COURSE BASICS

Producing: Documentary: MDIA.426.1.34130 • Fall 2026

Scheduled Sessions: Tuesday, 3:30-4:45PM (LB 121) • Thursday, 3:30-4:45PM (LB 121)

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Al Szymanski

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Office: Sports Link **Office Hours:** Mon. - Thur., 12pm-2pm or by appointment

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Description: Development of skills necessary to produce for a variety of media platforms. Each section of this course will focus on producing for a different medium, including news, documentary, and film. Emphasis will be given to writing, organizing and presenting information across platforms for specific audiences.

Prerequisites: NEWS 221, or MDIA 332 or TCOM 332

Course Objectives:

- Design, produce, direct, write and edit advanced productions from pre-production through post-production, demonstrating visual storytelling abilities.
- Manage projects, activities and other industry-related experiences as an effective industry professional.
- Evaluate the history, theory, aesthetics, and business of production as art, entertainment and documentation.
- Practice sophisticated visual storytelling techniques while creating informative, entertaining and creative media projects.
- Increased proficiency in the use of electronic/digital media and the application of related skillsets and software.

Course Modality/Structure: The goal is to establish an environment that fosters creative growth, collaboration and improved production skills. Success in that effort largely depends on honest, Socratic, group interaction. Therefore, students are strongly encouraged to engage in the classroom.

COURSE MATERIALS

There are no required materials for this course.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENTS

Doc Du Jour (10% of final grade)

Over the course of the semester, each student will select and present a clip -- NO LONGER THAN 10 MINUTES -- pulled from a commercially released documentary. This assignment has no written component, however presenters should provide some relevant details/thoughts about the film when clip is screened (i.e., director's bio; interesting production elements; storytelling technique; etc.).

**You must provide (email or submit via Canvas) the film's title, director's name and the platform where it can be found (i.e., Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, YouTube, etc.) to the instructor at least 24 hours before the scheduled in-class presentation.*

Poetic Micro Doc (20% of final grade)

Each student will produce a short *Poetic Micro Doc*. Topic/focus is left to the student. Each student will present their *Poetic Micro Doc* in class. The goal of the presentation is to spark collaborative support that may refine/elevate the production.

- Final production should be **NO LONGER THAN ONE (1) MINUTE**.
- Micro Doc should include Opening or End Credits that indicate title and director.

**This project is produced solely for the purposes of MDIA 426. It is not intended for commercial release, streaming platforms or social media. With that understanding, commercial music may be used; standard release forms (i.e., personal appearance and property) are not required; and rights & clearance documentation for "acquired" media is not necessary. If a student distributes/shares the assigned Poetic Micro Doc anywhere other than MDIA 426, that student assumes all legal and financial responsibilities for any and all material included in the production that has not been properly cleared.*

Written Pitch (20% of final grade)

Each student will submit a *Written Pitch* for a micro documentary. The *Written Pitch* should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- A log line: A super-short, compelling description of the topic. It needs to hook the reader.
- Two to three paragraphs that describe the story, potential interviews, production approach/style and elements to be filmed.

Each student will present their *Written Pitch* in class. The goal of the presentation is to spark collaborative support that may refine/elevate the production.

Micro Doc (30% of final grade)

Each student will produce a *Micro Doc* that exhibits the production qualities associated with one of the six documentary "modes" (styles) introduced in class. The *Micro Doc* will be presented in class for collaborative review. This assignment isn't about brilliant technique, an amazing topic, dazzling cinematography, pristine audio, super-slick editing or any of the qualities associated with a sophisticated production. It's about navigating the creative process and executing a concept. Film with your phone if you'd like. Edit with the software of your choice. The subject can be serious, humorous ... pointless! The only requirement is this: CREATE SOMETHING.

- Final production should be NO LONGER THAN FIVE (5) MINUTES. Productions that exceed 5 minutes require prior approval from the instructor in order to be shown in full.
- The *Micro Doc* should include Opening or End Credits that indicate title and director.

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Critical Analysis (15% of final grade)

- This is an exercise in curiosity — observation with intent — and peeling back layers to reveal hidden truth.
- Each Thursday, you will be introduced to an element that merits Critical Analysis (i.e., a poem; painting; photograph; etc.). During the next scheduled class (Tuesday) you will be invited to share insights revealed by your Critical Analysis of the designated element. Those insights might be facts related to the element or it's creator, story ideas sparked by it, or simple statements of opinion (*example:* "It sucks!").
- There is no written component associated with this assignment. Sharing observations is strictly voluntary (though, strongly encouraged). However, if you don't attend a Critical Analysis discussion session you will need to submit a brief written assessment via the Canvas portal in order to receive credit.

Attendance (5% of final grade)

- Attendance is strongly encouraged but not required. Attendance will be recorded via aPlus+ Attendance. Your class attendance percentage for the semester will account for 5% of your final grade.

Grading:

A (94-100%)	**A-** (90-93%)	
B+ (87-89%)	**B** (84-86%)	**B-** (80-83%)
C+ (77-79%)	**C** (74-76%)	**C-** (70-73%)
D+ (67-69%)	**D** (64-66%)	**D-** (60-63%)
F (0-59%)		

STATEMENTS & POLICIES

University Statement

We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse.

Disability Statement

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

University Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend all of their classes.

Faculty are required to establish attendance policies for their courses and ensure that they communicate these policies through their course syllabi. Faculty members should take attendance in all classes—even if there are no points associated with attending. In some cases, faculty may be asked to provide the last date of attendance for a student in association with financial aid requirement.

