

Student's Name

*Documentary Studies*

Self-Determined Major Proposal

Cumulative GPA: 3.0 or higher GPA

Advisors: Adam Tinkle, Rik Scarce

Phone number

date of submission

## ***Rationale***

In this increasingly media-saturated world, issues of representation and truth have begun to loom large in the American consciousness. Distinct from narrative and experimental work, documentary media has its own standards of aesthetic, practice, and production. Because it is a medium concerned with both information and storytelling, there is an extensive set of questions concerning the ethics during the process of its production. Good documentary production also requires sound research, observation, interviewing, and artistic merit, all of which I must explore during the course of my studies. The Documentary Studies major will prepare me as both a consumer and producer of documentary to navigate current and future mediascapes in the pursuit of honest, artistic work.

During the course of this major, I will learn the research skills necessary in order to present a well-informed piece of media. From there, I will hone my writing skills, essential in order to produce scripts and other pre-production documents and to apply for grants for funding. I will explore questions of ethics that impact all steps of the creation process from research to recording to post-production: What are the power dynamics in place that have allowed me to be the teller of this story, and do I have the right to do so? How will the production of this piece impact the lives of my subject? What role in the storytelling process should the subject play, how much of a hand should they have in the editing process? How do recording, editing, and distribution techniques impact the story I am trying to tell? I must study proper techniques for observation and interviewing in order to most accurately portray the subject matter, while paying close attention to the questions above. Not only will I consider such theoretical questions, but I will learn about documentary as an artistic form, studying color and composition through the aesthetic lens of the Art Department. Because film is a visual medium and is often judged on its

cinematography and overall visual scheme, it is essential that I study art in order to maximize the aesthetic value of my film products (elective courses will help me understand and evaluate aesthetic concerns of other media, such as the audio documentary). An understanding of color and composition will add to my ability to create and take note of visually appealing pieces.

Arguably the most important aspect of a documentary is the subject matter. Documentary media can focus on any topic, from environmental to political, but this major is constructed in order to inform me about social and cultural subject matter. Courses from the Sociology Department will familiarize me with the methodology for the study of society, also prompting me to develop research and writing skills, which are essential to the pre-production phase of media making. Courses on visual sociology and video ethnography will allow me to more deeply understand the social mechanisms which I will be discussing through documentary, while also informing me of the history of the documentary practice through a sociological lens.

Taken in conjunction with art and documentary studies courses, I will begin to formulate and understand the links between aesthetics, shooting and editing techniques, and subject matter, and hone the messages that my pieces will portray. For example, the combination of instruction in Digital Foundations, Documentary Storytelling, and Sociological Perspectives might prompt me to make a short film on wealth inequality in the U.S. aided by graphics I also design. Questions of ethics raised in Law and Ethics for Media and Socially Engaged Documentary Arts might prompt me to embark on a community-driven, collaborative style project during my Independent Study in Documentary Studies. A genre of photography discussed in Photography I could combine with inspiration from a film viewed in Video Ethnography to inform both the subject matter and style of my capstone project. Courses in the major intersect and inform one another, combining to form an approach which will result in thoughtful, relevant, and artistic

final products. Further, the study of the documentary canon in DS and MF courses will allow me to be an informed member of the industry, understanding potential successes and failures of the form.

The Documentary Studies Self Determined Major is based upon the degree requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Documentary Studies at SUNY-Albany and the Documentary Studies and Production major at Ithaca College. Both of these programs include classes in media production, film aesthetics, and journalism. I have mirrored their programs with courses from the Documentary Studies, Media and Film, Art, and Sociology Departments.

In order for me to be fully prepared for my desired career producing documentary content, it is essential that I study documentary production and editing, media and film theory, studio art, and sociology. This major, unlike any combination of major or minor, will allow me to understand the specificities of documentary media and best prepare myself to enter my desired career.

### ***Special Aspects***

(2.2a) This major is distinct from other programs at Skidmore, such as the Media Studies minor, for its specificity. Because the major focuses on one type of media, it can cover Documentary Studies from every angle. It expands upon the artistic and theoretical concerns covered in the minor to include topics specific to documentary production, such as potential subject matter related to social and cultural fields. Because of its nature as a major rather than minor, it is also able to go more in-depth than the Media Studies program, developing the skills and questions covered in foundational courses of the minor. In order to be prepared to enter into a career in documentary filmmaking, I must be able to explore the interdisciplinary connections involved in the process. Social and cultural documentaries are inherently interdisciplinary, as they combine

the art form of filmmaking with practices of journalism and sociology. It would not be sufficient to study documentary film from solely technical or solely theoretical standpoints, as my preparation would be insufficient in terms of aesthetic or content. The cohesive course of study involved only in a major would be able to provide me with a full grasp on all the academic and artistic elements which combine to form documentary as a field and industry.

