

**Florida International University**  
**CARTA School of Music**  
**MUS 5910 Research: Documentary Film Scoring**  
**Spring 2016 Selected Fridays 1:00 –2:00 p.m. MBUS Main Gallery - and private meetings TBA**

**Professor:** Dr. Orlando Jacinto Garcia  
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**Office hours:** MBUS 439 by appointment

**Course description:** MUS 5910 is designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of scoring music for documentary filmmaking. This will be accomplished through two approaches. The first will be class meetings to discuss and analyze important documentary films produced during the previous six decades to understand how music/sound is used in them. Students will be responsible for viewing and analyzing the films prior to the class and then participate in class discussions based on the findings of their analysis of how sound and music is used. The second approach will be the scoring of a short documentary being produced by students in the RTV4323 class being taught in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The short documentary (ca 10-15 min.) will be developed throughout the semester as a collaborative project in segments (assignments) and the final product due at the end of the semester. Prerequisite for the class is permission of the instructor and/or graduate standing in music composition. In selected cases advanced students in the upper level of the undergraduate composition program may be considered.

**Course objectives:** Students in this course are expected to understand the basic development of documentary films and the music used in them, from the earliest moments of technological and societal changes during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that led to the first instances of non-fiction, narrative filmmaking, to key contemporary moments that have shaped the genre as a whole. In order to effectively score documentary films, it is important for music students to understand some of the key questions, ethical debates and controversies that have shaped the genre since the first moments of documentary filmmaking:

- What is a 'documentary,' and why is this the term used to describe the genre?
- Is it possible to 'document reality' and what are the subjective choices made by all filmmakers that shape the stories they tell - what role does sound play in these choices?
- What changes when the camera captures a scene from 'real life' and you add music/sound?
- How involved can filmmakers be in the process of creation and interaction with their subjects while still remaining true to their objectives and honest with their audiences and how can music impact this?
- What are the ethical questions facing documentary filmmakers and what responsibilities do they have towards their subjects and stories?

As the second key component to the course, it is expected that students will consider these questions when watching the films assigned, during their discussions and analysis, and that they will apply what they are learning to the collaborative documentary projects that they will develop over the course of the semester.

**Student learning outcomes:** By the end of the semester, it is expected that students will leave class with the following:

- 1) A basic overview of the history, development and impact of documentary films and documentary film music

- 2) An understanding of the films assigned in the class in terms of their contribution to the genre, why they are considered seminal films, the influence of both the film and the filmmaker within a broader societal context, the role music/sound played in these films and the ability to convey this knowledge through participation in class discussion
- 3) The skills needed to produce film/sound for a short documentary film while collaborating with the film maker – this may include the further development of audio recording and editing techniques as needed for the projects

**Text book/Readings:** Aufderheide, Patricia. (2007). *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press (**recommended but not required**). Additional readings may be required throughout the semester and provided in PDF

**Class Expectations:** One fourth of the grade in this course will be based on analytical assignments related to the screenings and how music is used in these films; the other three quarters will be based on the production of the music being written for the documentary project, which will be produced through multiple assignments, each earning an individual grade, as well as a final grade earned on the documentary itself. **IMPORTANT:** This is a graduate class, and the expectation is that all necessary composition and technology classes needed to create these projects at a high level have already been completed.

**Assignments (description, percentage of overall grade, and grading):**

- **Attendance and participation:** Because this class only meets once a week, in addition to short private sessions, it is expected that students will show up, fully prepared to both class and private sessions as scheduled. You will be allowed one unexcused absence for the semester. As per FIU policy, any other absence that is not a documented family or medical emergency, and for which you do not notify the professor within 24-hours of the missed class, will be counted as unexcused. Each unexcused absence after the first will result in a grade reduction of your final grade (A to A-, B+ to B, etc.).

**The grade for the class will be based on the following elements/assignments (see calendar below for due dates):**

- **Analytical Assignments of how sound/music is used in each of 6 documentary films assigned in class and participation (30%):**  
At the beginning of the semester you will be provided with questions outlining an analytical methodology for analyzing how sound and image interact and how this relates to documentary films. You will then apply this methodology to each of the films assigned in class and present your analysis to the class and at that time turn in your assignment for a grade. The films will be available in the library and it is your responsibility to watch each and have your analysis ready for class as per the class schedule. Grading will be based on the accuracy and completeness of the analysis – each analysis will be worth (5%) of the total grade and late or incomplete assignments will not be accepted
- **Scoring assignments (70%):** Throughout the semester you will be completing scoring assignments while working with film students in the RTV 4323 course. These assignments consist of the following: Interview (15%), Sequence (15%), Cinema Verite (15%) and Final Project (25%) – due dates are listed in the calendar below. The projects should be completed using audio editing software such as Pro Tools, Logic, Digital Performer, and/or any other

similar software. The sound files for the assignments can be created by sampling live instruments, ambient sounds, utilizing sound synthesis, MIDI keyboards, synthesizers, etc., recording performers/performances of your notated works on acoustic instruments and any other sound compilation that will be appropriate for each of the visual components of the documentary film. Grading will primarily be based on (1) completing the assignments on time and (2) the feasibility of the integration of the sound work with the images/narration. The composition student's presentation regarding their assignment to the class as indicated on the schedule below for each assignment will also be considered in the grading.

