Example

Documentary Filmmaking – Instructional Design

Documentary filmmaking is a process of building layers and integrating those layers in a way to provide maximum impact of content. Using Layered Design, as described by Gibbons (p. 315), the modules needed for this instruction will be able to evolve and progress as technology and styles of documentary production progress.

Documentary filmmaking, specifically content creation, requires knowledge of many subjects and topics within those subjects, but the general production can be taught using a specific set of skills. Thinking visually, interviewing and connecting with people, planning production, using video cameras, framing shots and capturing action, and finally editing footage for a finished product. By mastering these fundamental skills, students can concentrate their efforts on content, and focus on creating professional products. Many times, students are so frozen by the technical skills needed, and cannot progress beyond them. Completion of this supplemental material will allow for more classroom time to focus on content and for hands-on use of the equipment.

Terminal Objective:
Upon completion of the modules, students will understand the ideas and practices needed be able to develop an idea for a documentary film, plan the production, shoot the material needed for the production, and edit the material into a final film. Students will be able to identify key concepts in storytelling methods and the threads of a potential story to build visual sequences and scenes off of. Students should be able to identify qualities in documentaries they like or find interesting, and apply those same threads and thoughts to their own work.

Enabling Objectives:

1. Students will be able to identify viable subjects for short documentary films.
    a. Who is the person? What is interesting about their story?
    b. What are the visual sequences you can build from their story?
    c. Why is this interesting and what is the potential audience? Is it universal or niche?
2. Students will be able to create shot lists, interview questions, and camera schematics for documentary productions.

    a. Students can identify the shots needed before going on a shoot and are visualizing the scenes in their minds. This can be shown through storyboard and proper shot lists and interview questions. Students should be versed enough in research and questions to have a casual, but focused, conversation with the subjects without simply asking questions on their list.
3. Students will be able to create storyboards showing scenes of the films they want to make.
    a. Storyboards do not need to be complex drawings; stick figures and motion arrows work best. The purpose of the storyboard is to establish screen space and flow before going on a shoot. Some things will obviously change as the shoot unfolds, but going in with a plan will help the students stay focused and attentive. The key to a good shoot is not feeling lost or just filling time, students must execute a plan, be focused, and be aware of people's time commitment and schedules.
4. Students will be able to identify and use Master Scene shot selection, the 180 Degree Rule, and the Rule of Thirds.
    a. Students will know how to incorporate wide, medium, and close up shots for optimum visual storytelling methods.
    b. Students will know how to keep up the willful suspension of disbelief needed for successful filmmaking and understand how the 180 degree rule plays into that success.
5. Students will be able to identify the following terminology:
    a. White balance
    b. Gain
    c. Iris/F-stop
    d. Depth of Field
6. Students will be able to organize footage in a non-linear editing system.
    a. Students will know how to create bins
    b. Students will know how to create sequences
    c. Students will know how to create sub clips

7. Students will be able to create a rough and final cut of a short documentary film.
    a. Students will assemble an edit by marking in/out points through clips and dropping them on the timeline
    b. Students will understand the difference between a rough cut, fine cut, and final edit
    c. Students will learn to assemble non-linear footage to tell a greater story

Assessment:

1. Students will complete a short series of terminology quizzes.
2. Students will turn in written production plans that will be assessed by a provided rubric.

3. Students will complete a peer review of all plans produced in the class and will be assessed based on their ability to discuss the work using the proper terminology.
4. Students will write a paper that describes the major units learned in this course as they're applied and analyzed by a short documentary film of their choice.

Layered Design

Content Layer:

The abstract subject matter of a documentary film production course lies in a student's ability to use common film practices to create compelling visual stories. Often, a new student is paralyzed by all of the technical work and cannot put those theories and practices into creating work of their own. The units needed to facilitate this kind of learning are as follows:

1. **Identifying topics:** This unit feeds into all subsequent units and layers of the documentary production process. Without successful identification of subject matter, the final project, and execution of technical skills, will be for nothing. A viewer will not engage with a film that does not have a structured and identifiable narrative. Subject matter will be made available by brainstorming and discussing possible film ideas, and then tracing all of the needed elements for a visual story.
2. **Thinking visually:** Often, students in an intro level film production course forget they've ever seen a film or television show. They do not have the visual vocabulary to recreate the common practices used in all film production. This unit, as well as the topics unit, are theoretical study of the ideology needed when creating documentary film, and will allow for subsequent layers to be of a higher value and quality. Subject matter will be made available by analyzing documentary films and breaking them down into individual visual components.
3. **Interviewing techniques:** Standard documentary film is based on the ability of the filmmakers to connect with and convey the ideas of a subject or social actor (Nichols, p.46). Completion of this unit will allow for students to use techniques learned in identifying a topic and thinking visually conveying a personality or character through film, rather than someone answering a list of questions. This unit is critical to the final success of a film. Subject matter will be made available by examining interviews in documentary films next to the visual style and landscape of the film. Students will identify layers of information being presented at the same time by audio and visual components.
4. **Production Plans and Schedules:** Students will learn to create production plans consisting of shot lists, interview questions, and camera schematics, so they their documentary team will have a blueprint to work on and complete the production phase of their film.

Subject matter will be made available by filling out pre-made, industry standard, forms.

5. **Framing Shots and Capturing Action:** Students will learn about Master Scene, 180 Degree Rule, and Rule of Third ideologies and practices. This unit allows for a professional looking product, and gives students a good rubric of information they should be collecting on a documentary film shoot. This unit will provide the information needed for putting a production plan into action on the set.
6. **Directing the Documentary:** Students will learn the ethical and acceptable practices of directing social actors and subjects. Subject matter will be made available through discussion of what is appropriate, and what is not, when asking documentary subjects to perform in front of a camera.
7. **Non-Linear Editing:** Students will learn basic navigation of non-linear editing software and be able to import and organize footage, structure a narrative through the software, and create a rough cut and final edit of their film. Subject matter will be made available by analyzing documentary film edits, as well as creating multiple stylistic edits of their own content. The success of all previous units will be measured and assessed by viewing a finished edit. Problem areas from previous units are easily identified when starting this process.

Strategy Layer:

The units and tasks described in this course are designed for personal consumption and practice of a student, and to supplement in-class learning. Completing the modules and units in the Content Layer will allow for more successful films, but the modules will not require students to create a film. Students will have access to the information in an LMS and will be able to complete the tasks on their own time, through video lecture, online quizzes, and discussion forums. Successful completion of these modules will create a more useful time when they are physically in a production studio, editing room, and location based shoots.

Message Layer:

Breaking down common film production terminology and pairing it with real-world examples and discussion will deliver the message for this course. By identifying professional film language and actively showing those moments in a finished film, the technical jargon will become conversational and easy to understand. By offering each piece individually, and on-demand via the LMS, students will be able to spend more time on the messages they have trouble grasping, and move quickly through those they are familiar with or immediately understand.

Control Layer:

Students will turn in assignments and participate in discussion boards within the LMS. Messages delivered will be evaluated by the instructor and by peers within the class. Students can move seamlessly through the units, adjusting assignments

within each as their comprehension level grows. Documents and assignments will continue to be edited until they are at a satisfactory competency level.

Representation Layer:

The modules for this course consist of a greater media literacy and ability to create effective media through documentary storytelling. By completing each module, and improving their competency for the material, representation in both the course content, and their own films, will grow as each is completed. By increasing competency in media literacy, for the purpose of media creation, the student will also have a better understanding of the content being delivered. Each layer builds upon itself, not only for the final products of the course, but for the understanding of each module presented.

Media-Logic Layer:

The sequence of units in this course is designed for a gradual build of content consumption and practical use. Each unit consists both of video lecture and videos posted for analysis. The lectures will often provide the analysis and breakdown of each documentary film students are asked to watch. The media used in this course, mostly video, is designed to help facilitate the learning of how video layers fit into documentary storytelling, and more specifically, how students can go about creating those layers for an effective final product.

Data Management Layer:

Through terminology tests, production analysis, and written schematics for film ideas, the LMS will collect and store all data for the course. All assignments will be digital, allowing for easy collaboration and sharing amongst the instructor and the students. All assignments will be graded and critiqued using the LMS. With the completion of each unit, the student will collect and create their own data that will ultimately result in stronger media and documentary film creation.

References

Gibbons, A. S. & P. C. Rogers. (2009). The architecture of instructional theory. In C. M. Reigeluth & A. A. Carr-Chellman (Eds.), *Instructional-design theories and models: Building a common knowledge base, Volume III* (pp. 305-326). New York: Routledge.

Nichols, Bill. "Why are ethical issues central to documentary filmmaking?." *Introduction to documentary*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. 42-66. Print.