(2.2b) Specialized resources necessary for a completion of the Documentary Studies major include media production equipment: microphones, tripods, cameras, lights, and light reflectors. Skidmore's Media Services, MDOCS, and Skidmore Academic Technologies are already in possession of necessary equipment. Editing software such as Adobe Premiere, ProTools, and Photoshop are available on computers in the Scribner Library and DocLab. These resources will be utilized during the production of projects for specific courses and during the completion of the capstone project for the major.

### ***Course List***

The courses which will make up the major in Documentary Studies are as follows:

#### **Foundation**

- MF 101: Introduction to Media and Film, 3 credits
- SO 101: Sociological Perspectives, 3 credits
- AR 136: Digital Foundations, 4 credits

#### **Methodology**

- DS 251: Documentary Storytelling, 3 credits
- AR 229: Photography I, 4 credits
- AR 330: Photography II, 4 credits
- SO 229: Visual Sociology, 4 credits

- SO 307: Video Ethnography, 4 credits

**Theory**

- DS 251C: Socially Engaged Documentary Arts, 3 credits
- MF 351 C: Law and Ethics for Media, 3 credits

**Other**

- DS 371: Independent Study in Documentary Studies, 2 credits
- DS 210: Introduction to Audio Documentary, 3 credits

**Capstone**

- ID 351A: SDM Prep Seminar, 1 credit and ID 372, 3 or 4 credits

**Total Credit Hours: 43-44**

***Disciplinary Breadth***

Disciplines incorporated into this major include Documentary Studies, Media and Film Studies, Sociology, and Art.

**Documentary Studies:** DS 251, DS 251C, DS 371

**Media and Film Studies:** MF 101, MF 351C

**Sociology:** SO 101, SO 229, SO 307

**Art:** AR 136, AR 209, AR 307

***Advancement of Studies***

Sequences which move from 100 level to 300 level occur within the Documentary Studies/Media and Film Departments, the Art Department, and the Sociology Department:

MF101\* → DS 251 → DS 371

SO 101 → SO 229 → SO 307

AR 136 → AR 209 → AR 307

\*Because the DS Department does not offer a 101 class, the foundational course from the Media and Film Studies Department has been substituted in place of a DS 101 course, creating a sequence from 100 to 300 level.

***Elective Courses***

I propose several elective courses related to but not included in the major core of courses:

- AH 251D: Cine Latino, 4 credits
- PL 225: Politics and News Media, 3 Credits
- AR 358 Digital Media: Animation, 4 credits
- MU 307: Music and Society, 3 Credits

***Semester Outline***

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Fall</b>	<b>Spring</b>
<b>First Year (2017-2018)</b>	London FYE Program	<b>Introduction to Media Studies</b>  <b>Socially Engaged Documentary Arts</b>  <b>Sociological Perspectives</b>
<b>Sophomore (2018-2019)</b>	<b>Documentary Storytelling</b>  <b>Intro to Audio Documentary</b>  Cine Latino	<b>Digital Foundations</b>  <b>Media Law and Ethics</b>
<b>Junior (2019-2020)</b>	<b>Visual Sociology</b>  <b>Photography I</b>  Digital Media: Animation	<b>Independent Study in DS</b>  <b>Photography II</b>  <b>Video Ethnography</b>

<b>Senior (2020-2021)</b>	<b>Capstone Prep</b> Politics and News Media	<b>Capstone Final</b> Music and Society
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***Course Descriptions and Rationales***

**1. MF 101: Introduction to Media and Film Studies**

Credits: 4

An interdisciplinary introduction to the questions re: Human dilemmas in the context of an increasingly technology and media saturated culture. The course begins with close consideration of the nature and structure of human communication and an historical overview of communications and media. Students will study media from both psychological and societal perspectives and will consider the impact of media on politics, government, community, and consumer behavior. Special attention will be paid throughout the course to the personal and social impact of current and emerging forms of communication and media.

This course is included under the foundational piece of the major as it introduces the principles of media including and beyond film. It provides a basis for film theory and practice, including both the ethical and aesthetic concerns important to the major. It is taught with the intention of preparing students for extended work in one form of media, which perfectly aligns with my intentions.

