

COMM 4397: Journalism and Media Production Practicum Abroad Documentary Filmmaking in Kenya

Instructor: Dr. Dani Madrid-Morales
Email: dmmorales2@uh.edu
Office location: Communication Building #142
Phone number: (713) 743-9751

Instructor: Dr. Sahar Hamzah
Email: srhamzah@central.uh.edu
Office location: Communication Building #130
Phone number: (713) 743-4974

Course Description

This course provides students the opportunity to participate in a journalistic & media production project overseas. Students will be assigned roles mimicking the division of labor in a 'real-word' media production. During the course students will learn how to perform the tasks associated with their roles, interact with other members of the group, and deliver a professional outcome, such as a multimedia story, an interactive website or a documentary. Moreover, students will gain experience in working in a foreign country, thus developing their intercultural communication skills and increasing their global awareness.

In the Winter'19-20 edition of this course, students will travel to Kenya (Nairobi, Amboseli and Mombasa) to film a documentary about the transformations and disruptions brought about by digital media. Students will be involved in the pre-production and production stages, from developing an idea to writing a script, researching the topic, locating subjects, scouting locations, and acquiring footage on location. Upon their return to Houston, students will have the opportunity to get involved in the post-production stage (e.g. editing, color correction, audio mixing...), although participation in this stage will not be required.

Learning Outcomes

Students enrolled in this course will:

1. develop a solid understanding of documentary narrative;
2. exhibit confidence in their ability to pre-produce a documentary;
3. perform professional roles characteristic of a documentary crew;
4. develop an awareness towards global communication phenomena;
5. learn how to work in a multicultural environment.

Prerequisites

There are no pre-requisites to enroll in this course. However, some prior knowledge of writing for the media, media production and journalistic practice is recommended. It is a requirement of the University of Houston that students who take part in faculty led Learning Abroad programs maintain a good academic and disciplinary standing (2.0 undergraduate, 3.0 graduate), and do not have financial delinquency holds on their accounts.

Course Structure & Schedule

This course involves a combination of face to face workshops at the University of Houston prior to departing to Kenya; online activities related to pre-production tasks during the Christmas break; and, a two-week long program on location.

Dec 16 – Introduction to Kenya and the Gig Economy, and Scriptwriting 101
Dec 17 – Filmmaking Workshop
Dec 18 – Scriptwriting Workshop
Dec 19 to Dec 23 – Online Pre-production duties
Dec 28 to Jan 12 – Travel to Kenya (Nairobi & Mombasa) for Production

We will meet in room COM 244 during the face to face workshops. A tentative schedule for the workshops is presented below for reference. If a student misses the UH Study Abroad Safety Workshop on Wednesday December 18, they will not be able to travel to Kenya.

| | Mon, Dec 16 | Tue, Dec 17 | Wed, Dec 18 |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 10-11am | Kenya & Gig Economy 101 | Equipment Intro | UH Study Abroad Safety Workshop |
| 11-12pm | Presentation of voiceover | Equipment Intro | Scheduling & Call Sheets |
| 12-1pm | LUNCH | LUNCH | Scheduling & Call Sheets |
| 1-2pm | Script Structure | Simulation | LUNCH |
| 2-3pm | Shots & Shot List | Shot Revision | Simulation |
| 4-5pm | Shots & Shot List | Shot Revision | Simulation |

Evaluation

Students' progress will be assessed continuously throughout the program using a combination of group and individual tasks. There will be no final or mid-term examinations. Students' grade will be based on the following assignments/tasks:

Workshops attendance and participation – 10%

Attendance to the face to face workshops is required. During these workshops, students will be given exercises to complete in class. These might include creating a shot list, creating a production timetable, shooting footage, testing production equipment...

Pre-production duties – 10%

Each student will be asked to complete pre-production tasks such as researching, scheduling, scouting, and contacting interviewees. These tasks will need to be completed before the departure to Kenya on December 28. Failure to complete these tasks will negatively affect the quality of the documentary.

