

J636

SPRING SEMESTER 2020 :: ERIC THOMAS, instructor :: U of KANSAS

documentary

INSTRUCTOR ERIC THOMAS

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Class time: 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in Stauffer-Flint Hall room 312

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30 a.m. to noon. Also, available by appointment, but seldom on campus Monday and Friday.

COURSE RATIONALE

As journalists, we call ourselves storytellers. And our audience looks to us for stories that help them make sense of their lives in this confusing world.

Yet so much of the work that we do as storytelling journalists happens after the narrative has all but ended. We interview athletes after the game. We collect stats to explain a trend that is already dissipating. We photograph a musician who has finished the hard work of producing a break-through album.

What if we had been present with our notebooks, with our cameras, with your audio recorders and with our powers of observation while it was happening? What if the story had unrolled in front of us? What if we had been there for the turning point?

Well, in this course, we find out.

This is Documentary, Journalism 636. For many of you, this class is a capstone to your undergraduate time on campus. You will create something so grand and ambitious that it will challenge you to use the skills of the past three-plus years. Plus, you will learn so much more.

We would be irresponsible to train you for a profession without a future. In 2018, the Center for Media and Social Impact reported that "Almost half of documentary professionals (48%) believe there are more opportunities for documentary makers now, compared to the last two years." Of course, we need only log onto

Netflix or Amazon Prime to see their growing documentary catalog. Even strategic communicators are using documentary techniques to reach audiences. In short, documentary journalists create immediate, emotional, challenging and popular stories. Indeed, that will be our goal as a documentary team this semester.

Welcome to the team.

PROJECT GOAL

As a team of more than a dozen journalists, we will create an online multimedia project documenting Quinton Lucas, the mayor of Kansas City, and his role as a professor in the KU law school. We will use his dual role, as both mayor and professor, to explore many themes in his private and public life.

If this multimedia documentary project is a success, we will create an emotional story about the mayor's time with his class this semester as well as a newsy exploration of the state of the city.

STUDENT GOALS

- Produce a high volume of professional-level journalism in a small time period.
- Understand and demonstrate the ethics of documentary journalism.
- Practice the craft of documentary journalism through more than one medium.
- Organize a team of journalists to cover a broad topic with a target audience in mind.
- Experiment with media technologies that are new for each student.
- Experience and deliver professional-level editing and fact-checking.
- Connect with professionals in the fields of political journalism and documentary journalism

- Craft narratives in a chosen medium. Learn to tell stories in addition to doing reporting on issues.
- Negotiate coverage with political sources and other news makers.

ASSESSMENT

You will be evaluated in this course very simply:

- 1) **PRODUCTION:** the work that you do,
- 2) **PROFESSIONALISM:** the way that you do that work

