

**Department of Latino and Caribbean Studies  
Rutgers University—New Brunswick/Piscataway**

**DOCUMENTING LATINX LIVES - ONLINE VERSION  
(595:402/070:407 + 595:403/070:408)  
Spring 2021**

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Office hours: Mondays 10AM-11PM or by appointment

Class hours: Mon 12:00 - 3:00PM  
Class location: Zoom  
Lab hours: Wed 1:40 - 3:00PM  
Lab location: Zoom

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This video production seminar uses the medium of video to explore contemporary issues that affect the lives of Latinos in the United States. Training will take place during a semester-long series of discussions and practical exercises which will prepare students to produce their own 10-minute documentary films about any aspect of Latino life. In addition to advanced production techniques, emphasis will be put on narrative structures and storytelling strategies in ethnographic and documentary films and the distinct representational techniques, dilemmas and possibilities these hold for representing Latino social experience.

This course is a 4-credit course. Students must register for both the 3-credit seminar (595:402 or 070:407) and the 1-credit 80-min lab (595:403 or 070:408). All four credits apply towards the major and minor in both Anthropology and Latino and Caribbean Studies.

**II. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

After completing this course students will have acquired:

- The ability to communicate effectively about contemporary Latinx issues through the medium of video
- An understanding of ethical and representational issues in visual representations of Latinx life
- Mastering of visual and digital story-telling techniques
- Basic video production skills including shooting observational and/or shoot-to-edit footage.
- Basic video editing in Premiere Elements and other post-production skills.

**III. COURSE FORMAT**

The seminar is divided into three main parts:

**Phase 1:** Project development, production techniques and exercises, pre-production of individual projects (Jan/Feb)

**Phase 2:** Project production, shooting, and weekly screenings of raw footage and edited scenes (Feb/March/April)

**Phase 3:** Postproduction, rough-cut screenings, final cut screenings, and final presentations (April/May).

The course consists of a weekly 3-hour long seminar held on Mondays (12-3PM) in which we will discuss representational issues in the context of screening weekly shooting and editing exercises. A weekly 80-min labs will be held on Wednesdays from 1:40 to 3:00pm to demonstrate equipment and for Premiere workshops and exercises.

The Monday seminars will mostly be run as “production meetings,” where students will present their raw footage and/or edited scenes and contextualizing their work in terms of their function and meaning for the whole project. You should also outline your ethnographic and documentary strategies, discuss the problems you faced in producing the scenes (and how these issues were managed) and introduce possible new questions that the material raises for your projects. Students will incorporate feedback on edited scenes and re-cut them to screen again the following week. Prof. Berg will screen additional film examples throughout the semester that offer possible shooting styles and techniques for consideration. The Wednesday labs will be spent mostly learning production and post-production techniques and address common questions that have come up in the shooting and editing sessions.

A final screening open to the public will take place on **Wednesday, May 5, 2021, 6:30PM - 9:00PM** on Zoom. The screenings will be followed by a Q&A with the filmmakers. Please invite participants in your film as well as family and friends to this final event and celebration!

All classes will be held on Zoom using this link:

<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/97191722824?pwd=RIEzQnRiVIR5dGJ3bVlVSoJldWxKdz09>

Join by SIP

97191722824@zoomcrc.com

Meeting ID: 971 9172 2824

Password: 011884

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,97191722824# US (New York)

+13017158592,,97191722824# US (Washington D.C)

Join By Phone

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington D.C)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

Meeting ID: 971 9172 2824

Find your local number: <https://rutgers.zoom.us/u/ads5ARv6T>

#### **IV. REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

Each student must direct, produce, shoot, and edit his/her/their own 10-minute film as the final deliverable for the course. In addition, all students are required to work in crews on the films of your peers. The main criteria for evaluation of work in the course is student participation in the production meetings and on crews, timeliness with work, students' acquisition of standard techniques in documentary video production and how well you articulate the terms and the choices you make in various aspects of production and editing in the final documentary projects.

##### **Attendance & Participation (20%)**

The active participation of *every student* in *each class* is fundamental to the success of this course. Many sessions will be dedicated entirely to discussing your work and that of your peers and you are expected to be an active and engaged member of the class. Absences will greatly affect your ability to keep the pace in the course *and* also your final grade. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class.

