

LMC 3258 Syllabus

Documentary Film, Section S, 3 credits
Summer, 2026

Instructor Information

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General Course Information

Course Description

Documentary Film introduces students to nonfiction filmmaking as a way of exploring real-world stories, environments, and social issues through creative expression. This course centers on urban gardening and food systems in Atlanta, Georgia, using local farms and community gardens as living sites for documentary inquiry. Students examine documentary as a practice of observation, listening, and interpretation—one that connects everyday labor, ecology, and community history to broader questions of resilience and sustainability.

Through screenings of classic and contemporary documentaries, students analyze how filmmakers shape meaning, represent multiple perspectives, and engage audiences around issues of place, justice, and survival. The course is conceptually grounded in Octavia Butler's EarthSeed philosophy as a lens for thinking about how communities grow food, respond to environmental pressures, and imagine possible futures.

Through class discussions, guided analysis, and hands-on workshops, students learn how core documentary elements work together to tell compelling true stories. Over this intensive five-week summer course, students develop short micro-documentaries (3–5 minutes) rooted in Atlanta's urban gardening ecosystem and created in collaboration with local partners. No prior filmmaking experience is required; the course is designed for students from a range of academic backgrounds interested in storytelling, social inquiry, and creative practice.

By the end of the course, students will produce a short documentary that demonstrates their ability to research responsibly, engage ethically with local communities, and communicate ideas clearly and thoughtfully through nonfiction films.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Distinguish between major approaches to documentary filmmaking and evaluate how each shapes meaning and audience response.
- Analyze how cultural, social, and historical contexts influence the way documentaries communicate with different audiences.
- Critically discuss contemporary nonfiction films that engage with topics such as scientific innovation, human cultures, social movements, and personal storytelling.
- Apply fundamental filmmaking techniques—including story development, cinematography, sound, and editing—to produce a short documentary project.

Required Course Materials

Textbooks

Documentary Voice and Vision, by Kelly Anderson and Martin Lucas

LMC 3258 Reading Packet

Tools and Software

4 to 5 GB of cloud-based storage (iCloud, Google Drive, Dropbox, or Box)

Smartphone with HD video capabilities

Otter Voie Meeting (Free Version)

Grading Policy

Evaluating creative work, especially in a visual medium like cinematography and production design, is inherently subjective. However, grades in this course are grounded in clearly defined expectations: the application of course techniques, thoughtful execution, creative intent, and evidence of effort and growth. Assignments are assessed on both technical proficiency and conceptual strength—how well the work communicates an idea visually, whether it reflects the goals of the assignment, and the degree to which it pushes beyond the basic requirements. **Working hard and completing all required elements is expected and valued, but it does not automatically guarantee an "A"; higher marks are**

reserved for work that demonstrates exceptional clarity, creativity, and command of techniques.

A (Excellent/Exceptional Work): 774 – 860 points

An "A-level" submission exceeds expectations in both concept and execution. It demonstrates mastery of visual language and a clear artistic vision. The work uses composition, framing, lighting, color, and production design purposefully and cohesively to enhance narrative or emotional impact. The creative decisions appear thoughtful, and the overall execution feels intentional and refined.

B (Strong/Above Average Work): 688 – 773 points

A "B-level" submission fully meets the assignment requirements and demonstrates solid technique, organization, and visual coherence. Composition is considered, framing is deliberate, lighting and color choices support the mood, and production design contributes to the visual world. While it may not take significant creative risks, it shows a good understanding of course concepts and an apparent effort to apply them meaningfully. Some elements may be underdeveloped or slightly inconsistent, but the overall work is thoughtful and effectively executed. B-level work reflects progress and attention to craft, even if it stops short of being exceptional. Creative risks may be present but not fully realized, or the execution may be solid with minor inconsistencies. Overall, it shows substantial progress and developing fluency in cinematic craft.

C (Satisfactory/Meets Minimum Requirements): 602 – 687 points

A "C-level" submission meets the basic expectations of the assignment but lacks clarity, cohesion, or conceptual execution. The student applies some course concepts but often does so inconsistently or superficially. Additionally, there may be missteps in framing, uneven lighting, unclear production design, or underutilized color and camera treatment. Technical execution is rough, with noticeable issues in lighting, framing, continuity, or design. The piece feels rushed, underdeveloped, and there are apparent missed opportunities to enhance visual storytelling. C-level work demonstrates effort but does not fully realize the potential of the assignment.