**Ethical Conduct & Plagiarism:** Student must follow the Standards of Conduct described in the student handbook ([http://www.fiu.edu/~sccr/standards\\_of\\_conduct.htm](http://www.fiu.edu/~sccr/standards_of_conduct.htm)). Students are expected to use all resources, including books, journals, and computers only in legal and authorized ways. Participants are expected to perform individual assignments without consulting each other. Participants in this course are also reminded that materials may not be pasted or paraphrased from printed, electronic or any other sources without appropriate citations and credits. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and will result in penalties as set forth by University policies.

### Course schedule

1/15 Overview for course and discussion of analytical methodology; assignment for next class analyze Man with a Movie Camera - available on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z97Pa0ICpn8>

1/22 Discuss Man with a Movie Camera - analysis assignment due; assignment for next class analyze Grizzly Man (available in both MMC and BBC libraries)

1/29 Discuss Grizzly Man - analysis assignment due; assignment for this week: **treatments** to be made available to comp students for selection early this week with selections due by Thursday 2/4

2/5 Joint viewing Harlan County 1:30-4:00 and meeting of students collaborating - MBUS

2/12 Discuss Harlan County and prior joint class meeting/collaborations; assignment for next week add sound to **video interview** - 2' video interview due for film class students today to be made available to comp students beginning of week - private meetings throughout the week to discuss approach, work in progress

2/19 **Sound due for video interviews from comp students at the beginning of the period** - present work completed for video interviews and discuss;

2/26 Joint viewing Why We Fight 1:30/4:00 BBC (discuss collaborations) - assignment for next week add sound to **sequences** - private meetings throughout the week to discuss approach, work in progress

3/4 **Sound due for sequences from comp students at the beginning of the period** - present work completed for sequences and discuss; Briefly discuss Why We Fight and prior joint class meeting;

3/11 No Class - private meetings as needed

3/18 Spring Break - - watch Thin Blue Line <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXsjVPKpOTM> and Act of Killing for discussion on 4/1 after break

3/25 No class: assignment for next class add sound to **cinema verite** - private meetings throughout the week to discuss approach, work in progress

4/1 Discuss Act of Killing and Thin Blue Line analysis assignment due (select one); analysis assignment due; **Sound due for cinema verite from comp students at the beginning of the period** - present work completed for sequences and discuss; assignment for next class analyze Citizen Four

4/8 Discuss Citizen Four analysis assignment due;

4/15 Joint viewing at BBC 1:45 – 4:30 The Act of Killing – be ready to present all collaborative work and discuss - assignment for the next 3 weeks complete the Final Project due May 5 – weekly private meetings as needed

4/22, and 29 edit work with film students

5/4 **Final projects due at the beginning of the period** - for screening TBD

**\*\*\*\*Below is a description of the assignments the film students will be basing each of the segments you will be collaborating with. Your work will be to add a sound/music component for each (except the treatment). This is provided to give you insight and a more complete view of what the documentary film projects consist of.**

**Two-page treatment:** This treatment should clearly outline the proposed film that will be produced. The outline should include why the subject matter will make for compelling storytelling, the primary characters involved in the story, and how the filmmaker will go about gathering the footage needed to create the film that is being proposed.

**Interview project:** The voices of your subjects are probably the *most* important element of a documentary. It is how we learn about your characters, and why we become invested in their stories. This assignment is designed to help you work on your interviewing techniques, not just in terms of the questions asked (which are of course crucial), but also in your technical approach. For this assignment, you will conduct the first interview for your project, which should be 20 minutes at a minimum (30-45 minutes should be your average), and edit it down to the two or three most compelling moments.

**B-roll/sequence project:** It is essential that your documentary contain multiple edited sequences that will be used to both tell your story and help the film move from one scene to the next. For this assignment, you will take multiple shots from a single scene for your project and edit them into a single sequence that does not use narration or interview footage, but has a clear beginning, middle and end. The initial amount of footage shot is up to you, but the final sequence should be between 0:45–1:00 minute in length.

**Cinema verite project:** The concept of cinema verite ('real cinema') is at the heart of some documentaries, but also highly contested (can anything that is filmed really be 'real?'). We will be discussing the method in class at some length and you will be expected to go and capture your own 1:30–2:00 minutes of cinema verite. This assignment will be completely unedited—only the start and end points will be chosen—and thus it will rely heavily on your ability to find the right scene, know where to shoot and who to follow, and your technical ability with the camera.

**Final project:** Your final project, due at the end of the semester, will be graded in its entirety, based on the elements that were developed in the preceding projects as well as the additional material recorded and edited in order to complete the film.