



## Documentary Filmmaking 1

10-session Hybrid-Learning Course

Interactive Course Overview (Subject to Change)

**Course Materials:** Computer or tablet for online webinar participation; all course reading, listening, and viewing materials are free online resources

**Instructional Team:** Julia Steinberg, Sherwyn Smith

**Student Instructors:** Annie Ning (Wesleyan University)



### Course Description

The Documentary Filmmaking Lab is the first part in a three-series lab for young filmmakers, aspiring and experienced alike. This new media lab will equip students with the tools and experience necessary to plan a short documentary film: crafting a narrative, developing a log line, polishing a pitch, writing a film treatment, and ultimately captivating an audience with their storytelling abilities. Students will learn skills and hear stories from acclaimed documentary screenwriters, producers, and filmmakers alike, as they work with their instructors to develop a pitch and proposal for their very own short documentary film.



### Course Goals

1. Collaborate with a dynamic team of students, educators, and filmmakers to create a successful treatment for a short documentary film
2. Select from a variety of documentary forms and styles for your documentary and work with peers and instructional teams to craft, present, and revise the treatment
3. Create and film a “pitch” for your film proposal, with instruction and feedback from experienced filmmakers
4. Digitally archive your final interview project in a format compatible with leading online college applications (e.g. the [Common App](#) and the [Coalition for College Access](#)).



### Final Portfolio Project

By the end of the course, students will have learned the necessary components of a successful documentary proposal and development plan for a documentary film. Students will have a filmed pitch, a completed treatment, and a variety of feedback from peers, instructional teams, and visiting guest experts.



### Drop in Orientation Session

**Note:** There will be a required kick-off orientation session before Week 1 to equip all students to use Google Classroom and digital portfolio tools.

## Instructional Team



### **Julia Steinberg, Co-Lead Instructor**

Julia is a teacher, leader, and curriculum developer who specializes in Humanities. She has 10+ years of teaching experience, working with students from grades six through eight, and led the ELA and Humanities Department at Prospect Schools for over five years. She earned her B.A. in both Film and English from Kenyon College, where she filmed, produced, and edited her short documentary, [Superman Lost](#), which details the experience of a young boy living in rural Ohio on juvenile probation. She has experience working with Krasnoff Foster Productions as well as React to Film, an organization dedicated to educating and empowering today's youth through documentary film.



### **Sherwyn Smith, Co-Lead Instructor**

Sherwyn Smith has over 20 years of teaching experience, from middle school to college. He specializes in helping students tell stories using new media and moving image forms. A member of the middle and high school humanities faculty at the Nightingale-Bamford School for more than two years, Sherwyn has also taught at the Collegiate School and at NYU. His enrichment teaching has focused on the fundamentals of personal essays, short fiction, expository writing, and screenwriting. He was an official Screenwriting Fellow for Walt Disney Studios and has contributed to screenplays on MTV Films, ABC, and Off-Off Broadway.



### **Annie Ning, Visiting Instructor**

Annie is a filmmaker and multimedia artist with experience in public media, podcast journalism, and documentary storytelling, from Suzhou, China. She has a B.A. in both Film and English from Wesleyan University. She is currently pursuing an MFA in the Columbia University Film Studies Program. She has worked at American Documentary | POV, at the Tribeca Film Festival, and for the past three years on the programming team for the Asian American International Film Festival in New York, where she currently co-curates the documentary program. As a filmmaker, Annie aims to tell stories grounded in community-building practices. She is currently a 2020 Filmmaking Fellow at the Creative Visions Women Excel Project, producing short films for non-profits working for gender justice & equality for women, girls and non-binary persons in Los Angeles.



### **Andi Wiley, Student Instructor**

Andi is a rising senior at Wesleyan University majoring in Economics and Psychology with a minor in Writing. As a San Francisco Bay Area native, she is passionate about creating a more equitable behavioral health system for the social and emotional well-being of California's youth, which she does through her work with the California Children's Trust. She also plays midfield on Wesleyan's women's soccer team; loves anything fashion-related from thrifting to sewing and altering her own clothes; and enjoys cooking and eating healthy food, which she shares on instagram @happi.healthi.



### **Tucker Kirchberger, Student Instructor**

Currently a rising senior at Wesleyan University, Tucker is originally from New Jersey, where he had a background in wrestling. His areas of interest include literature, writing, and music. He is majoring in Philosophy and Environmental Studies.

