Directing the Documentary,* by Michael Rabiger
SCHEDULE OF READINGS

09/09/13 - **Introductions and Overview**
- Define goals, discuss structure of course. Describe nature of collaborations/expectations and fill out questionnaire.
- In-class reading of Pedagogy of the Oppressed followed by discussion
- View previous student work, other examples of video advocacy and activism
- Discuss Potential Partner Organizations in depth.
- Meet and Greet speed dating.

09/16/13 – **A Brief History of Documentary Film** & **Camera Workshop**
- Show and Tell
- Discussion of Documentary Film History & Future
- Camera workshop with Martyna Starosta
- Go over camera check out procedure
- **Reading:** Rabiger, Intro and Chapter, and Aufderheide Text
- **Writing:** Response Paper #1 due (on Directing the Doc excerpt)
- **Video:** Research organizations. Camera exercise.

09/23/13 – **What is Video Advocacy/Activism?** & **Camera Workshop Part II**
- Show and Tell
- Discussion of Readings
- Watch “dailies”
- Camera Workshop Part II with Martyna Starosta
- Pre-Production discussion: What is a treatment? A proposal?
- Discuss organizations more
- **Reading:** Video For Change and VAH, and Aufderheide Text
- **Writing:** Response Paper #2 due
- **Video:** Camera exercise- Campus Issues
- Reach out to organizations

09/30/13 - **The History of Video Advocacy/Activism**
- Show and Tell
- Discussion of Reading (watch clips)
- Decide on organizations
- Watch Dailies
- Q and A on the gear- workshopping best practices
- **Reading:** Krinsky
- **Writing:** Response #3 due
- **Video:** Decide on organization. Continue practicing.
10/07 - Meerkat Collective
- Show and Tell
- Discussion of Readings
- Visiting with Meerkat Media Collective
  
  Discuss proposals and treatments
- Reading: TBD
- Writing Paper #4
- Video: Meet with organization, complete video treatment/proposal
  
  Continue to practice with camera gear

10/14 - FALL BREAK

10/21 - What makes for effective media?
- Show and Tell
- Discuss Readings and look at samples
- Meetings with Prof. and groups
- Reading/Watching: Working Films website
  - Deep Dish TV/Shocking and Awful
  - Beautiful Trouble
  - Kony 2012
  - George Lakoff
- Writing: Paper #5
- Video: WORK WITH ORGS

10/28 - Introduction to Final Cut Pro
- Show and Tell
- FCP 1 - understanding the FCP Environment
- Logging and Transferring
- Introduce Ad Remix assignment
- Video: SHOOT VIDEO

11/04 - Final Cut Pro Lesson 2
- Show and Tell
- Logging and Transferring
- Project Management
  
  Video: Select Ad for Remixing. Edit

11/11 - Final Cut Pro Lesson 3
- Show and Tell
- Motion and Effects
- Work on Ad Remix
- Video: Shoot Project Video
Web 2.0 activism
- Has social media made activism more powerful and real change more possible than ever, or has the internet isolated and atomized society and made real bonds of solidarity harder than ever to forge.
- Reading: Zandt and Gladwell
- Writing: Paper #6
- AD REMIX DUE

11/25- Guest Lecture Jesse Epstein
- Show and Tell
- Discuss Distro Strategies with Filmmaker Jesse Epstein

12/02- Rough Cut Crits
- Show and Tell

12/09- Open Work Session
- Show and Tell

12/11- Final Crit
- Show and Tell