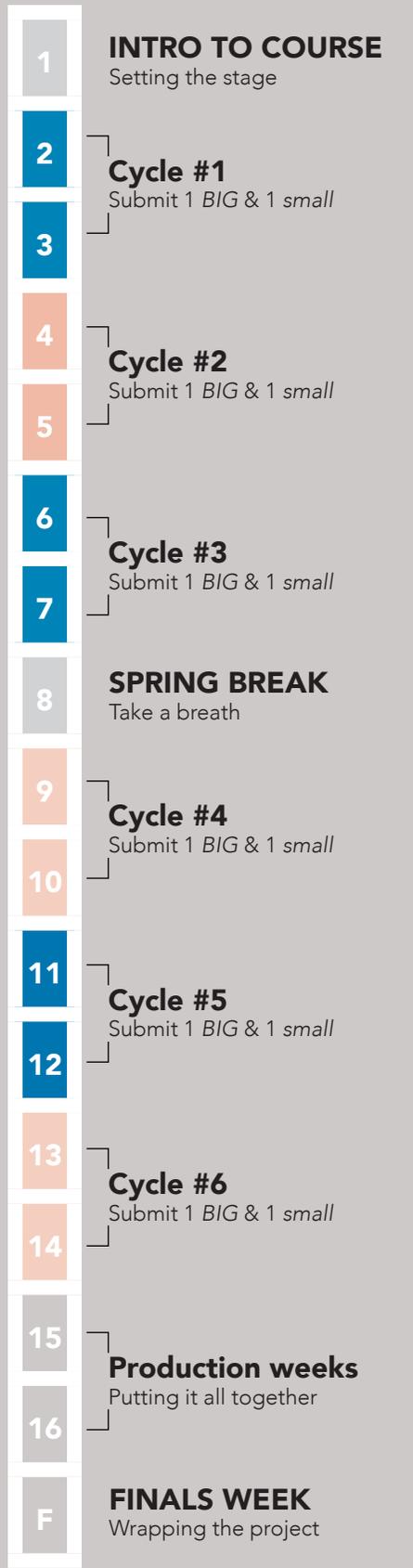
PRODUCTION

I will start here with some honesty. If this project is going to be the exemplary portfolio piece that I envision for you, if it is going to make it on the air at KCPT, many of you -- if not all of you -- will need to exceed the basic expectations below. When I am *requiring* six of something, I will *need* more than that from some of you as journalists. I hope that you rise to this challenge because you enjoy the work and recognize this insane opportunity.

With that said, on the second page of the syllabus, you will find the basic production framework for this semester. There are 6 two-week cycles of the semester outlined there. For each of those cycles, you will create a BIG and a SMALL element of documentary journalism. A BIG element is an ambitious piece of journalism. Here are some examples: a feature story, a documentary photo gallery, the logo and branding for the project, or three in-person documentary video events with the mayor. There are so many more possibilities, including ambitious work as an editor, project manager, sound editor or producer. A SMALL element might be cataloging the footage from your shoots, copy editing a few interview transcripts by another student or creating an infographic. As a rough thumbnail, consider a BIG assignment to be an 8-hour day's work as

OUR TIMELINE

A week-by-week schedule, with the six cycles noted. The start and end are reserved for intro and production.



a journalist. A SMALL assignment should be a half-day of work.

Your production assignment is to submit a BIG and a SMALL for each cycle. I promise that this system will make more sense once we dive into the work.

PROFESSIONALISM

The two excitements of this class for me are working with a team of journalists on a singular project AND working with high-profile public figures. Both of those aspects of the class hinge on you being responsible, prompt, professional and kind journalist. I know that you will do this. And I will commend you when you are excellent and address problems I see. This component of the course applies to interactions with team members, guest speakers, sources, the mayor's team and me.

A note on attire: covering the mayor is not the same as being in a college classroom. Please dress in crisp business casual. If you need more direction, I am happy to provide it.

Also, if your conduct with the mayor's is below expectations I may remove your access from those assignments. For each half of semester I will assign a grade out of 100 for your overall professionalism.

POINT BREAKDOWN

ASSIGNMENT	PTS	DUE
cycle 1: BIG	100	Feb. 4
cycle 1: SMALL	50	Feb. 4
cycle 2: BIG	100	Feb. 18
cycle 2: SMALL	50	Feb. 18
cycle 3: BIG	100	March 17
cycle 3: SMALL	50	March 17
professionalism	50	March 17
cycle 4: BIG	100	March 31
cycle 4: SMALL	50	March 31
cycle 5: BIG	100	April 14
cycle 5: SMALL	50	April 14
cycle 6: BIG	100	April 28
cycle 6: SMALL	50	April 28
professionalism	50	May 11
TOTAL	1,000	

RESOURCES

To keep us organized and working together, we will use the following technology solutions:

- Google Drive: to submit work, provide revision feedback and share non-video files
- Google Calendar: To mark key dates on the Mayor's calendar and also project deadlines
- Trello: for project management
- Slack: for project communication

We will also use the following resources:

- Access to Adobe Creative Cloud. You must have your own membership for the semester. **You will not be able to simply use the Journalism school laptops or desktop computers for access.** We will be sharing files using Creative Cloud and you need to have access to that storage throughout the semester. Plus, we will be using many of the applications.
- Video tutorials: These videos from www.JSchoolTech.org are great and I will likely point you to them often (along with YouTube). Because you might be the only one in the class to need to learn a particular skill, I will often rely on these videos and other online training rather than dedicating class time to a lesson.
- Blackboard will be used for this class for two main functions: email blasts and tallying your grade.