## Visiting Guest Experts and Core Course Content

2-3 documentary filmmakers will join particular class sessions for interactive interviews with students

**Ruby Fludzinski**



**Ruby Fludzinski** is a student at Wesleyan University. In the past year, she has produced numerous short films while continuing to screenwrite daily. She has worked on production design teams for several short films as well. As a double major in Film Studies and History, the bulk of her creative work focuses on telling neglected stories at the heart of American history.

**Helen Whitney**



**Helen Whitney** is an Oscar nominated, Emmy and Peabody award-winning film producer, director, and writer. Helen has been a prolific creator of documentaries and feature films focused on topics such as Great Britain's class structure, presidential candidates, mental illness, and Pope John Paul II.

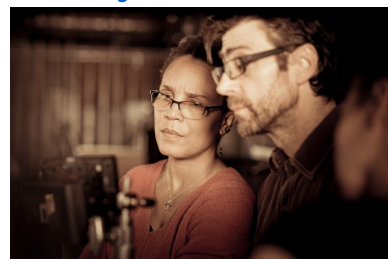


[Click here](#) to watch an interview with Helen



[Click here](#) to check out Helen's website

**Tracy Heather Strain**



**Tracy Heather Strain** is behind the Middletown CT-based documentary film company, The Film Posse, and a co-director of the Wesleyan Documentary Project Strain. She is a two-time Peabody Award winner and two-time WGA Award winner, and has produced over 20 documentaries, many through The Film Posse.



[Click here](#) to watch a trailer for her film "Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart"

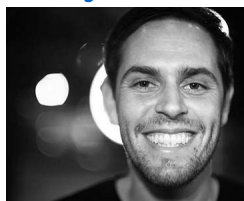


[Click here](#) to listen to an interview with Tracy on Making Media Now.

**Core Course Content**

Together, we will explore the films made by these esteemed filmmakers and organizations

**Jimmy Golblum**



**Jimmy Golblum** is an Emmy Award-winning director and Executive Producer. He has set up and directed some of the world's most visually ambitious and emotionally resonant documentaries, and worked on shows like Chef's Table and Unsolved Mysteries.



[Click here](#) to watch a trailer for his award winning short "Broken Home"



[Click here](#) to learn more about Jimmy.

**Sundance Film Institute**



**Sundance Institute** is dedicated to the discovery and development of independent artists and audiences. Through its programs, the Institute seeks to discover, support, and inspire independent film, media, and theater artists from the United States and around the world, and to introduce audiences to their new work.



[Click here](#) to check out their website.

**Nashville Film Institute**
















**The Nashville Film Institute** is dedicated to training students for careers in the film industry. Their free learning website provides students with concrete guidance and opportunities to get hands-on experience in the art of filmmaking.



[Click here](#) to check out some of their "how-to" guides.

**Course-at-a-Glance**

<p align="center"><b>Content Theme: The Art of the Documentary</b>  <b>Project Stage: Introduction and Ideation</b></p> <p align="center"><i>"Many documentaries would be a lot better if they were a lot shorter"— Edward J. Delaney</i></p>	
<p> <b>Session 1:</b> Welcome &amp; Intro to Documentaries</p>	<p> <b>Session 2:</b> Story Structures and Stylistic Nuances of a Documentary with <b>Guest Speaker: Jimmy Goldblum</b></p>
<p><b>Goal:</b> Get to know one another and explore microdocumentaries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of learning environment do we want to form?</li> <li>• What are microdocumentaries and why do they matter to me?</li> </ul> <p><b>Want a sneak peak? Check this out:</b></p> <p> <a href="#">Click here</a> to watch a video about the art of micro documentaries.</p> <p> <a href="#">Click here</a> to read about the new age of micro-documentary filmmaking</p>	<p><b>Goal:</b> Learn about the three act structure and the different types and styles of documentaries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a documentary story arc?</li> <li>• How are authentic documentary stories told, structured, and styled?</li> </ul> <p><b>Want a sneak peak? Check this out:</b></p> <p> <a href="#">Click here</a> to watch a micro-documentary called "The Doggist," which focuses on the artist behind the popular instagram page called <a href="#">The Doggist</a></p> <p> <a href="#">Click here</a> to listen to an interview on Making Media Now.</p>
<p> <b>Digital Deposits:</b> Interactive notes from interview with Guest Speaker &amp; Vision Board with ideas for interview topic and subject</p>	

