We are at an extraordinary time where documentary film enjoys a high degree of popularity and the means to make them are more accessible than ever. Documents can be a platform for underrepresented groups and activists/advocates seeking to effect social change. The documentary film is widely consumed as a source of reliable information on hidden injustices. However, over the past 20 years, they are increasingly part of strategic campaigns designed to engage and motivate viewers. This workshop is an introduction to the process of documentary filmmaking (including shooting, interviewing and editing). Over the course of the semester, we will begin the process of producing a SEAS documentary on the Benton Harbor water crisis. This winter we hope to make at least 2 trips to Benton Harbor to film and conduct interviews.
Course Objectives

This course will familiarize students to various aspects of documentary filmmaking - pre-production, production and post-production. This includes:

- Finding and Developing Story
- Research
- Scripting
- Interviewing
- Camera Movements/Filming
- Lighting; Sound
- Editing
- Ethical Considerations
- Funding
- Distribution and Marketing

Class Format & Participation

The class participation grade will be based on attendance, contribution to class discussions, and oral presentations. Not surprisingly we will be watching A LOT of documentaries in this class. Students will also get hands on experience in producing a SEAS documentary on the Benton Harbor water crisis. We will be using our cell phones and actual film equipment camera, tripod, lights etc (which I will provide). We will also be doing some basic editing using software like Adobe Premiere Pro.
Reading Materials and Documentaries

Suggested readings will be posted on the CANVAS site over the course of the semester. Clips of documentaries will be viewed in class.

Weekly Activities

Introduction

Week 1

- Course Introduction
- What is Documentary?
- “Fact”, subjectivity and the documentarian-viewer “contract”
- A brief “history” of Documentary
  - The Man with a Movie Camera (1929)
  - Nanook of the North (1922)
  - Grey Gardens (1975)
  - Ken Burns’s The Civil War series (1990)
Pre-production

- What makes a good subject?
- Research
- Narrative Structure
  - An Inconvenient Truth (2006)
  - Nor Any Drop to Drink (2008)

Week 2

Week 3

- Style of documentaries; Storytelling techniques
  - Whore’s Glory (2011)
  - The Act of Killing (2012)
  - Here’s to Flint (2016)

Week 4

- Script outline/proposal/treatment
- Production Schedule
- Pre-interviews
- Interview questions
- Scouting locations
  - Permissions and Releases
- Pre observations
- Creating a shot list
- Scheduling
- Assembling your crew
  - Mister Sunshine (2016)
Week 5

- Documentary Budget; fundraising; overview of funding for independent documentaries; Fiscal Sponsorship; Distribution and Marketing

**Production**

- Intro to Cinematography
- Using Natural light
- Tripod
- Composition
- Camera movement; panning; tilting
- Filming with Your Smartphone: capabilities and limitations

Week 6

- Intro to Exposure
  - Exposure 5 step method
  - Aperture
  - ISO
  - ND Filters
- Basics in Camera Functions and lens
  - Focal length
  - Shutter Speed
- Shooting B-roll
  - *Mossville: When Great Trees Fall* (2020)
Week 7

• Intro to Audio
• Audio Equipment
• Recording Space
• Audio Tricks
• Interview Ground Rules and Tips

Post-Production

• Intro to Editing
• Transferring files
• Writing a Transcript
• Paper Edit

Week 8

• Premiere Pro Interface
• Importing Footage
• Setting up a sequence
• Placing Clips on Timeline
• Syncing Audio with Video
• Making Cuts
Week 9

- Adding B Roll
- Adding Music
- Cutting Music
- Adding Transitions
- Leveling your Audio
- Special Effects; Titles; Ken Burns Effect; Warp Stabilizer
- Leveling audio
- Basic color correction
- Export

- COWSPIRACY: The Sustainability Secret (2014)

Week 10 - 12

Students will shoot, cut and edit their own footage. The footage can be from Benton Harbor or from their own projects.
Class will watch footage together.