

## **Proposal for Teaching With Technology Grant—The iOgraphy Documentary Project (iODP)**

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Summary: This proposal seeks to improve the learning outcomes for students enrolled in the Communication Arts Department's *Documentary Filmmaking* course by providing high quality interactive media tools that will, when used in tandem with new instructional techniques, help build confidence, improve essential skill-sets, and help improve teaching effectiveness in the course. Additionally, if funded, the instructional methodology and problem-solving experiences of students and faculty in this course will be shared through on-campus symposia, regional mass media, various social-media outlets, as well as a presentation at an international conference.

Goals (in three parts): The *Documentary Filmmaking* his course is designed to assist students in exploring the numerous facets involved in writing, directing and producing a television documentary. The course lectures present an overview to the genre and several exercises are given that are designed to reinforce concepts and techniques taught in the classroom. After these initial exercises are completed, students begin researching and developing individual documentary project proposals. Once production teams have been selected and group collaboration begins, a single documentary proposal is selected and students concentrate on developing that story for the remainder of the semester. At the end of the semester the "final cut" of students' documentary films are screened on a single evening that is open to the campus.

The "iOgraphy Documentary Project" (iODP) proposal meets the Marion Scherner Leonhard Teaching and Technology Program goal of designing new instructional techniques, improving teaching effectiveness, and increasing student learning. The goals of this proposal are:

- 1) help students build interview skills,
- 2) improve students' image capturing skills, and
- 3) provide students with wider audience feedback.

The instructor will create a new series of team-centered successive learning exercises that build students' confidence using the iPad in an "iOgraphy" configuration.

1. The first exercise challenges students to interview "a person at work, talking about their job". This exercise, which I used successfully in my recent Fulbright teaching assignment in Africa, provides an approach to interviewing subjects that is less technically challenging for the student-producer, and is also non-threatening to the interview subject. The iPad-mini does not require portable lights, or complex switches or buttons, or large crews. Therefore, the subjects invariably are more comfortable and accessible because they are speaking about a familiar subject without the distractions that usually accompany a traditionally outfitted documentary production team. The student producer can now focus and begin to develop her/his interpersonal skills, increasing the likelihood of experiencing a successful interview. This assignment will have a two-week deadline. To measure student qualitative achievements in this goal, they will complete online surveys after each interview. The survey questions are:

- Was the subject working or at work when you conducted the interview?
- How many "yes" or "no" answers did you receive to your questions?
- On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) how would you rate your comfort level at the start of the interview?
- On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) how would you rate your comfort level at the end of the interview?
- On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) how would you rate your subject's comfort level at the start?
- On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) how would you rate your subject's comfort level at the end?
- What percentage of questions would you have preferred to re-phrase?
- How would you rate your subject's overall response to your interview questions? (scaled 1-to-5 as above)

These questions measure stylistic choices (ratio of "yes/no" questions vs. open-ended ones), ability to put one's self and one's subject at ease, and the ability to construct questions the elicit relevant responses. Results from surveys will be discussed in class along with viewing of each short documentary interview. Feedback from other students, student video journals, survey results, as well as critical commentary from the instructor will be combined to establish a baseline for each student team.

2. As a normal part of this course, the instructor creates an exercise where student divide into teams and edit raw video footage. This both familiarizes students with the editing software as well as the basic elements of visual storytelling. Students must make critical decisions on visual and narrative structure—choosing clips that are among other things well-balanced, well-lit, and have good acoustics. In the new exercise, students will edit the raw video interview footage created by other student teams in the previous exercise. This assignment will have a one week deadline with a maximum of three draft edits. To measure student qualitative achievements in this goal, they will complete online surveys after each draft edit.) The survey questions will ask the following:

Was the horizon line consistent from one scene to the next?

Was the on-camera interview properly framed and well balanced?

Were the lighting contrast-ratio values well-adjusted or did you have to make adjustments in Post?

Were color balance correct or did you have to make adjustments in Post?

Was the head-room too much or too little?

Were the acoustics well balanced or did you have to make adjustments in Post?

These questions measure basic composition, and lighting, color and acoustic balances—and whether or not student editing teams had to compensate for what was improperly recorded in the field. When communicated to student production teams, these critical assessments have meaningful impact on choices students have to make when capturing images and sounds. As before, results from surveys will be discussed in class along with viewing of each short documentary interview draft edit. Feedback from other students, video edit clips, student video journals, survey results, as well as critical commentary from the instructor will be combined to establish a baseline for each student team.

3. The third goal of the iODP proposal gives students greater potential to both reach larger audiences as well as afford them opportunities to get feedback and begin cross-media collaborations. I would like students to explore the potential to a) create interactive documentary films that use more complex, non-traditional approaches in their conception and execution (see: [i-docs](#)), and b) use online collaborations to bring their documentary stories to larger affected audiences and get feedback (see the [PACT5 project](#); a collaboration with the documentary class from spring of 2013.) By creating a specific social media website for their videos and video journals (uploading their assignments to YouTube, Vimeo, BabbleGum, and BlackBoard) they can receive feedback and/or assistance in the research, development, and execution of their assignments. (Since the course instructor is a skilled and knowledgeable user of these web resources, and is also a recognized practitioner in the discipline, students will be well fixed to obtain assistance remotely as well as in class. With the additional availability of ITS and the ETO staff, there will be numerous opportunities for students to communicate and interact when/if seeking assistance.) By reaching out to other students with like or similar projects, students enrolled in this course can collaborate on documentary stories. Past experience with this subject matter strongly suggests this should be an “option” presented to students, as opposed to a “requirement.”

