

**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION**

**JOUR 410 RADIO DOCUMENTARY
4 UNITS**

Instructor: Sandy Tolan

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course builds on basic reporting skills for public broadcast style learned in JOUR 409 and focuses on more advanced reporting and production skills geared for long-form productions. Emphasis will be on documentary structure, advanced use of sound, scene creation, writing for the ear, developing a narrative voice, and documentary point of view.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

Students will develop knowledge of the history of the radio documentary, and various public radio documentary styles, while producing their own documentaries over the course of the semester. In the process students will develop advanced production, interviewing, narration, reporting and editing skills. In addition, regular story conferences will help students sharpen their "story sense" as the documentary projects move from the page to the streets of Los Angeles, and, later, the production studio. All along the emphasis will be on in-depth story telling, as students are trained to produce the thoughtful, sound-rich, in-depth radio associated with the best tradition of public radio.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Basic knowledge of radio production.

Staying current on current events: Documentary story lists and class discussions will draw from the pressing issues facing the residents of Los Angeles, and a broad knowledge of those issues will be required for participation in those discussions. Students should read the *LA Times* or other local daily paper every day, regularly visit and read online sites such as *laobserved.com*, and listen the news on one or more local public radio stations, e.g., or KPCC 89.3 or KCRW-FM 89.9.

Assignments:

Assignments will come from a mixture of readings and online listening. Texts will include selections from a special documentary edition of the quarterly, *Nieman Reports*; from the websites *transom.org*, *thirdcoastfestival.org*, and *radiocollege.org*, and from *Sound Reporting: The National Public Radio Guide to Radio Journalism and Production* by editors Marcus D. Rosenbaum and John Dinges. Listening assignments will be given at the end of class each week, and will depend on the content of the documentaries in production. Additional assignments will require students to bring in their favorite (or least favorite) radio stories and to talk in class about its strengths (or weaknesses). In this way students will have the opportunity to contribute to an online archive of the best of public radio storytelling, coordinated by the instructor, which will serve future radio students at Annenberg.

Midterm project: As part of the development of the long-form documentary, a four-minute feature story will be required before the spring break. This will be both a story unto itself, to be aired on Annenberg Radio News, and a means to assess the story development of the longer project.

Final project: Long-form radio documentary, minimum 8 minutes, maximum 15. Length will be determined by content, story "do-ability," and the experience of the reporter.

Both midterm and final projects will be evaluated on the quality of the research and reporting, clarity of the writing and narrative structure, effectiveness and originality of the use of sound, compelling nature of the scenes and other story-telling techniques, seamlessness of the editing, and quality of the recorded interviews and final narration.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Although each reporter will develop his/her own documentary, this will be in a real way a team production. Each reporter will be the lead producer on one story/doc, and associate producer on another. Story sessions will depend heavily on each student's participation. Documentary brainstorming and constructive critique of works in progress is an essential part of the journalistic/creative process. Hence ***attendance every week is required. Unexcused absence or regular tardiness will be penalized.*** This is a matter of respect for yourself, your colleagues, and your teacher. Of course, genuine emergencies are excepted. (These do not include assignments for other classes.) Please email or phone me well in advance if you are not able to make it to class.

GRADING CRITERIA

The following will count toward your grade:

- 25% class participation
- 20% homework assignments
- 20% midterm project
- 35% final project

EQUIPMENT AND EDITING

The School has field recorder kits available for check out from the Equipment Room. We will use *Adobe Audition* digital editing software, which is loaded on certain computers in the Annenberg Digital Lab. The Annenberg Radio News booth should be used for recording your scripts. The booth should only be used for designated assignments that require an audio board and for recording voice tracks. The booth cannot be used Tuesdays and Thursdays between 8 am and 4:30 pm because of the newscast production. All other assignments and all basic editing should be done on the computers in the Digital Lab. The booth is only accessible during the hours the Digital Lab is open, so plan your workload accordingly.

Hours of the Annenberg Digital Lab:
Monday-Thursday: 10:00 am – 10:00 pm
Friday & Saturday: 10:00 am – 6 pm

STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301. The phone number is 213-740-0776.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will immediately receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

PLAGIARISM

All journalists must be committed to the truth. Presenting components of a story done by someone else without attribution is dishonest. Fabricating any part of a story is a lie. Any act of fabrication or plagiarism will result in a failing grade in this course.

INTERNSHIPS

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Sandy Tolan is a radio and print journalist who has reported from more than 30 countries over the last 25 years. He is the author of two books and has written for more than 40 newspapers and magazines, and produced hundreds of documentaries and features for NPR and Public Radio International. Since 1982 he has reported from American Indian country, along the U.S.-Mexico border, across New England and the American West, in Latin America, the Middle East, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and South and East Asia. A central focus of his work has been the intersection of land conflicts, racial and ethnic identity, natural resources, and the global

economy. He is a co-founder of Homelands Production (www.homelands.org), an independent production company focusing on documentary work for public radio. He is a lead producer for the Homelands series WORKING, monthly profiles on workers around the world broadcast on public radio's *Marketplace*.