##### **Assignments and video exercises (35%)**

The best way to learn about video production and filmmaking is by doing it. The course is designed for students to get hands-on experience with a number of different shooting and editing techniques. To that end

all students will complete regular exercises – weekly or more frequently. In the beginning of the semester, the exercises will form the basis for class discussions on technical aspects of film and video-production. The exercises should be ready to screen in class on the due date. Please have the digital file ready to press play when it is your turn to share your screen on Zoom. Every student must complete ALL exercises before the due date! All exercises will be graded and the sum of assignments/exercises will be worth 35% of your final grade. Please note that the assignment schedule at the end of this syllabus is tentative and may be subject to change throughout the semester. All assignments and video exercises will be discussed in class prior to the due date.

Assignment 1: One-page description of main project idea (2 points)

Assignment 2: Revised and amended project description (2 points)

Assignment 3: List of five relevant documentaries + clip from favorite documentary (2 points)

Assignment 4: First draft of film treatment (4 points)

Assignment 5: Final project proposal incl. revised treatment (4 points)

Video Exercise 1—Basic observational shooting techniques (3 points)

Video Exercise 2—Shoot an event, action, or process for editing (3 points)

Video Exercise 3—Reshoot exercise 2 in a different documentary style (3 points)

Video Exercise 4—Shoot a short 2-min interview using full sound set-up and tripod (3 points)

Video Exercise 5—Shoot a second short 2-min interview using natural light and B-roll (3 points)

Video Exercise 6—Shoot and edit scene with own project footage (3 points)

Video Exercise 7—Short “video package” (A-roll, B-roll, subtitles, title-cards, etc.) (3 points)

### **Weekly responses to documentary films (10%)**

One of the best ways to learn the language of documentary filmmaking is to watch a lot of documentaries. Beginning in the first week of classes we will be watching one major documentary a week (some feature-length, some shorts). Students must post your response on Canvas before class on the due date. In the beginning of the semester I will assign documentaries for everyone to watch and respond to. Later, you will watch and review documentaries that are directly related to your own project. All responses should focus on narrative structures and storytelling strategies (why did the director choose a particular narrative strategy? Is it effective or not?); representation of characters and of key issues (how complex are the characters? Is the issue simplified or represented with sufficient complexity? Whose POV is highlighted?). Students should also comment on technical aspects of the production including shooting styles, lighting, sounds, and editing strategies. Each entry is worth 1 point (total of 10 responses are due)

### **Production Journal (10%)**

All students must keep a **digital notebook** as your Production Journal for their individual projects since the first week of classes. These production journals will consist of project development notes, concepts, narratives, shot lists, plans, contacts, records of ethnographic circumstances, feedback from production meetings to be addressed in editing, and other project notes. In addition to the production journal, I recommend that you download and save all handouts as well as other course materials and readings.

Production journals are due on **Thursday 5/6/2021**. All journal entries should have a header that includes the date and time, and a title that identifies the class, lab, shooting event, or editing session. The journal will be graded on a 1-10 point scale and is worth 10% of the final grade. Your journal will be evaluated for: 1) consistency and completeness – whether there are journal entries for all classes, shoots, and editing sessions; 2) form – whether the journal entries conform and/or respond to the questions, ideas, and lessons outlined in the class session; and 3) engagement –whether the journal entries reflect a general engagement with the practice of video-making in general and with your project in particular.

### **Final Films (25%)**

The final version of your 10-minute documentary film, which will be screened publicly at the end of the semester on May 5, is worth 25% of the final grade. Final cuts are due to Professor as digital Quicktime files at

the end of the day on **5/4/2021**. I need a day to check all films before our final screening. We'll discuss the specific output settings when we get closer to the date.

Final grades will be calculated according to the following grading scale:

A = 93 and above; B+ = 89-92; B = 81-88; C+ = 77-80; C = 70-76; D = 65-69; F = 64 and below.

## V. OTHER COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. Students are expected to attend all classes and labs and participate actively in all aspects of the class. No unexcused absence or excessive lateness please.
2. Everyone will stay on schedule with shooting and editing exercises as well as meet the deadlines for all written work throughout the semester.
3. When presenting work in class, students are expected to have their material **cued and ready to screen** when invited to share, present the key issues they encountered, and explain choices in shooting, editing and equipment. This is very important as we want to make sure to not waste valuable class time with looking for clips or checking that they play.
4. All students will offer constructive feedback on each other's work in each seminar session.
5. All students are required to use the equipment provided by the department to shoot their projects, unless you have a camera of your own with XLR sound inputs. In that case you may use your own equipment. No equipment without XLR sound input will be allowed. Students are expected to follow established procedures for checking out equipment, security, and care, as well as to promptly report any problems, breaks, or lost parts to Prof. Berg.
6. Some shoots require more than a one-person crew. Reciprocity is the rule! If you help your class mate today for an important shoot, they will help you tomorrow. All in-person shoots that involve more than one student must strictly follow mask requirements and social distancing protocols.
7. All students must keep a Production Journal for their individual projects. These will consist of shot lists, concepts, narratives, plans, contacts, records of ethnographic circumstances, and other notes.

