

DNM820: TRANSMEDIA **winter 2024**

INSTRUCTOR

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Office Hours: by appointment

SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

Course DNM820 will teach students how to apply transmedia and interactive strategies to documentary, by looking at case studies drawn from Hollywood film franchises, bleeding-edge immersive technologies, alternate reality experiences and co-created activist documentaries. While we will examine the ever-changing digital landscape, our aim will be to use transmedia and interactive strategy in support of project goals and never technology for its own sake (even if at times such strategies deconstruct traditional documentary form -- and sometimes also technology -- *literally* from within).

So in the spirit of the interactive process, our course will unfold iteratively as needed to support and enhance students' final documentary projects. Thus the breakdown below should be seen as a guideline only¹, with the following lines of inquiry helping to frame our explorations during this time of flux:

- What's the interplay between linear and non-linear storytelling?
- What are the differences between interactive documentary (i-doc) and transmedia storytelling traditions? How are they converging today?
- How do "character", "story" and "world" relate in transmedia?
- What are the changing dynamics between filmmakers, documentary subjects and the "people formerly known as the audience"? What role does technology play in these dynamics?
- What levels of interactivity, immersion and participation are appropriate for different types of documentary projects?
- How does technology affect our understanding of truth and reality? And why does this matter especially for documentary filmmakers?
- What might emerging technologies like AI, the metaverse, Web3 and NFTs mean for documentary film?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. refer to transmedia storytelling and interactive documentary (i-doc) best-practices, using examples from key case studies and online resources
2. create a transmedia or interactive documentary (i-doc) plan to complement their final linear documentary project
3. understand interactive and transmedia production models, and the roles key stakeholders play: from makers to subjects and online communities

¹ As we iterate, syllabus' updates will be highlighted by version numbers (e.g. DNM820 Syllabus: Transmedia W-2024 - V1, V2 etc.).

4. navigate the basics of interactive funding in Canada
5. learn to protect project goals in the face of technological demands and temptations, while staying open to innovation
6. learn to track rapid innovations in digital storytelling and interactive technology

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT 1

TRANSMEDIA CASE STUDY

DUE: Feb. 15

In one to two pages, explain how your favourite transmedia franchise succeeded (or failed) in expanding its “storyworld” across platforms. Five-minute in-class presentation on Feb. 15.

ASSIGNMENT 2

INTERACTIVE CASE STUDY

DUE: Mar. 21

In one to two pages, summarize the storytelling goals of an interactive documentary (i-doc) of your choice (from a list of TBD examples) and explain how interactivity helped or hindered those goals. No presentation.

ASSIGNMENT 3

INTERACTIVE/TRANSMEDIA TREATMENT

DUE: Apr. 1

In one to two page treatment, explain the goals of your final documentary project and select an interactive documentary (i-doc) or transmedia strategy that can help you achieve those goals. Be prepared to discuss your treatment in a one-on-one meeting with your instructor in preparation for Assignment 4.

ASSIGNMENT 4

INTERACTIVE/TRANSMEDIA PLAN

DUE: Apr. 11

Based on your Assignment 3 treatment, create an interactive documentary (i-doc) or transmedia plan to support your final documentary project, and present it in-class for 10 mins.

GRADING SCHEME

ASSIGNMENT 1: Transmedia case study (written and oral)	10%
ASSIGNMENT 2: Interactive case study (written only)	10%
ASSIGNMENT 3: Interactive/transmedia treatment	15%
ASSIGNMENT 4: Interactive/transmedia plan - written	35%
ASSIGNMENT 4: Interactive/transmedia plan - oral	15%
Participation (in-class and one-on-one)	15%

A considerable amount of class time will be dedicated in advance of due dates to explain the nature of the assignments and what is expected.

WEEKLY BREAKDOWN

Class 1/Feb. 1,2024 - Introduction

- Transmedia storytelling vs. interactive documentary (i-doc):
 - The “terminological tsunami” of documentary forms that embrace technology
 - Overview of the transmedia storytelling and interactive documentary (i-doc) traditions, and their differences and recent convergences
 - How linear and interactive storytelling can complement each other, and thus how this class will complement the program as a whole
 - Instructor background, and why embracing your interdisciplinary experience will make you a better i-doc creator
 - Review the learning outcomes
 - Reflect on our personal course and program goals, and discuss ways we can “co-create” successful outcomes together

Class 2 / Feb. 1, 2024 - Transmedia Storytelling 1

- Transmedia defined
- Importance of “worldbuilding” over “story” and “character”
- Henry Jenkins’ foundational transmedia concepts
- Robert Pratten’s transmedia types
- Best practices: how storyworld and platform interact
- Relevant examples from gaming, publishing, film and TV
- **ASSIGNMENT 1** (due Feb. 16): in one to two pages, explain how your favourite transmedia franchise succeeded (or failed) in expanding its storyworld across platforms, and present your findings to class for 5 minutes on Feb. 16.