It is expected that students will research, present the results of their research to the class, and chose a major (group) project after the IODP is completed. (For all intents and purposes, this project concludes after the first third of the course.) However, as students will need to begin researching their final course documentary project, there is no reason the IODP resources cannot be made available to support these efforts. iPads can be used to gather and disseminate research materials between team members, and to assist in sharing experiences with students off campus. The course instructor will prepare a summary report of goals and outcomes for the course by the end of the Fall Exam Period. This final Assessment of overall student development will include all survey and meta-data results.

Objectives: The iODP will provide students with the ability to conduct more frequent and more meaningful interactions with interview subjects early in the course, leading to greater self-confidence, improvement in overall production technique, and eventually improvements in overall story content. The iODP will also provide students with the ability to creatively interact and collaborate with students at other academic institutions, and to present the products of these interactions in a multi-audience environment.

Students will start with one-on-one in-class interview exercises (student-on-student interviews), developing skills that will be used during the first interview exercise with subjects in the field. Each exercise will have a limited time for completion (one class period for in-class interviews; one week for field interviews). A surveys will be recorded but will receive non-letter grades. Group projects will be proposed and presented in-class, and final projects will be screened online as well as in-house.

#### Outcomes (Assessment Plan):

It is expected that students will demonstrate competence in this course through written and/or oral analysis of films shown in class, and through researching, planning, and executing an original documentary project. The rubrics for assessing student competency are a fully integrated part of this course (written exams, class presentations, response papers, drafts of group projects).

The iODP assessment plans includes student video journals, survey results, as well as critical commentary from the instructor at each stage of the project. Templates that the instructor will use to assess student video journals are--

#### Interviews:

- (1) Did the student interviewer develop the rapport needed to get the interview off the ground?
- (2) What alternative questions might have been used to achieve this goal?
- (3) Did the interviewer achieve a clear picture of the relationship between the subject and their job?
- (4) Did the interviewer successfully elicit the subject's feelings about their job?
- (5) Did the interviewer elicit information about the subject's job responsibilities and scope of activities?
- (6) Did the interviewer bring forth previously unknown facts about the subject and/or the job?
- (7) Did the framing and composition compliment the subject?
- (8) Was the audio clear and understandable?

#### Interview Editing:

- (1) Did the team choose the best horizontally composed clip?
- (2) Did the editors properly compensate for varying volume levels?
- (3) Did the editors successfully use the software to correct for contrast-ratio values?
- (4) Did the editors successfully compensate/correct color balance?

#### Collaboration and Dissemination:

- (1) Did student teams engage with students at other colleges or universities?
- (2) How accurate was student assessment of the feasibility of producing a documentary their subject?
- (3) Did student teams create a fallback strategy?
- (4) Where student teams aware of ethical obligations and limits; did they employ them effectively?
- (5) Did student work reach the desire audience(s)?

Required Resources: In addition to using the iPad in the iOrgaphy configuration, students in the *Documentary Filmmaking* class will have access to four iMac NLE editing systems with Adobe Premiere editing software during class meeting hours. (Four additional iMac NLE systems with the same software are available during "Open Access" hours on the Ground Floor of the Library.) The Communication Arts Department has a dedicated inventory of professional quality portable audio and video capture resources that will afford students the opportunity to 'scale up' the experiences from the iODP proposal. All final documentary films will be saved on dedicated hard drives (as well as DVDs) affording the course instructor the opportunity to view and critique the work privately, as well as present materials during class critiques.

Communications Plan: Students' works will be disseminated to the campus through the Department's dedicated cable channel (CH.36). Additionally, student-created work will appear on dedicated YouTube and Vimeo channels, and a student created Facebook page (inclusive of video journals). Students will also be asked to engage in collaborative efforts that will appear online. The instructor will engage local mass media (*MetroWest Daily News*, *Globe West*, *The Gatepost*) as well as present results at in a campus-wide forum such as the "Day in May". Additionally, the instructor is a "corresponding member" of [CILECT](#)—and international association of film and

television educators, as well as the U.S. affiliate, the [University Film and Video Association](#). Assuming timely approval, the instructor will present a pre-summary report at one or both of these meetings.

Project Timeline:

Award received: September 3, 2014

Workshops and Training: September 3-12, 2014

Assessment Results: December 29, 2014

Presentation of Student Work: December 15-19 2014 (Exam Date--TBD)

Budget:

Hardware (6 units of each)

iOgrapher for Mobile Media Case for iPad	65.00
Polaroid Studio Series Telephoto & Wide Angle Lens kit	39.95
Manfrotto MKC3-H01 Compact Series Tripod w/ Video Grip Head	59.88
iRig Pre Universal Microphone Interface for iPad, iPhone	36.80
Bescor LED-70 Dimmable 70W Video Light	39.95

Software (download)

Cinemek Storyboard Composer (scripter/storyboard)	14.99
iMovie (editing)	4.99

Subtotal: **\$261.56**

Total: **\$1,569.36**