F (Below Expectations): 0-601 points

A "F-level" submission falls short of assignment requirements in key areas. The work illustrates minimal effort, lacks clear intention, or disregards fundamental techniques. There are several problems with composition, lighting, framing, or production design that significantly undermine the effectiveness of the piece. The work is incomplete, poorly executed, or shows minimal application of course content. D-level work does not reflect

the standards expected in a creative production course and is not suitable for portfolio inclusion.

Assignments:

The total amount of points you can earn in the course is 860. Below is the list of the points per assignment.

Assignment 1: The Photograph, 50 points

Assignment 2: Observational Exercise, 50 points

Assignment 3: Media Block Discussion 1, 30 points

Assignment 4: Formal Interview, 50 points

Assignment 5: Micro Documentary, 100 points

Assignment 6: Media Block Discussion 2, 30 points

Assignment 7: Ethics Case Study, 250 points

Assignment 8: Documentary Pitch Presentation, 250 points

Exam 1: 50 points

Description of Graded Components

Assignment 1: The Photograph: This assignment is the foundation for your midterm project, a 1-minute documentary, and it is inspired by a scene from Stella Meghie's *The Photograph*. Students will conduct an audio interview with someone in their group, sharing a compelling story about a memory captured in an appropriate photograph on their camera roll. The image should have a strong thematic or emotional connection to their experience at Georgia Tech.

Assignment 2: Observational Exercise: This assignment builds on Assignment 1: The Photograph and focuses on using the Observational Mode of documentary filmmaking to deepen your exploration of the subject and their story. Your task is to capture dynamic b-roll and observational footage visually conveying aspects of your subject's story and experience. You will apply composition and framing techniques discussed in class to create a visually engaging and meaningful collection of footage. This material will serve as an essential component of your midterm documentary.

Assignments 3 and 6 Media Block Discussions: Overview: Working in your 3-minute documentary groups, schedule a Zoom session with group members to discuss the films below. The discussion should focus on the Content, Hypothesis, and Evidence of the

CHEQs framework presented in the movies. The discussion video should be at least 15 minutes and, at most, 40 minutes. Though this is a group assignment, students are graded individually based on their contributions to the discussion. You must actively contribute to the discussion by pulling out specific examples from the assigned reading to receive full credit for the assignment. Also, students must discuss both films within the allotted time.

Assignment 4: Formal Interview: Building on the groundwork laid in Assignment 1: The Photograph, Assignment 2: Observational Filming, and Assignment 3: Observational Mode, this assignment focuses on conducting a sit-down formal interview with the subject of your documentary. The goal is to delve deeper into their story and capture personal, engaging responses that complement your gathered visuals. You will apply composition, framing, and lighting skills to create a visually polished interview. Additionally, active listening techniques will help you adapt and respond during the interview to capture compelling content.

Assignment 5: Micro Documentary: The final cut of your documentary is the polished and professional version of the story you have been building throughout the semester. Building on the feedback and lessons from your rough cut, the Final Cut emphasizes refining your narrative, enhancing technical quality, and incorporating key post-production elements like subtitles, lower thirds, closing credits, music, and color grading. Your final cut should be a cohesive, visually engaging, and emotionally resonant 3-minute documentary demonstrating understanding of storytelling and technical skills.

Assignment 7: Ethics Debate: This assignment aims to engage students in a structured debate exploring documentary filmmakers' ethical responsibilities. Students will critically analyze various documentary films and discuss the ethical dilemmas filmmakers face in pursuing truth and storytelling. Students will join three groups. Each group set will watch the assigned films, and they will prepare a response to their assigned debate topics. It may be beneficial to view both to have more examples to build a compelling argument. Students will conduct research outside of class to prepare materials for the debate. Each group should view their assigned films and research and prepare arguments based on their assigned topic for both affirmative and negative positions. Your references should be in relation to specific ethical issues that arise within your assigned film. Students should use various credible sources, including academic articles, film reviews, and interviews. **To receive full credit for this assignment, you must actively participate in the debate and complete a peer review of another group.**

Assignment 8: Documentary Pitch Presentation: Students will develop a detailed pitch deck and proposal for a 10-minute documentary on a topic of their choice. This pitch deck should outline a documentary concept and serve as the foundation for decision-making.