## VI. READINGS AND COURSE MATERIALS

### Required readings:

Anthony Q. Artis (2014). *The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide*. Focal Press. ISBN: 9780240824154

All the rest of the readings for the class come from a variety of sources and will be available on the Canvas course site. You will also find pdf's of the equipment manuals and all course handouts on Canvas. Please note that assigned readings may change during the semester depending on the dynamics of our class discussions and our collective needs. Make sure to check in on Canvas for weekly updates on materials and adjustments to assignments.

If possible, you may want purchase the books listed below for your reference, but they are not mandatory (selections will be posted on Canvas).

### Recommended books (selections available on Canvas):

Sheila Curran Bernard (2011) *Documentary Storytelling, Third Edition: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*. Focal Press. ISBN: 0240812417

Michael Rabiger (1998) *Directing the Documentary (Fourth Edition)*. Focal Press. ISBN: 0240806085 (\*Used cheap copies of the fourth edition is available on Amazon – no need to buy the more expensive fifth edition)

Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor (1997) *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking: A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos* (listed below as “CCF”), University of California Press. ISBN: 0520087607

We will also make extensive use of the following free online video tutorials:

- LinkedIn Learning (formerly lynda.com) is a key resource for this class Sign up with your net-ID and password through the Rutgers library: <https://it.rutgers.edu/linkedin-learning/>. I have created a playlist with tutorials for our class which will be periodically updated and can be accessed here: <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/collections/6572273913521332224?u=76115650>
- Adobe Premiere: <https://helpx.adobe.com/premiere-pro/tutorials.html>

## VII. COURSE SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1+2 ~ INTRODUCTION ~ WHAT IS A DOCUMENTARY?

#### **Wednesday – Lab (1/20) - 1:40-3:00PM**

Introduction to the course and coordination of equipment pick-up.

Discussion of course orientation, requirements, schedules, and procedures and policies on equipment

For Monday: Think of 3 possible project ideas to share in class + sign-in to LinkedIn Learning through the RU Library.

#### **Monday – Seminar (1/25) – 12:00-3:00PM**

Pick up equipment on Livingston Campus, New Brunswick. Instructions TBA via Canvas.

Read: *Shut Up and Shoot*, Chap 3 (pp. 113-148).

Introduction to cameras, sound equipment, tripods, and accessories

Basic camera skills and shooting techniques.

#### **Wednesday – Lab (1/27) - 1:40-3:00PM**

Due: 1. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment about *The Wolfpack* (2015) directed by Crystal Moselle

Read: *Shut Up and Shoot*, pp. 6-15 and 38-45 + Curran Bernard, Ch. 1 (pp. 1-11).

Discussion: What is a documentary?

Class discussion of 3 possible project ideas

For next Monday: Be ready to present and “pitch” your favorite project idea further based on feedback collected during class.

For Monday: Bring in a clip from your favorite feature-length documentary to present to the class. Be prepared to explain why it is compelling to you and the issues it raises. Make a list of documentary films relevant to your project (could be topical or stylistic connection) that you will watch over the course of the semester as part of your research for your film. In addition to the assigned documentaries which you must respond to on Canvas, make it a habit to watch at least one more documentary a week that relates to your project.

**Thursday Event (1/28):** Jueves de Cine, Zoom, 8-10PM (Optional, but highly recommended)

### WEEK 3 ~ PRE-PRODUCTION & PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### **Monday – Seminar (2/1) –**

Due: 2. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment on Mexican shorts including *El Buzo* (2015) directed by Esteban Arrangoiz

“Pitch #1” – Further discuss project idea + bring in clip from your favorite documentary or a

documentary that made a lasting impact on you

'Favorite Clip Film Festival' – Screen a clip from your favorite documentary

Assign Video Exercise 1 - Basic observational shooting techniques: Shoot an event, activity, or process using observational style (max. 5 mins). Used fixed and moving handheld camera; shoot things and people in motion, use zoom, etc.

**Wednesday – Lab (2/3) –**

Screen: Video Exercise 1 – Observational footage of an activity. Discuss.

Assignment 1 due: Hand in one-page description of project idea

**WEEK 4 ~ FROM PRE-PRODUCTION TO PRODUCTION & SHOOTING STYLES**

**Monday – Seminar (2/8)**

Due: 3. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment about *El Mar La Mar* (2017) directed by JP Sniadecki and Joshua Bonnetta

Read: *Cross Cultural Filmmaking*, Ch. 1 on “Documentary Styles;” Ch. 3, “Picture” (pp. 95-130).