<p align="center"><b>Content Theme: Finding your Inspiration</b>  <b>Project Stage: Vision Board &amp; Project Planning</b></p> <p align="center"><i>"I'm really drawn to stories about African Americans in situations that are allegedly new and unusual or outside of where we're supposed to be. That's representative of situations I've been in myself and sometimes my parents.."— Tracy Heather Strain</i></p>	
<p> <b>Session 3:</b> Vision Boarding</p>	<p> <b>Session 4:</b> Intro to Treatments with <b>Guest Speaker: Tracy Heather Strain</b></p>
<p><b>Goal:</b> Research possible topics, issues and focus areas for your documentary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What topics am I most passionate about? What do I have access to?</li> <li>• What are my hopes and goals and inspiration for this project?</li> </ul> <p><b>Want a sneak peak? Check this out:</b></p> <p> <a href="#">Click here</a> to watch a former student talk through his vision board and brainstorm his project.</p>	<p><b>Goal:</b> Learn about the anatomy and structure of a documentary film treatment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a film treatment and how does it work in the film industry?</li> <li>• How can I write my own treatment?</li> </ul> <p><b>Want a sneak peak? Check this out:</b></p> <p> <a href="#">Click here</a> to read essential tips for writing film treatments for documentaries.</p> <p> <a href="#">Click here</a> to watch a short video about writing film treatments.</p>
<p> <b>Digital Deposit:</b> Vision board, working title, and film logline</p>	

**Content Theme: Film Treatments and Pitches  
Project Stage: Committing to Project Topic & Plan Development**

*"I began to feel that the drama of the truth that is in the moment and in the past is richer and more interesting than the drama of Hollywood movies. So I began looking at documentary films"— Ken Burns*

**Session 5: Film Treatments **Guided Workshop****

**Goal:** Make progress on our film treatments through self-management and feedback cycles.

- What strategies work best for me to manage myself?
- How can I give and receive useful feedback?
- Mid-course survey

**Want a sneak peak? Check this out:**



[Click here](#) to get inspiration from the documentary film called Speed Cubers

**Session 6: The Art of the Pitch with **Guest Speaker Helen Whitney****

**Goal:** Learn about effective film pitches so we can practice and record our own pitches.

- What makes an effective film pitch?
- How can I grab the attention of my audience?
- Review mid-course survey data & reset personal goals

**Want a sneak peak? Check this out:**



[Click here](#) to listen to a podcast about film pitches and how to make your pitch strong and compelling..

**Digital Deposit:** Upload your recorded pitch and your treatment draft

**Content Theme: Polishing up Film Treatments  
Project Stage: Project Development**

*"If it can be written, or thought, it can be filmed."— Stanley Kubric*

**Session 7: **Guided Workshop****

**Goal:** Make progress on your film treatment and pitch

- What strategies and self-management tools work for me?
- How can I set goals for myself and reflect on my progress?

**Want a sneak peak? Check this out:**



[Click here](#) to watch the short documentary called Wilbur Force to get inspiration for your own work.

**Session 8: **Guided Workshop****

**Goal:** Make revisions to your film treatment and pitch based on feedback

- How can I incorporate feedback from others?
- How can I give meaningful feedback to others?

**Want a sneak peak? Check this out:**



[Click here](#) to watch the short documentary called Mister Sunshine to get inspiration for your own work.

**Digital Deposit:** Upload final treatment and recorded pitch

**Content Theme: Project Presentations  
Project Stage: Practice, Pitch, & Present**

*"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." - Martin Luther King, Jr.*

 **Session 9: PBL Guided Workshop 4:**  
Preparing Digital Portfolios & Practicing  
with Feedback


**Goal:** Prepare digital portfolios and practice presentations

- How can I give a compelling and engaging presentation?
- How can I set up a digital portfolio to document my progress during the Lab?
- What did I learn from the feedback on my practice presentation?

 **Session 10: Final Project Presentations**

**Goal:** Present your projects and get feedback

- What have you learned about your personal creative process?
- What do you want to do next?
- Final survey

 **Digital Deposit:** A recorded film pitch, written treatment, digital portfolio, and applicable feedback for your future endeavors.

**About the Brooklyn Action Lab**

Brooklyn Action Lab offers unique project-based learning experiences designed by MeshEd, an education collective whose mission is to increase access to high quality project based learning for all adolescents. Learn more about our Lab offerings on our [website](#).