The pitch should be compelling, visually appealing, and clear, and it must follow the required structure for consistency and evaluation.

Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. I will take attendance at the start of every session. Anyone who misses four classes or has four unexcused absences will automatically drop a letter grade. Anyone who accumulates six unexcused absences will automatically fail. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes after the scheduled start time are considered absent. The Institute's [rules and regulations](#) for approved absences will be strictly adhered to. If you must miss class, please contact me through MS Teams **at least 30 minutes before** class time to discuss excusing your absence. If you miss an in-class exercise or film shoot due to an unexcused absence, then you will not be permitted to make it up.

Core IMPACTS

This is a Core IMPACTS course in the Humanities area. Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master the course content and support their broad academic and career goals. This course should direct students toward a broad, broad-orienting question: *How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?*

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary or philosophical texts or works in the visual or performing arts.

Course content, activities, and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404) 894-2563 as soon as possible to make an appointment to

discuss your needs, and to obtain an accommodation letter. Also, please schedule a meeting with me to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you.

Course Expectations, Policies and Resources

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

- ENGL 1102
- LMC 2000
- LMC 2400 or LMC 2500

Microsoft Teams

We will use **Microsoft Teams** as the primary method of communication in this course. I will share weekly objectives, notes, journal prompts, prereading assignments, previewing assignments, and announcements through Teams. Microsoft Teams is the **best (and preferred) method** to contact me outside of class. If you are running late or need to take an excused absence, please notify me by sending a message through Teams. Emails will not suffice in these instances. If you would like to schedule a meeting with me outside of class, please send those requests via email.

Exams

Except for Practical Exam #1, all exams are administered on Canvas and will close indefinitely after the due date. You can access the exam once it opens and can complete the exam on your own time. Forgetting, oversleeping, computer failure, power failures, and loss of Wi-Fi are not adequate excuses for an incomplete or missed quiz. Please plan accordingly.

Late Assignments and Extensions

Canvas will automatically apply a 6% **deduction per day** that the assignment is **late**, regardless of the reason why it's late. Students may request a one-time extension on any assignment **except for the final project**. Late penalties also apply to group projects. It is essential to maintain open lines of communication with your team to ensure that someone uploads the assignment on time. Students who are ill or have extenuating circumstances may request a 2-day extension on any assignment. Please send your request for an extension to me via Teams.

Viewing List

To access the assigned films, navigate to Canvas > **Pages** > “Viewing List”

Reading List

To access the articles and book sections, navigate to Canvas > **Files** > “Reading Sections”

Schedule of Classes

Week 1: Defining a Documentary

- Dates: May 19, 21, and 22
- Topics: Course Overview, Rhetorics of Appeal, CHEQs Framework, Systems
- Reading: Reading Packet Article 1; Voice & Vision Chapters 1 - 3
- Assignment: Assignment 1, Assignment 2
- Viewings: Media Block 1

Week 2: Understanding Ecosystems

- Date: May 26, 28, and 29
- Topic: 6 Modes of Documentary, Eco systems mapping: people, processes, environments, Observational Filmmaking Techniques
- Reading: Reading Packet Articles 2 and 3; Voice & Vision Chapters 7, 9, and 15
- Assignment: Assignment 3

Week 3: Labor, Process, and Story Development

- Date: June 2, 4, and 5
- Topic: Interview Techniques, Documentary Ethics, Ethics Case Study, From System to Story
- Reading: Voice and Vision Chapters 3, 4, and 6
- Assignment: Assignment 4, Assignment 7
- Viewings: Media Block 2

Week 4: Production – Documenting the Ecosystem

- Date: June 9, 11, and 12
- Topic: Cinematography Techniques, Post-Production Techniques
- Reading: Reading Packet Article 4
- Assignment: Assignment 5, Assignment 6
- Viewings: Media Block 3

Week 5: Developing the Documentary

- Date: June 16, 18, and 19
- Topic: Structuring the Long Form Documentary
- Reading: Reading Packet Article 5
- Assignment: Assignment 8