**2. DS 251C: Documentary Storytelling**

Credits: 3

The present rearranges the past through the art of documentary storytelling. Every moment of a documentary has already happened. It's through the process of discovery in editing that documentarians determine how to arrange that material into a story. This course will focus on some of the basic concepts and issues that guide documentary storytelling. We will use one of the largest video archives, YouTube, as the material from which we'll create original documentary stories. From concept through presentation, topics covered will include: - Discussing what makes for good story subjects - Learning how to pitch our ideas through loglines, treatments, and public pitches - Figuring out how to best search for material in an archive - Addressing problems of representation, assumptions, and differences of background or culture, choices of modes and models, ethics, narrative structure, rhetorical affect, events that have come and gone - Determining what form our stories should take. Is this story best told as a short? Podcast? Feature? Interactive project? Does it require narration or additional interviews? - Deciding how to craft our stories through the art of editing. We'll be learning basic editing skills in Adobe Premiere and will be encouraged to develop our own personal voice and style, while learning practical skills that are applicable to a multitude of forms. Assignments will be both creative and critical; all will be aimed at sharpening your voice as it fits within the documentary tradition.

This course will build upon the ideas learned in MF 101, honing in on specific relationships to documentary film. It is listed under the methodology component of the major, as it will introduce new

dilemmas specific to the medium while also giving me concrete skills, such as editing on Adobe Premiere and pitching stories. This course will also help me develop my own personal voice in filmmaking, which will include my choices to focus on sociological and cultural topics learned in other courses.

### 3. DS 251C 002: Socially Engaged Documentary Arts

Credits: 3

This course locates the emerging field of "participatory documentary" within the wider landscape of the arts as used towards popular education, social justice, and community building. Beginning with the long history of socially engaged art, the course will focus in especially on participatory approaches to performance, community-based media, media literacy, and media justice. These traditions critique the exclusivity and elitism afflicting all the arts, and ask questions like: What is, or should be, the place of creativity in the lives of individuals and societies? Who is, or gets to be, an artist? Why should a rarefied class of makers be telling everyone else's stories? Could a more inclusive approach help create social bonds, empower the objectified, and bring truer, less distorted representations into our public discourse? Participatory approaches to documentary storytelling cast the documentarian as a facilitator of a process in which non-professionals take an active role in telling their own stories. No sound/radio experience or hands-on media experience is required.

This course is included under theory. It explores issues specifically related to socially engaged documentaries and creates a set of principles on which the practice of socially engaged documentary is based, and asks students to then apply this theory in a documentary project proposal. The course explores many of the ethical concerns specific to documentaries about social issues, which will be essential when creating projects in the future.

### 4. DS 371: Independent Study in Documentary Studies- Audio Documentary Project

Credits: 2

An opportunity for qualified students to pursue independent study or research in Documentary Studies under the supervision of an appropriate faculty member. The written study proposal must be approved by the MDOCS director.

This is the final course in the DS sequence. During the course of my Independent Study, I will develop, record, and edit several episodes of a podcast-style audio documentary project. I will ultimately publish this project online through either SoundCloud, iTunes, or Spotify. Working on this project will allow me to hone interviewing technique and audio production as previously developed in DS 210, and will help add to my portfolio. As a graduate, it is essential that I have a body of work which demonstrates my skill

to potential employers and collaborators. This course will allow me to have a substantial, professional quality audio documentary project in my portfolio in addition to a film project.

## 5. AR 136: Digital Foundations

Credits: 4

A survey of aesthetic and technological best practices in visual communication today. Students will study the basic functions and integral properties of Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, as well as After Effects or other video software while learning the principles of design. Vector and raster imaging techniques, scanning, printing, and font and file management are introduced through a series of demonstrations/projects that build upon each other. Through projects and critiques, students will work to make a visual voice that is distinctive and original. No digital experience necessary.

Documentary filmmaking requires a set of technical skills including, but not limited to, filming, font design, color correction, image manipulation, and animation. AR 136 will introduce skills and softwares essential to the post-production stage of filmmaking, and will allow me to acquire confidence and skills necessary to make a professional piece of work, while also allowing me to develop my own distinct voice. Because of its introductory nature it is included under foundation.

## 6. AR 229: Photography I

Credits: 4

An introduction to the creative and technical possibilities of digital photography. Students will explore the basics of using a camera and imaging software to produce well-crafted and thoughtful digital photographs and prints. Topics include manual camera operations, shutter speed, aperture, RAW file formats, white balance, and composition. Using Photoshop, students will work on file management, image enhancement, and printing. Students will build photographic skill sets as well as a deeper understanding of visual perception and photography as a medium for personal expression. Lectures on historical and contemporary artwork will provide a context for creative approaches to photography. Students should have access to a digital SLR camera with the following: manual option modes for exposure, manual adjustable focus, and RAW file format. This course is a prerequisite for all other photography courses; no previous photography or Photoshop experience is necessary but Macintosh literacy is required.

This course will build upon skills and thinking learned in AR 136. New knowledge of composition and balance will allow me to construct even more meaningful imagery and will contribute to my competency in both the pre- and post-production stages of filmmaking. It will be important for me to develop an understanding of creative concepts related to photography in order to create aesthetically pleasing film projects. The technical skills which the course teaches qualify it as part of the methodology of the major.