Class 3/ Feb. 8, 2024 - Transmedia Storytelling 2

- Case studies, transmedia for change:
 - Transmedia strategies for documentary and activism
 - Transmedia as participatory: changing the way stories are told
 - Transmedia thought leaders on “collective journey” story dialogues versus top-down, conflict-driven “hero’s journey” narratives, and how this mirrors the latest insights from the interactive documentary (i-doc) community

Class 4/ Feb. 15, 2024 - Transmedia Storytelling 3

- Case Studies, “Dos and Don’ts”:
 - Best practices distilled into a list of transmedia “dos and don’ts”, with students asked to share their insights from their WIP Assignment 1 research.
- Jeff Gomez and Robert Pratten’s transmedia production strategies, for both Hollywood and indy budgets - and how these strategies can help jumpstart a documentary career

Class 5/ Feb. 15, 2024 - Interactive Documentary 1

- Students to present their transmedia case studies (**ASSIGNMENT 1**)
- Technology, storytelling and documentary film:
 - The influence of technology on storytelling throughout the ages, and how pre-digital technology has influenced documentary film
 - A brief history of interactive technology, from relevant pre-digital examples; to early personal computing, video games and interactive films; to CD-ROMs, video platforms and Flash sites; to the social media, AR, VR and XR of today; to tomorrow’s AI and metaverse -- we’ll explore how technology has influenced documentary and the “i-doc” community
 - Challenges surrounding innovation and adoption cycles, obsolescence,

accessibility and the ethics of agency

Class 6 / Feb. 22, 2024 - Interactive Documentary 2

- Meet leading figures in the “i-doc” community, and the i-doc categories they’ve mapped (e.g. interactive, participatory, sensory, data, location, remix)
- Explore key i-doc case studies taken from:
 - Immersive VR, AR & 360 journalism
 - The NFB social docs and the Canadian interactive legacy
 - Gamification for good
 - Alternate and mixed reality experiences
 - (Remix and activist) UGC and short-based online platforms and communities
 - Hybrid forms pushing boundaries

Feb. 26 to Mar. 1 - reading week (office hours by appointment)

Class 7 / Mar. 7, 2024 - Interactive Documentary 3

- Co-creation and the future of documentary:
 - Documentary filmmakers advocating for co-created dialogues that empower audiences and documentary “subjects”
 - How this is mirrored in transmedia strategy, which calls for bringing collective dialogues into the mainstream -- and the importance of participatory media
 - The challenge of integrating diverse voices and user generated content into a compelling, coherent, user-friendly experience
 - The role of technology (and ideology) in negotiating stakeholder interests
 - Opportunities and dangers presented by emerging technologies
- **ASSIGNMENT 2** (due Mar. 21): in one to two pages, summarize the story goals of an interactive documentary (i-doc) of your choice (from a list of examples provided in the assignment deck) and explain how interactivity helped or hindered those goals. No presentation.

Class 8 / Mar. 14, 2024 - Creating your Plan 1

- Introduction to our upcoming industry guest speakers
- Treatments and MVPs: indie film and startup techniques for ideation and iteration
- **ASSIGNMENT 3** (due Apr. 1): in a one to two-page treatment, explain the goals of your final documentary project and select an interactive or transmedia strategy that can help you achieve those goals.
- Book a one-on-one meeting with your instructor (Apr. 1) to review your treatment and prepare for your final plan (ASSIGNMENT 4).

Class 9 / Mar. 14, 2024 - Creating your Plan 2

- Interactive and transmedia storytelling techniques:
 - We’ll explore story, content and site maps, user journeys, co-creation strategies and other tools to help students create their interactive/transmedia plans
- Intro to pitching and early-stage planning:
 - What makes for a successful pitch deck and presentation, with real-world examples
- **ASSIGNMENT 4** (due Apr. 11): based on instructor feedback to your ASSIGNMENT 3 treatment, create an interactive documentary (i-doc) or transmedia plan to support your final documentary project, and present to class (due Apr. 11).

Class 10 / Mar. 14, 2024 - Running a Production

- Behind-the-scenes of a real interactive production
- The roles in an interactive productions, from writers, directors and producers, to UX, designers and development leads, to subjects, experts, distributors, media outlets, influencers and stakeholder communities
- Industry guest speaker Heather Phenix

Class 11 / Mar. 21 2024 - Fundraising in Canada

- A survey of interactive and transmedia documentary funding opportunities
- A look at digital-only and broadcast-contingent digital doc funds

Class 12 / Apr. 1, 2024 – mandatory final assignment one-on-one check-in (by appointment, sign up [here](#)).

Class 13 / Apr. 11, 2024 - Final Plan Presentation

- In class presentations of final transmedia/interactive plans (ASSIGNMENT 4).

Class 14 / Apr. 18, 2024 - The Future of Digital Storytelling

- How conceptions of technology, story, truth, interaction and participation will continue to accelerate changes to the documentary form
- How to track digital storytelling trends, techniques and tools
- Emerging technology: XR, the metaverse, NFTs, Web 3.0, and AI
- Philosophy of technology and AI, cyberpunk, Baudrillard and The Matrix
- Can i-doc theory save the metaverse?
- Job opportunities for interactive documentary (i-doc) filmmakers