Sandy is the author of two books: *Me and Hank, A Boy and His Hero 25 Years Later*, an exploration of race and sports in America; and *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, A Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East*, which was a finalist for a National Book Critics Circle award, and which won Booklist's "Top of the List" award in nonfiction, and the Christopher Award for works "affirming the highest values of the human spirit." The book also won honorable mention for the Sophie Brody Medal for Outstanding Achievement in Jewish Literature from the American Library Association.

Sandy has garnered more than 25 national and international journalism awards, mostly for his radio work, including a duPont-Columbia Silver Baton, three Robert F. Kennedy awards, a United Nations Gold Medal award, and two honors from the Overseas Press Club. He has written for the *New York Times Magazine*, *Audubon*, the *Nation*, the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *USA Today*, and dozens of other publications. He was a 1993 Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

From 2000-2007, Sandy taught at the Graduate School of Journalism at UC-Berkeley, where he coordinated international reporting programs, taught radio feature and documentary classes, and served as an I.F. Stone Fellow. In 2007, the 11 reporters in his "Early Signs" climate change class, who produced an eight-part series, "Reports From a Warming Planet," for *Salon.com* and NPR's *Living On Earth*, won the prestigious George Polk award. It was the first time the award has been given to students.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: January 17: Introduction

- Class overview and review of syllabus, discussion of class objectives and goals, initial brainstorming of documentary themes and topics.
- Introduction to the radio documentary, through examples.
- Discussion of recording equipment and Adobe Audition editing software with Chuck Boyle and Billy Higgins.

Week 2 assignment:

- Bring in three one-paragraph ideas for your documentary topic. Pitches should be succinct, with clear indications of the compelling nature of the topic, the potential for scenes, characters, and use of sound, and a sense of logistics, or “do-ability” of the story.
- Bring in one example of an especially strong long feature or documentary, and be prepared to discuss its strengths and weaknesses. Choose a five- to seven-minute segment for the class to hear. (You may bring in a CD or send the link to me online, at least one day prior to class.)
- *Sound Reporting*, Chapter 2, "Getting Started," pp. 15-24, and Chapter 3, "The Reporter," pp. 25-34.

WEEK 2: January 24: Doc Assignment, part one: Identifying the story

- Discussion of your ideas and other potential documentary topics. Initial winnowing of ideas.
- What works and what doesn't: Playing your long feature/documentary selections from this week.

Week 3 assignment:

- Refine your pitches by focusing on one topic, and begin the reporting process. Write a succinct, half-page pitch that further develops potential characters, scenes, and logistics. ***Due date: Send to class listserv by 5pm on Tuesday, January 29, so that your colleagues and our Week 3 guest can review them in advance of class.***
- Read *Nieman Reports* “Documentary and Journalism,” pp. 4-21 and 57-58. Be prepared to discuss the subject in class.
- Explore www.loe.org: Listen especially to longer pieces and special projects in order to prepare for our Week 3 guest.

WEEK 3: January 31: Doc Assignment, part two: Zeroing in on your story.

Discussion of *Nieman Reports* articles on the role of documentary in society.

Review of documentary proposals.

Guest speaker:

Ingrid Lobet, award-winning journalist; reporter, editor, and West Coast bureau chief for public radio's "Living on Earth." Ingrid will review your documentary proposals and play stories.

Week 4 assignment:

- Read *Sound Reporting*, pp. 93-102, "Conceiving Features," by Robert Krulwich
- Read *Sound Reporting*, pp. 35-45, "Interviewing," by Robert Siegel.
- Detailed reporting plan (to be discussed in class).
- Optional but strongly encouraged: Bring in an example of a short piece (4.5 minutes or less) that effectively uses sound and storytelling techniques.

WEEK 4: February 7: Setting up your story

- Extensive review of story plans.
- Discussion of Krulwich and Siegel.

Week 5 assignment:

- Homework assignment for week 5:

Interviewing tips, by Jay Allison

<http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=194>

- Read Terry Gross, *All I Did Was Ask*, pages 137-142 (Grandmaster Flash), 157-166 (Jody Foster), 255-262 (Frank Stella).
- Read Studs Terkel, selections from *Hard Times* pp. 29-34 (Ed Paulson); pp. 53-56) (Cesar Chavez); and *The Studs Terkel Reader*, pp. 38-49 (Andy Johnson and Wallace Rasmussen); 205-210 (Peter Ota); 226-236 (Florence Scala); 272 -273 (Chester Kolar); 336-345 (Roberto Acuna); 467-475 (Lloyd King).
- Bring in tape from your first interviews (pre-select ten minutes of interviews from at least two separate sessions).
- Bring in examples of strong, compelling interview segments from a public radio produced story or interview.

WEEK 5: February 14: The interview

- Story assessment.
- Discussion:
 - The art and craft of the interview
 - Recording techniques for interviews
- Listening to your interview segments

- Listening to your public radio selected stories

Week 6 assignment:

- *Sound Reporting*, Chapter 12, "Field Recording Techniques," pp. 149-161.

