

COMM 420 – Digital Production: Telling Stories

SOC 015, Tuesdays 7:00-9:30

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Office hours: T 2:30-6:00 p.m. or by appointment

Course Objective

This lab-based course will introduce students to production techniques for digital storytelling. Students will acquire basic knowledge of videography, sound recording, and non-linear editing. Students will use audio-visual storytelling techniques to craft influential narratives for use in advertising, journalism or documentary production.

During the course students will:

1. learn the basics of video and sound recording;
2. study the essential concepts of a/v storytelling;
4. learn to edit video and sound;
4. learn how to prepare media for the web and exhibition;
5. produce short scripted and non-scripted videos.

Texts and Readings

All reading materials and tutorials will be available on Sakai.

Equipment and Material Supplies

Required Materials:

1 Class 8 (or higher) SD card

1 pair of stereo headphones

70+ GB external hard drive (USB 2.0/3.0 or Thunderbolt)

Optional Materials:

Subscription to [Adobe Creative Cloud \(Complete Plan\)](#)

Computer Use: Please be aware that occasional software bugs, virus presence, human error and/or hardware failure can result in damaged, corrupted or deleted files (including audio, video and graphic files). In addition, to conserve drive space and ensure the smooth operation of the computers, the School of Communication media files cannot be permanently saved on the internal hard-drives of the CPUs in the SOC labs. Consequently, it is your responsibility to back-up your media and project files during and after each use.

Grading & Evaluation

Attendance & Participation: This class meets only once a week for a total of 14 sessions, so attendance is important. While attendance is not tracked and will not, in and of itself, affect your grade, active participation is key to your success and indeed the success of the class as a whole and will be included in your grade.

Late Work: Students are expected to complete all of the assigned projects and readings on time. Late projects will automatically be penalized 1 point per weekday (i.e. a project that earned 13/15 points will be reduced to a score of 11/15 points if two days late). No projects will be accepted more than one week after the original due date.

Grading & Evaluation: Your final grade will be based on your participation in classroom discussions, critiques and exercises, and the quality of your production work. The course is not intended to be a competition of technical wizardry, but as a place to develop and express emerging creativity. Your projects will therefore be evaluated as part of an evolving body of work over the course of the semester.

Emphasis will be placed on completing polished, finished pieces. Consequently, students have the opportunity to tweak or rework an assignment to improve their score and final grade, but revision are due within a week and your “final grade” on an assignment will be an average of your original grade and your revision grade (i.e. if you earned a 10/15 originally and a 14/15 on the revision, you will get a 12/15 for said assignment).

Your final grade for the course will be calculated using the following formula:

The Visual Landscape 20%
The Edit: 20%
The Polish: 15%

The Voice: 15%
The Narrative: 25%
Participation: 5%

Assignments

- The Visual Landscape - composition, framing and creating meaningful images.
- The Voice - basic lighting, recording voices and interviewing.
- The Edit - editing image and sound, creating meaning via juxtapositions.
- The Narrative - designing shots, analytic montage and “scripted” storytelling.
- The Polish - project expansion, revision, and refinement.

The assignments are designed to introduce you to the various components of media production. Each project relates to and builds on a previous one, culminating in a final project utilizing the videography, editing and storytelling skills learned over the course of the semester.

Each assignment will be evaluated based on a set of criteria (a rubric) outlined in the assignment descriptions, with each criterion scored on a scale of 1-5 (1 = extremely poor to 5 = excellent).

Note on working in groups: media production is by nature a collaborative medium and students will be encouraged to help each other on creative projects. That said, since this course is intended to teach each student a basic level of competency in all of the basic production skills, most projects will be completed as individual assignments. The Narrative assignment will be the only project completed as a group. Please note that every member of the group will receive the same grade for said assignment, so you are each equally responsible for the success or failure of the team.

See below for assignment descriptions and grading criteria.

The Visual Landscape – exploring a space.

Find an organization or location that you would like to profile. If it's a private space or organization, make sure you secure permission to film there. Using a digital video camera, record 20 or more compositions (locked on a tripod, without camera movement or lens change) that are expressive, visually evocative and communicate the significance of or activity within the space.

The idea is to give the viewer a deeper, more detailed sense of the organization/space, while creating complex, meaningful and beautiful images. Pay close attention to framing and to the graphic qualities (lines, shapes) of the images within the frame. Make sure you have some variety in composition and scale (i.e. close-ups and long shots, low angles and high angles, etc.), and make sure to record at least 10 seconds worth of video for each composition (so you should have a grand total of 3-4 minutes worth of video).

After filming, select the best twenty images, organize, label and log them clearly.

Grading Rubric (20 points total)

- Quantity & Variety – 20 or more distinct and varied (scale and angle) images.
- Compositions – effective use of balance, focus, colors and depth.
- Organization – clearly labeled, organized and logged footage.
- Content & Creativity – communicates mood, meaning, space & a unique vision.

The Voice – designing a shot and recording voice.

For this assignment you have two options: 1) find someone to interview about the space/organization you explored in the Visual Landscape assignment; or 2) write a short essay, anecdote or description about the space/organization and find someone to “perform” it as a monologue to the camera. If you choose to do an interview, you should come up with 3-5 open-ended questions to ask your interviewee. If you choose the monologue, it should take roughly 1-2 minutes to perform/read out loud.

Film your monologue or interview, carefully designing the look and composition using the principles of three-point lighting, framing and mis-en-scene discussed in class. Be sure that the recording of your subject's voice is clean and clear. Finally, make sure that you secure a release from your interview subject/actor.

Grading Rubric (15 points total)

- Audio – mic placement, fidelity and clarity of the voice recording.
- Videography – composition, lighting and use of mis-en-scene.
- Content & Creativity – questions, writing, originality, narrative power.