Discuss: Shooting styles as ethnographic practice, knowledge and experience.

Screen: Examples of film styles and their modes of address, social relations and voices.

Possibly finish screenings of Exercise 1, if any left

Assign: Video Exercise 2 - Shoot an event or process for editing ; max. 5 min.

Shoot observational style, handheld and with tripod for editing (Due Monday 2/15)

**Wednesday – Lab (2/10)**

Demos on “Coverage,” shooting to edit in Premiere

Prof. Berg will screen examples of raw and edited footage

Discuss Rabiger’s “Production check-list.”

Favorite Film Clips, continued, if we have time.

For next Wednesday (2/17):

Please start watching the LinkedIn Learning course on Premiere Elements 2021.

**WEEK 5 ~ PROJECT OUTLINES & TREATMENTS / PREMIERE WORKSHOP**

**Monday – Seminar (2/15) - 12:00-3:00PM**

Due: 4. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment - *Man on Wire* (2008) by James March – discuss in class.

Read: In Curran Bernard, Chaps. 8-10 on Research, Pitching and Proposal Writing.

Discuss: Project outlines, Treatments, and Scripts, and Casting in class.

Discuss: Rabiger’s “Pre-production check-list”

Screen: Video Exercise 2, observational shooting styles – shoot to edit (but don’t yet edit). Karla will also screen Exercise 1.

Assign: Video Exercise 3 – DUE MONDAY 2/25. You will be asked to reshoot Exercise 2 in an alternative style (i.e. direct, vérité, reflexive, impressionistic/performative; different distances, angles, etc. (Be sure to shoot to edit.)

**Wednesday – Lab (2/17)**

Assignment 2 due: A one page single-spaced, revised draft of project topics will be due in class: Include your working ideas for title, topic, locations, subjects, plot, and tentative shooting & editing styles.

For Monday, please watch Anthony Artis's tutorial on shooting interviews on LinkedIn Learning available in our LinkedIn Archive.

## **WEEK 6 ~ INTERVIEWS: SOUND, SET-UP, SHOOTING WITH NATURAL LIGHT**

### **Monday – Seminar (2/22)**

Due: 5. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment on 13<sup>th</sup> (2016) by Ava Duvernay.

Read: (1) *Shut Up and Shoot*, Chap. 5 (pp. 183-216), Chap. 7 (pp. 247-63) and Chap. 8 (pp. 264-283)  
(2) CCF - Ch. 7, "Production - Actualities" (pp. 327-357) and (3) Curran Bernard: Ch. 11 "Shooting."

Discuss: Shooting interviews, styles, sound and setup, organization, rapport, and shooting B-roll for interviews. Class discussion of Artis's LinkedIn Learning video on interviews.

Screen: Video Exercise 3 + examples of documentary interviews, if time permits.

Assign: Video Exercise 4 - Short 2-minute interviews with a tripod using wireless mics AND shotgun mic. Get an establishing shot for your location and also B-roll to edit interview.

### **Wednesday – Lab (2/24)**

Basic skills in digital video editing / Premiere Elements workshop

Read: *Shut Up and Shoot*, Chap 9 (pp. 296-330)

In-class editing of video exercise of Video Exercise 3

Discuss: Logging and transcribing footage + best practices in managing your footage.

**Thursday Event (2/25):** Jueves de Cine on Zoom (Livingston), 8-10PM (Optional, but highly recommended)

## **WEEK 7 ~ STORY-TELLING**

### **Monday – Seminar (3/1)**

Due: 6. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment

Read: (1) Curran Bernard: Chaps. 2-5 "Story basics, "Finding the Story," "Story Structure." (pp. 15-77)

Screen: Edited video exercise 3 (different shooting styles) + Video Exercise 4 – 2-minute handheld Interviews (no need to edit)

Discuss: Finding the story and story structure + update on developments in projects.

Assign Video Exercise 5 - Shoot a handheld interview using natural light. Shoot b-roll with good natural sound and record room tone. Remember to shoot-to-edit!

### **Wednesday – Lab (3/3)**

Due: Assignment 3 – List of documentaries relevant to your project.

In class editing of exercise 5: Edit interview footage and B-roll into a 2-minute clip

\*For Next Week: First draft of project treatments due on Monday.

## **WEEK 8 ~ POSTPRODUCTION I – CREATING EDITED SEQUENCES**

### **Monday – Seminar (3/8)**

Due: 7. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment - *Colossus* (2018) by Jonathan Schienberg.  
Due: Assignment 4 - First draft of project treatments  
Read: (1) CCF, Ch. 8, "Postproduction – Theories and Principles" (370-399) and "Postproduction – Practices and Technology" (429-442) and (2) Curran Bernard, Chap. 12 "Editing," and Chap. 14 "Storytelling: A Checklist"

Discuss: Readings; structure and narrative forms.