Outcome based performance – 55%

Each student will be assigned to one of three common roles in documentary filming crews

- a. producer/production assistant;
- b. director/camera operator;
- c. audio/light operator & production assistant.

On location, students will be divided into 2 or 3 crews, depending on filming needs, and assigned a role for the day. Students will be evaluated on their performance in that role for the day.

Producers will be responsible for scheduling interviews, arranging/scouting locations for shooting, coordinating transportation, and other logistics on set (food, access to power, permits...).

Production assistants will be in charge of supervising that all equipment is functioning and ready for use at the beginning and end of the day. While on set, they will keep track of the shot list, maintain a video/audio log, and handle the slate.

Directors will be responsible for conducting interviews, supervising the quality of image and audio, guaranteeing a homogenous look for the documentary, and supervising the work of all crew members.

Camera operators will be responsible for shooting on location, making sure footage is properly recorded and stored at the end of the day, and making decisions about the look of each shot.

Audio and light operators will monitor audio and lighting on set, make sure that sound quality and lighting is consistent across shots, handle brooms, and storing, logging and tagging all content at the end of the day.

Three weekly reflection papers – 15%

Students will write three one-page reflection papers (single spaced, PDF format, font type Times, size 12pt), due on December 21, January 4 and January 12. Each paper will be worth 5%.

In these papers, students should reflect on their learning process, their experience in Kenya, the relationship with other members of the team, and their overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their performance.

The goal of these papers is to have students think critically about the process of making a documentary film, and about the challenges & rewards of working in a foreign country, and working as a group.

Students will submit these papers by sending a DM on Slack to the two instructors.

Daily de-briefing sessions on location – 10%

At the end of each shooting day, the group will meet to discuss any problems/challenges and to plan work for the next day. Students are expected to attend these sessions, and to contribute to the discussion.

Textbook & Other Learning Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. However, students are required to watch the following video materials.

- Before coming to class on December 16, students are required to watch the LinkedIn Learning (formerly known as Lynda.com) course: “Learning Documentary Video: 1

Planning and Pre-production” (<https://www.lynda.com/Video-tutorials/Documentary-Video-01-Planning-Pre-production/471913-2.html?org=houstonlibrary.org>).

- Before coming to class on December 17, students are required to watch the documentary *Samsara* (available at <https://tubity.com/movies/469240/samsara>)
- Before coming to class on December 18, students are required to watch the course “Learning Documentary Video: 2 Production” (<https://www.lynda.com/Video-tutorials/Documentary-Video-2-Production/486414-2.html?org=houstonlibrary.org>).

Access to LinkedIn Learning/Lynda.com is available for free for anybody with a Houston Public Library card (<http://houstonlibrary.org/lyndacom-linkedin-learning>).

Instructors might ask students to take one or more quizzes to verify that they have watched the above video materials. These quizzes will count towards the final grade.

Communication Tools

The main communication tool for this course will be slack, which is a widely-used platform in the media and IT industries. Students are advised to install the slack app on theirs phones, turn on notifications and check it regularly. If students need to contact the instructors, they should send direct messages on slack, rather than email.

UH Academic Honesty

To cultivate an environment of academic integrity, the University of Houston expects students to abide by the University’s Undergraduate Academic Honesty Policy, found in the Undergraduate Catalog: <http://www.uh.edu/academic-honesty-undergraduate>. Make sure you read the provisions included in the catalog as they are important. Students in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) are expected to abide by the University of Houston’s Code of Student Conduct. Familiarize yourself with it.

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with 504/ADA guidelines, CLASS is committed to providing reasonable academic accommodations to students who request them. Students seeking accommodation must register with the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) 713-743-5400.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) are available for students having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or somebody you know is in crisis, the “Let’s Talk” program provides a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. Read more about the services provided by CAPS [on their website](#).