The Edit – creating a short, non-fiction video.

Using Adobe Premiere, combine your Visual Landscape and Voice assignments into a coherent 1-3 minute, edited video about the space/organization you have profiled. If necessary, you may acquire additional images to flesh-out your piece. You must also acquire, either via online catalog or by recording them yourself, 3-5 additional sounds (music, fx, ambience) to go with your video.

As you edit, pay attention to issues of tempo and rhythm, graphic matches or juxtapositions, and the sound-image relationships created by your choices. Your short video *must* include titles and credits, and *may* include text in the body of the film. You may also experiment with video transitions and filters, but don't over-do it!

Finally, prepare your video for exhibition and viewing by exporting: 1) a full-resolution, QuickTime video of your project for TV/film; 2) a version optimized for streaming on the web (e.g. YouTube); and 3) a version optimized for mobile devices (iPad, iPhone, etc.).

Grading Rubric (20 points total)

- Editing – titles, transitions, pacing and design.
- Sound Design – sound-image relationships, sound mix and transitions.
- Content & Creativity – originality, meaning and narrative structure.
- Exhibition & Export – working, labeled, clean versions for TV, web and mobile.

The Narrative – storytelling, shot design and analytic montage.

Working with 2 other members of the class, create a short script (PSA or commercial) for one of the organizations/spaces that a class-member has profiled in the previous assignments; however, you are required to create new images, record new voice-over and/or new dialogue, and acquire new sounds and/or graphics according to the needs of your script; i.e. unlike your previous projects, the sounds/voice and images should be entirely pre-scripted, pre-planned and overtly “designed.”

In addition, in designing the spot, you must use a minimum of 10 distinct shots to cover the action AND include at least one match-action edit and one POV sequence; so plan and storyboard carefully.

The final edit should convey a sense of visual or dramatic development, and cut together as seamlessly as possible. The final version should be approximately 1-minute in length. Your pre-production materials must be submitted and approved prior to filming.

Grading Rubric (25 points total)

- Pre-production- script, shot list, storyboard and floor plans.
- Videography – composition, exposure, focus and white balance.
- Editing – continuity, pacing, and POV/matched-action sequences.
- Sound – audio clarity/fidelity, audio mix, sound design.
- Content & Creativity – originality, coherence, narrative impact.

The Polish – refining and punching-up a media project.

Working by yourself, take either The Narrative Project or the Edit and punch-it-up (i.e. polish or improve upon it), by acquiring additional images, video, sounds and/or graphics and re-editing the piece. You are free to (in fact, encouraged to) re-record interviews, sounds or images used in the original piece, in addition to creating completely new elements and even re-conceptualizing the project entirely. You must generate *at least 10* new shots or sounds for potential use in the Polish.

Grading Rubric (15 points total)

- New Media – quality, variety, quantity of new media added to the piece.
- New Edit – sound design, edit, use of graphics, transitions and fx.
- Impact – creativity, extent of improvement and overall impact.

Course Schedule and Assignment Deadlines

<u>Week 1</u> Aug. 26	Syllabus and schedule review. Introductions and goals. Discuss Visual Landscape project. The power of images.
<u>Week 2</u> Sep. 2	DUE: Visual Landscape project ideas/contact info. Basic Videography 1: Using the Camera (NX5U operation)
<u>Week 3</u> Sep. 9	DUE: Visual Landscape contact info and shooting schedule. Basic Videography 2: Composition and Framing. In-class shoot.
<u>Week 4</u> Sep. 16	DUE: Visual Landscape Media. Media organization and export. Workshop Vis Landscape assignment. Discuss Voice assignment <i>Workshop Group: Patrick, Kim, Laine, Nicole, Chelsea.</i>
<u>Week 5</u> Sep. 23	DUE: The Voice questions or script and “talent” contact info. Sound: camera as sound recorder. Microphones and mic placement.
<u>Week 6</u> Sep. 30	DUE: The Voice shooting schedule. Copyrights and wrongs. Mis-en-scene and lighting. Techniques for interviews and voice-overs.
***** Fall Break *****	
<u>Week 7</u> Oct. 14	DUE: The Voice assignment. Workshop The Voice. Discuss editing assignment. Intro to basic montage theory. <i>Workshop Group: Mayowa, Palak, Shauntelle, Dara, Kelsey.</i>
<u>Week 8</u> Oct. 21	Editing theory cont’d. Intro to NLEs: Adobe Premiere. Set-up, importing and organizing media. Cuts-only editing.
<u>Week 9</u> Oct. 28	Adobe Premiere Cont’d: transitions and titles. Sound design theory: mixing sound in Premiere.
<u>Week 10</u> Nov. 4	Exporting and optimizing media. DUE: The Edit Assignment. Workshop The Edit. Discuss The Narrative assignment. <i>Workshop Group: Megan, Monica, Kelli, Richard, James, Szilvia.</i>
<u>Week 11</u> Nov. 11	DUE: The Narrative proposals. A/V scripts and Pre-pro. Creating storyboards and floor-plans.
<u>Week 12</u> Nov. 18	DUE: pre-pro materials. Shooting coverage and analytic montage. Working with talent and using shotgun microphones.
<u>Week 13</u> Nov. 25	Due: The Narrative assignment. Workshop The Narrative. Discuss The Polish assignment.

Week 14 **Due: The Polish additional media assets.** Individual meetings.
Dec. 2 In-class work.

Final Exam **DUE: The Polish.**
Dec. 9

** **Please note:** the schedule for the course is subject to change as required by the needs of the class and as determined by the instructor. Any significant change to assignments, deadlines or the meeting schedule will be announced in class and indicated in an updated version of the syllabus posted to Sakai.*