Screen: Exercise 5 (2-min sequence of interview footage + B-roll for your own project)

Assign Exercise 6 – Shot and edit own project footage into a short scene (no interviews this time).

**Wednesday – Lab (3/10)**

Capturing and organizing clips + in class editing of exercise 6

**WEEK 9 ~ SPRING BREAK, MARCH 15-19, 2021 – NO CLASS!**

Take advantage of the spring break to shoot new footage, log and transcribe your footage, and create a master-log for your project. Watch and analyze as many documentaries as you can over the break from those on your list.

**WEEK 10 ~ POSTPRODUCTION II – AUDIO EDITING, SUBTITLES & USING STILL PHOTOS**

**Monday – Seminar (3/22)**

Due: 8. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment (Film TBA)

Read: (1) CCF, Ch. 7, "Archival Material" (357-363); Ch. 8, "Postproduction Sound" (405-412);  
(2) Curran Bernard: Ch. 13 "Narration and Voice-Over"

Discuss: Shooting photos; copyright issues, subtitles, using text to create context, audio editing.

Screen: Video Exercise 6 (edited observational sequence of own footage – no interviews please!)

**Wednesday – Lab (3/24)**

Premiere: subtitles, scanning, shooting and scanning still images.

Audio-editing in Premiere.

Assign Video Exercise 7 - Short Video Packages: Plan, shoot and edit a 2-minute "video package" which include all of the following elements: (A) use b-roll video and/or stills; (B) interviews/soundbites; (C) subtitles; (D) use 1-2 text pages (at any point (i.e. beg. middle, end) to introduce the subject and/or the background and/or context.

**Thursday Event (3/25):** Jueves de Cine, Zoom, 8-10PM (Optional, but highly recommended)

**WEEK 11 ~ THE EDITING PROCESS: FROM ASSEMBLY TO ROUGH CUT**

**Monday – Seminar (3/29)**

Due: 9. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment (Film TBA)

Screen and discuss exercise 7 + Screen and discuss new raw project footage

**Wednesday – Lab (3/31)**

Screen and discuss new raw project footage

For Monday: Shoot project materials + edit two new scenes

**WEEK 12 ~ CUT NEW SCENES**

**Monday – Seminar (4/5)**

Due: 10. Canvas Documentary Analysis Assignment (Film TBA)

Discuss rough assemblies.

Screening of new edited scenes

**Wednesday – Lab (4/7)**

All students must spend time over the weekend putting together all your sequences into a rough assembly which you will screen for the class on Monday 4/12 (include all possible scenes + insert title cards for “missing pieces”)

**WEEK 13 ~ RECUT SCENES / FIRST ROUGH ASSEMBLY**

**Monday – Seminar (4/12)**

Screening and feedback on rough assemblies. Continue to work on rough assemblies for the rest of the week towards your rough cuts before Wednesday’s lab.

**Wednesday – Lab (4/14)**

Discussion and feedback on rough assemblies, continued.

**WEEK 14 ~ ROUGH-CUT SCREENINGS**

**Monday – Seminar (4/19)**

Present first rough-cuts of project sequences

**Wednesday – Lab (4/21)**

Due: Assignment 5: Final project proposal incl. revised treatment (See outline distributed in class)

Continue to edit rough-cut project sequences – incorporate feedback from 4/22 seminar.

**Thursday Event (1/28)**: Jueves de Cine, Zoom, 8-10PM (Optional, but highly recommended)

**WEEK 15 ~ FINE CUT + FINAL CUT SCREENINGS**

**Monday – Seminar (4/26)**

Screen Fine Cut of projects + take notes on feedback—even the smallest details!

**Wednesday – Lab (4/28)**

Read: *Shut Up and Shoot*, Chap. 9 (pp. 323-330)

Picture lock, if finished with your editing. Output Final Cuts – this is the final version of the digital project files for public screenings.

Discussion of distribution, online releases, submitting to festivals

**WEEK 16 ~ THE GRAND FINALE**

**Monday – Seminar (5/3)**

Please use this time to finalize and output your projects. Picture lock. Each student must have reviewed their final film in a one-on-one session with Professor Berg before outputting for Wednesday's screening.

**Wednesday – (5/5) Final Public Screening**

The screening will take place on Zoom, 6:30-9:00

Please also invite your families and friends to this event.

Production Journals are due on 5/6.