Syllabus - Documentary Storytelling for Radio and Podcasts, Fall 2016

Thursdays 9:00 am - 1:00 pm in Room 659

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Through this course students will learn to produce documentary-style audio stories, as heard on Serial, This American Life, 99% Invisible, Planet Money, The Heart, Love and Radio, and Invisibilia. You will be encouraged to develop their own personal voice and style, while also learning practical skills necessary for finding work in both radio and podcasting.

After a quick introduction to audio equipment, you'll create two broadcast-worthy audio features as if you were working for an actual show. You'll learn to identify what makes for good radio story subjects and sources, and how to pitch your idea to an outlet. You'll produce your stories through the edit process used by most shows, and fine-tune your audio sensibilities by workshops each other's stories. We'll cover how to best write for the ear, and you'll receive coaching to record narration in the NYU studio. There will also be an introduction to using music and sound design.

PLEASE NOTE: There will be four required outside-of-class sessions for this course. Each will have two time options: Tuesday late afternoon or Wednesday morning. **If you do not have flexibility either on Tuesday afternoons or Wednesday mornings, you should not enroll in this course.**

Also this class moves very quickly in the beginning, **attendance in the first three classes is mandatory, no exceptions.** Every day of class is crucial to this course, any absences must approved in advance, and will count against your grade. Plagiarism and dishonest or unethical reporting will not be tolerated.

GRADING

Your grade will reflect on-time attendance in class and outside sessions, and on-time submission of your assignments in accordance with directions. Your progress on the grade rubric can be tracked here throughout the semester. All grades are final.

NECESSARY MATERIALS:

Laptop to edit audio and to bring to class
Reaper audio editing software- [download the free unlimited trial](https://www.reaper.fm/) on your personal laptop

**Students will need to provide their own AA batteries and SD card for the recorders.** Headphones will be needed for every class, so if they don't want to have to check out an entire kit each class they'll need to bring their own.
Resources:
Transom on the Zoom H4N

ASSIGNMENTS

● **Audio postcard (due 9/22)**
  This will serve as an exercise to familiarize you with using your equipment and editing software, and collecting documentary audio. They will run 10-60 seconds in length.

● **Story from a stranger (due 10/6)**
  This is as an exercise in story structure, interviewing, and audio editing. You will interview a stranger and gather a story or anecdote from them that is under three minutes in length.

● **Short news feature (due 10/20)**
  You will report on a recent trend and include scene tape and one extra expert voice. Features should be three and a half minutes max.

● **Profile feature (due 11/10)**
  These will be audio features that profile an individual of your choice. These features can also include other people who offer us further insight into your source. The lens you focus on your source’s life can be as broad or as narrow as you’d like, but must include documentary scene tape. Profiles will run four and a half minutes max.

● **Reported feature (due 12/15)**
  This is the assignment where you get a chance to make whatever kind of audio story you would like to hear. It can be another profile piece, a non-narrated documentary, a storytelling-rich take on current events, a retelling of a forgotten history, a personal story, or an investigation into what your neighbor really does all day- the only constraint is that you will need to pitch your story with a particular outlet in mind. Stories will run six minutes max.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Class 1 9/8/16 (bring recording kit from gear locker)
-Listening
-Introduction to course
- What is a story?
- Orient to recording equipment
- Blind recording exercise
- Discuss audio postcard assignment, listen to a couple of examples

**Homework:**
- Gather tape for audio postcard assignment
- Prepare for class 2 with your favorite clip cued up on your computer

**Class 2 9/15/16** (bring raw audio postcard tape and computer with Reaper on it)

- Listening
- Students can play their best or most frustrating clips
- Audio editing- edit provided sample audio all together
- Crash course in writing for radio, in order to write vox pop intros and outros
- Write vox pop intros and outros

**Homework:**
- Attend one of two Reaper editing help sessions
- Create an audio postcard, with intro that you’ll read before we play it class

**Class 3 9/22/16** (bring rendered audio postcard assignment)

- Listening
- Play audio postcards for the class
- Discuss the interviewing a stranger assignment, listen to two examples
- How to interview for audio
- How to transcribe/log tape

**Homework:**
- Interview a stranger (or multiple) until you feel like you have one story you are happy with and loosely transcribe your tape

**Class 4 9/29/16** (bring your stranger tape)

- Listening
- Discuss what you've gathered
- What is good tape?
- More practice with Reaper

**Homework:**
- Finish your story from a stranger
Class 5 10/6/16 (bring rendered story from a stranger)
-Listening
-Play your story from a stranger assignment for the class
-Intro to writing for radio
-Intro to short news story assignment

Homework:
- Pick a trend you want to report on and gather audio that illustrates it
- Interview someone who can speak to this trend being “a thing”
- Put together an outline of how that story will go

Class 6 10/13/16 (bring your tape for your news story)
-Listening
-How to write a radio script
-Workshop your news stories
-How to track narration

Homework:
- Attend one of two scheduled Reaper editing help sessions
- Write, edit, and narrate your short news story

Class 7 10/20/16 (bring your rendered news story)
-Listen to everyone’s stories
-Intro to profile assignment
-How to pitch a radio story

Homework:
- Write your pitch for your profile story
- Choose your profile story subject and conduct your interviews

Class 8 10/27/16 (bring profile story pitch and interview tape)
-Listening
-Go over classmates' pitches
-Writing for radio exercise
-BEGIN editing tape for profile story

Homework:
- Write script and pull all your clips for your profile story
**Class 9** 11/3/16 (bring profile draft script and audio all line up)
- Listening
- Everyone live-reads their profile pieces drafts
- How to upload to SoundCloud
- Discuss final assignment

*Homework:*
- *Finalize your profile story script*
- *Track your narration at your assigned time*
- *Make final mix of profile assignment*

**Class 10** 11/10/16 (submit your rendered profile story to the class SoundCloud page before class)
- Listen to everyone's profile pieces
- Discuss final story pitches
- Prep for final story interviews

*Homework:*
- *Choose a show where your final assignment might air, and write a pitch*
- *Conduct interviews for your final story*

**Class 11** 11/17/16 (bring tape from final story interviews)
- Listening
- Go over final story pitches
- Discuss and workshop final stories

*Homework:*
- *Write (and pull the quotes for) first draft of final story*

**Class 12** 12/1/16 (bring first draft of final story)
- Listening
- Edit and workshop first drafts in groups of three
- How to score with music
- Work on scripts/edits and get one-one help from instructor

*Homework:*
Edit your script again, then create a rough mix of your story- record your narration at home, and mix it in with your selected quotes. Again, this doesn't need to be perfect, it will just give us a sense of roughly how your story will sound.

Class 13 12/8/16 (bring rough mix)
- Workshop rough mixes (instructor will email edits to all students after workshop)
- Work on scripts/edits and get one-one help from instructor

Homework:
- Make your final edits, record (if any) narration at the NYU studio at your assigned time, and mix your final piece, adding music and sound design if desired.

Class 14 12/15/16 (bring rendered/bounced final story)
- Listen to everyone's final story
- Discuss possible work in radio and podcasting

Following last class- Public listening night