CLASS TIME

What in the world, you ask, will we do for 2.5 hours, twice each week? Good question!

We intentionally built in this time so that your schedule would be reliably blocked to work together on the project, to potentially travel to and from Kansas City, and to signal the commitment that this class will take.

I will post a class schedule and it likely will feature some days when we don't meet. Please check that schedule headed into each week.

RULES TO LIVE BY

- All assignments must be linked on

Google Drive using your Cycle document. We will review the mechanics for this submission process in detail for the first Cycle submission.

- All assignments are due at the start of class (1 p.m.). Expect technical difficulties and do not wait until the last minute to submit your work.
- Assignments turned in after the start of class (yes, this means even a minute or two late) will lose 10-percent credit.
- Assignments not submitted by midnight on the due date will lose 50-percent credit.
- No assignment will be accepted 24 hours after the deadline without an excuse approved by me in advance.
- Late & excused work (including on in-class assignments and quizzes) is allowed if:
 - a signed physician note documents the absence and illness
 - a KU-sponsored athletic event in which you are participating conflicts with an assignment **and** you have notified me of the absence in advance
 - you notify me in advance of the conflict and convince me of its necessity
 - you have a death in the family that you can document with an obituary or funeral program.

ATTENDANCE

Missing more than one class without an approved excuse (see above) will result in a deduction from your professionalism grade for that half of the semester.

Please do not contact me about absences, unless you are . . .

- experiencing a long-term absence,
- or, need to make up work **and** have a verified excuse from the column above. If that is the case, please chat with me after class or email me with the details.

YOUR WORK

The expectation for a capstone class is that you are ready to do professional

work, although not necessarily at a professional pace. You will hear that word, “professional” often in this class. Here is a breakdown of what I mean.

Originality

All the work you do in this class must be original. That means no “recycling” of assignments or designs from other classes in the j-school or from outside the j-school. If you created something for a publication or an earlier class (either at KU or elsewhere), you cannot resubmit it (or revise and submit it) as a new assignment in this class. Likewise, I expect the reporting/footage/photos/visuals that you submit to be created **during this semester for submission to this class**. Any efforts to recycle material will be regarded as academic dishonesty. You may receive zero credit for the assignment and have a letter explaining the academic dishonesty entered into your academic file.

Accuracy

Facts matter, especially when completing work about a high-profile public figure like the mayor. If you have factual inaccuracies in your submitted work, I will deduct points. The most likely culprits: names, dates, statistics.

Public

By submitting work to me, you are saying that it is ready for publication -- not just for me and not just for the fellow students in this class -- but for the public at large. Please understand this: **the work for this class is academic but also public.**

First-hand

Because this is a documentary class, much of your reporting should be original because you are standing there observing it yourself. There should be no risk of “recycling” because we will document starting now and through your first-hand experience of being a reporter in specific situations, perhaps in a city council meeting, at the scene of a shooting or in Lucas’s law class at KU. **It is vital that you don’t rely on other reporters for your content in this class:** you must go do the reporting, meet the people and see the events yourself.

ETHICS

You are expected to adhere to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. For example, you should:

- **VITAL:** Never include the work of others in your story without proper attribution and credit for their contributions;
- Inform interview sources that you are a University of Kansas media reporter;
- Avoid using family or friends as sources, and avoid writing about issues or entities with which you have a personal connection and thus a conflict of interest;
- Never fabricate or fictionalize facts, sources or quotes;
- Always clearly attribute source of information presented in your stories.

NOTE: Ethics violations will lead to a failing grade in the course. If you have questions, please seek advice from the instructor.

ABOUT PLAGIARISM

In general, any student who turns in work that is not their own on any assignment will receive a zero on that assignment. You may also be subject to Journalism School penalties on cheating and plagiarism, which can include expulsion from the School of Journalism.

Misconduct

You are bound by the university rules on academic misconduct. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating, please ask BEFORE your endeavor.

The William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications does not tolerate plagiarism, fabrication of evidence and falsification of evidence.