Getting Good Tape, by Scott Carrier

<http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=207>

Getting Good Ambient Sound, by Robin White

<http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=201>

How I Use Sound in a Story, by Jim Metzner

<http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=208>

Remote Recording Survival Guide, by Tom Lopez

http://www.transom.org/tools/recording_interviewing/200206.remote.tlopez.html

Shout Out! A Kids' Guide to Recording Stories, by Katie Davis, with the Urban Rangers

<http://transom.org/tools/basics/200501.shoutout.kdavis.html>

How to Mic a Field Interview, by Robin White

<http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=199>

- Bring in sound recordings from your story assignment. Choose at least four distinct sounds or ambience beds.
- Bring in at least one example of creative or compelling use of sound in a public radio story.

WEEK 6: February 21: Field recording and use of sound

- Story assessment
- Discussion of outlines (due next week) for a short version of your documentary.
- Discussion: Radio and the use of sound.
- Play and critique your field recordings
- Play and critique your public radio use of sound

Week 7 assignment:

- *Sound Reporting*, Chapter 10, "Producing Features," pp. 117-126.

- Bring in an example of a long-form feature that "puts it all together": sound, writing,

- Write a detailed outline for your short feature.

WEEK 7: February 28: The art of the feature

- Story assessment.
- Workshop discussion of the short feature outlines.
- Discussion and examples of short features
- Listening to the short features you brought in

Week 8 assignment:

- *Sound Reporting*, Chapter 6, "Writing News for Radio," pp. 65-79, and Chapter 9, "Writing for

the Ear: A Personal Approach," pp. 105-115.

- "Some Tips on Writing for the Ear," handout.

- Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*, selected pages.

- Bring in examples of great writing for radio.

WEEK 8: March 6: Writing for radio

- Story assessment, with special focus on short feature deadline for next week.
- Discussion: What makes for good writing in radio?
- Brief preliminary discussion of voice technique

- *Week 9 assignment:*
- Read *Sound Reporting*, Chapter 5, "The Editor," pp. 49-63.
- Script Guidelines for a Speedy Edit
<http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=206>

- Finish your midterm short feature assignment.
- Before final production of your short feature, read *Sound Reporting*, Chapter 9, "Delivery: Using Your Voice," pp. 81-89.
- Visit marketplace.org; listen to several longer features and bring in questions for Karen Lowe.

WEEK 9: March 13: Working with an editor.

- Listen to and critique midterm projects.
- Discussion: Working with an editor. Guest speaker: Marketplace Foreign and Special Projects editor, Karen Lowe.

Week 10 assignment:

- Prepare a detailed story outline and structure for your full documentary
- Bring in an example of an especially compelling long feature or documentary.
- The Pen is Easier Than the Mic, by Bill McKibben
http://transom.org/tools/beginnings/2006/200602_bill_mckibben/
 - "A Year to Live, A Year to Die," documentary by Mary Beth Kirchner.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5303770>

MARCH 20: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 10: March 27: Expanding your reach

Story assessment.

Discussion: from the short to the long.

Guest speaker: Independent producer Mary Beth Kirchner.

Week 11 assignment:

- Listen to pieces from Scott Carrier (<http://hearingvoices.com/stories.php?fid=32&fidType=producer>), and Ann Heppermann and Kara Oehler (<http://annkara.org/> - be sure to scroll down and listen to the Anthony Bourdain and "Crossing Borders" pieces), and NPR/National Geographic's "Radio Expeditions" <http://www.npr.org/templates/topics/topic.php?topicId=1023>.

WEEK 11: “My Favorite Things”: Special guest, this week, details forthcoming

Week 12 assignment:

- Find at least two examples of great "scenes" in a public radio story, and bring them into class.
- Chicago Public Radio/Third Coast's "Re-sound" – go to <http://thirdcoastfestival.org/re-sound.asp> and search for "The Outfront Show (#84)."
- Live? Die? Kill? Karen Michel, search for the program on http://thirdcoastfestival.org/audio_library.asp
- First draft of script for documentary.

WEEK 12: April 10: Setting the Scene

- Story assessment: Review of first draft of scripts.
- Discussion of readings.
- Listening to examples of scene-setting.
- Discussion and playing tape from different narrative styles.

Week 13 assignment:

- Various listening and writing assignments, TBA, from thirdcoastfestival.org, transom.org, and radiocollege.org
- First rough mix of doc.

WEEK 13: April 17: First rough mix

- Story assessment: Listening to the first rough mixes.
- Troubleshooting
- Discussion of advanced production techniques.
- Discussion of voicing

Week 14 assignment:

Second rough mix of doc.

WEEK 14: April 24: Second rough mix

- Story assessment: listening to the second rough mixes

Week 15 assignment:

- Final mix due.

WEEK 15: May 1: Final mix

- Critique and assessment of final projects.
- Class evaluation.
- The future of the work.