### 7. AR 330: Photography II

Credits: 4

A continuation of problems of visual expression and techniques encountered in beginning photography. Students explore advanced digital image manipulation; investigate digital portfolio presentations; as well as refine traditional print aesthetics.

This course will deepen concepts from AR 229, completing the sequence of classes within the Art Department. It will allow me to further explore the image as a means of creative expression, and develop a personal aesthetic to distinguish my work, further developing technical skills which qualify it as a methodology course.

### 8. SO 101: Sociological Perspectives

Credits: 3

The basic concepts and principles of major sociological perspectives. Attention is given to how these perspectives have been developed and used by social scientists to explain social phenomena. Recommended as an introduction to the discipline.

This course will introduce me to the major theories and perspectives in sociology. It will form the basis of the sociology sequence within the major and will allow me to begin to understand the social phenomena that will make up the content and subject matter of my films and the films that I will study.

### 9. SO 229: Visual Sociology

Credits: 4

An introduction to visual sociology as both an analytical tool for more deeply understanding the visual in society and as a means of conveying the results of sociological research. Students will develop the theoretical and conceptual tools necessary to ask more critical questions of the visual world around them and, by producing a sociological documentary of their own, the technical skills to communicate in visual media. No prior experience with videography is required.

This course will connect my introductory understanding of sociology more closely to the field of documentary by considering questions specifically about visual culture. It will not only allow me to understand visual culture, but will equip me with the necessary tools in translating sociological research into documentary film, which is also why it is included as a methodology course.

### 10. SO 307: Video Ethnography

Credits: 4

Video can be used as a research tool to better understand social life. Students will explore key theoretical and empirical works in visual sociology and visual studies and will enhance their skills in ethnographic data gathering and analysis. Students will work on a semester-long research project to produce a sociologically-informed ethnographic documentary from start to finish, becoming conversant in methodological and filmmaking practices. Prior experience with video equipment and editing software is not a requirement.

SO 307 will deepen skills learned in SO 229, allowing me to conduct even more complex research and data analysis. The semester-long project will prove to be my most time-consuming film project yet in the major before my capstone, allowing me to encounter potential problems and solve them before embarking on my final project in the major and completing my methodological sequence.

#### 11. MF 351C: Law and Ethics of Media

Credits: 3

This course provides essential, practical information that is indispensable for media content creators, regardless of their medium, applying to nearly all majors. This course offers an interdisciplinary approach for filmmakers and documentarians, authors and artists, musicians, makers and marketers, to explore ways to protect their ideas, expressive works and creative endeavors from being copied or stolen by others, especially in the digital age. Students will learn to develop approaches regarding underlying policies and to challenge assumptions at the intersection of storytelling, business, art, law and creative expression. Some documentary films will be shown on a few evenings during the semester. Fulfills the Arts Administration Program's Focused Elective requirement.

While other DS courses in the major discuss questions of ethics related to media, MF 351C will further these ideas, grounding them in American law and policy. This course will provide theoretical knowledge essential to building a career in media production, preparing me to launch a career. The ethics portion of the course will prepare me for the challenges of working with human subjects, as there is an entire section of the syllabus dedicated to ethics of documentary filmmaking.

#### 12. ID 351A: Self Determined Major Capstone Preparation

Credits: 1

In this course I will write my proposal for my Self Determined Major final project.

#### 13. ID 371: Interdisciplinary Independent Study

Credits: 3 or 4

Independent work for juniors and seniors whose academic interests require an interdisciplinary approach beyond the academic structures available through established departmental courses. The student must have background appropriate to the proposed study, must have completed at least one other

interdisciplinary course at Skidmore, must carefully define a plan of study, and must enlist the guidance of one or more faculty as appropriate. Proposals for ID 371 are reviewed by the chair(s) of the sponsoring faculty member's home department or interdisciplinary program; or in the case of students with an approved self-determined major, by the director of the Self-Determined Majors Program.

In this course I will complete the final project for the Self Determined Major using skills and theory learned throughout my course of study as a Documentary Studies major.

### **Courses Taken Outside of Skidmore**

No courses taken outside of Skidmore will be included in the major requirements.

### **Final Project**

For my final project I will research, shoot, and edit a short documentary film concerning a social or cultural issue. I will use interviewing skills learned in DS 210: Introduction to Audio Documentary to conduct interviews with experts and individuals familiar with/currently experiencing the issue at hand. I will utilize pre-production, production, and post-production skills, theory, technique, and perspectives learned from my entire course of study. I will then showcase this project through a film screening on campus.