Penalties for plagiarism, fabrication or falsification can include a failing grade for this course and expulsion from the School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please consult the instructor of this course.

The following definitions are from Article

II, Section 6, of the University Senate Rules and Regulations, revised FY98.

Plagiarism

Knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source). The sole exception to the requirement of acknowledging sources is when the information or ideas are common knowledge.

Fabrication and Falsification

Unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The University of Kansas is committed to helping all students learn. If you have a special need that may affect your learning, please contact me as soon as possible. Please be aware that the KU Office of Student Access Services coordinates accommodations for all students who are eligible. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted this office, please do so as soon as possible.

Information about services can be found at <https://access.ku.edu/>. Or you can visit the office on the first floor of Strong Hall. The phone number is 785-864-4064. The email is achieve@ku.edu

Please contact me privately regarding your needs in this course.

CLASSROOM ATTENDANCE

From the journalism school's policy:

"No student may add a journalism class after the 20th day of a semester.

"Students must attend their classes and laboratory periods. Instructors may take attendance into account in assessing a student's performance and may require a certain level of attendance for passing a course. Instructors may choose to drop students from a course, based on attendance, without consent.

"The School of Journalism reserves the right to cancel the enrollment of students who fail to attend the first class or laboratory meeting."

"The KU Office of Student Financial Aid is required by federal law to determine whether students who receive aid are attending each class in which they are enrolled. Instructors are required to report to that office absences of students who have stopped attending and names of those who have enrolled but never have attended. Students who do not attend classes may be required to repay federal and/or state financial aid.

"Students who receive any form of financial aid should learn all requirements including minimum hours of enrollment and grades to qualify for and retain that aid."

INCLEMENT WEATHER

In the event of inclement weather, the decision to cancel classes is made by KU officials. To determine whether snow or icy conditions have canceled classes, call 864-7669 (864-SNOW).

COPYING OR RECORDING

Course materials prepared by the instructor, as well as content of all lectures presented by the instructor, are the instructor's property. Video and audio recording of lectures without instructor consent is prohibited. On request, the instructor usually will permit students to record lectures, on the condition that these recordings are only used as a study aid by the individual making the recording. Unless the instructor gives explicit permission, recordings of lectures may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

EXTRA CREDIT

Students have two opportunities for extra credit in J636. You can do both extra-credit options to earn a total of 20 extra credit points. No other options available:

- **KSPA events.** Volunteering at the KSPA regional contest (Feb. 21) and state contest (May 2). Volunteer slots for these events are first-come, first-served with limited slots. ***The twist?***

If you fail to show for the extra credit volunteer opportunity, I will deduct 10 points from your attendance in addition to your not earning the extra credit points. Please only sign up if you are sure you can help. (10 points)

GRADING SCALE

The grading scale for this course is shown below. Grades are rounded to the next percentage point. There is no curve. Please do not ask.

A = 100-93 // **A-** = 92-90

B+ = 89-88 // **B** = 87-83 // **B-** = 82-80

C+ = 79-78 // **C** = 77-73 // **C-** = 72-70

D+ = 69-68 // **D** = 67-63 // **D-** = 62-60

F = 59.9 and below

FINAL EXAM TIME

The J636 final exam is Monday, May 11 from 1:30 to 4 p.m. We will meet during this time, although I am not sure for how long or for what use. This time may be a showcase of our work, might be a time to complete production or might be a time to celebrate a finished documentary.

CHANGES TO SYLLABUS

As the instructor, I reserve the right to modify the syllabus and schedule, if necessary. Those changes may include altering point values for assignments. Of course, I will notify you of any changes.

CAREER & OUTREACH OFFICE

If you need assistance with resume and cover letter development, job search strategy, internships, mock interviews and LinkedIn profile, schedule an appointment with Steve Rottinghaus at steve_rottinghaus@ku.edu. He's in Stauffer-Flint Hall room 120. Make sure to follow job and internship postings on Twitter at @Rhaus90.

THANKS

I appreciate you reading all the way until the end. I am ready for a great semester and to see your inspired work.

Yours in storytelling, Eric