Students are expected to review course syllabi regarding absence guidelines and follow those guidelines.

Course attendance policies are up to the individual faculty but must be consistent with University policy. The University has a number of specific policies regarding student absences that are housed within different areas.

Absences:

Accommodations for student absences are often needed. Accommodations are required by law and including situations that relate to ADA, Title IX, and disabilities. If you are student who needs an accommodation for these legal reasons, please contact the Office of Disability Services. If you are a faculty member who is working with a student requesting an accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Services.

Here we provide a compilation of student attendance and absence policies for reference. These university policies should be considered when faculty members construct their individual attendance policies. We understand that faculty members will also consider field-specific best practices as well as student well-being as they construct their policies.

In general, students are expected to notify all of their instructors once they anticipate being absent for any reason (e.g., funeral) or as soon as possible after the absence begins (e.g., unexpected injury or illness). The student may need to provide documentation to each instructor if requested. Only faculty members can excuse an absence.

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

Absences for University Activities

The University expects its departments and programs that take students away from class meetings to schedule such events in a way that will minimize hindrance of orderly completion of course requirements. Such units must provide a written statement to the students describing the activity and stating as precisely as possible the dates of the required absence. The involved students must deliver this documentation to the instructor, preferably before the absence but no event later than one week after the absence.

MDIA 426 Attendance Policy

Attendance is strongly encouraged but not required. Attendance will be recorded via aPlus+ Attendance. Your class attendance percentage for the semester will account for 5% of your final grade.

Student Office Hours

Faculty are expected to maintain office hours. The hours are indicated earlier in the syllabus.

Freedom of Expression

In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions. Please review Ball State University's Statement on Freedom of Expression, the resources on Ball State's Freedom of Expression webpage, and Ball State's Beneficence Pledge.

Title IX / Sex Discrimination

Ball State University is committed to maintaining an educational environment free from sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, and stalking. Students who experience or witness conduct that may violate University policy are encouraged to seek support and assistance. The Title IX Office can provide information about reporting options, supportive measures, and available resources. Contact the Title IX Office at 765-285-1545 or titleix@bsu.edu.

Please Note: As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter. If you disclose information to me about conduct that may constitute sex discrimination or sexual misconduct, I am required to notify the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Office will reach out to discuss available resources, supportive measures, and reporting options. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, you may contact the Counseling Center or the Center for Survivor Support.

Pregnancy and Related Conditions

Ball State University provides reasonable modifications for students affected by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. Students seeking academic, housing, or other modifications are encouraged to contact the Title IX Office as early as possible to discuss available options and support. For assistance, contact the Title IX Office at 765-285-1545 or titleix@bsu.edu.

University Grade Appeal Policy

If you believe you received a final course grade that does not reflect your performance due to fairness or a procedural issue, you have the right to file an appeal within 5 school days after final grades are posted by the Office of the Registrar. Review the University Grade Appeal Policy and Process.]

Student Academic Ethics Policy

Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's academic integrity website (Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University Student Academic Ethics Policy.

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to:

- Using resources not authorized by the instructor (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books).
- Using a generative AI system or a person to complete academic assignments such as response papers, discussion posts, essays, or any other assignment when such use is not explicitly permitted by the assignment instructions or the instructor.
- Utilizing another person or a generative AI system to take a quiz, examination, or similar evaluation in place of oneself.

- Using a generative AI system for research, creative work, theses/dissertations, grant proposals, IRB-regulated work, or publication-bound work in violation of university AI policies, funder/publisher rules, IRB requirements, or discipline-specific standards.
- Presenting as one's own work the ideas, representations or words of another person or of a GenAI system without customary and proper acknowledgment of sources or of the AI tool(s) used.
- Using generative AI systems to analyze data, conduct research, or generate content that is included in an assignment (images, graphs, charts, tables, etc.) without proper documentation, citation, and attribution of this AI use.
- Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded assignments (Chegg, Course Hero, StudyPool, OneClass, etc.).
- Without the instructor's written permission, giving away, buying, or selling graded assignments class notes, exams, study guides, or other course materials to other students or to third-party vendors (Course Hero, Chegg, 24HourAnswers, etc.).
- Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.
- Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.
- Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.
- Sharing answers with others during exams (passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)
- Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.
- Soliciting others to complete work for you.

Generative AI (GenAI) Statement

It is up to the faculty and/or their academic unit to determine if, when, and how generative AI use is permitted. @Generative AI (GenAI) refers a class of AI tools that can create text, images, audio, video, and other similar media from existing training datasets. This may include user-prompted tools or tools running autonomously (aka, "agentic AI"). Note that some AI tools are becoming embedded in platforms that students use to create their assignments (e.g., Grammarly, Microsoft Word, Excel, Adobe Acrobat, Canva, OneNote, and Evernote). The mere presence and use of AI-assisted features in such tools, such as grammar suggestions, predictive text, formatting help, or auto-completion, would not normally be considered GenAI.

Faculty should communicate their expectations about students' use of GenAI in their course and/or on specific assignments. Each syllabus should clearly state one of the three GenAI use categories shown below for the class or for each assignment. Regardless of which category a faculty member selects, they should provide a brief rationale for their approach and explain how it supports the course learning objectives. Students are more likely to comply and engage more critically when they understand the purpose behind a policy. Faculty can support students by engaging in ongoing conversations about the ethical use of GenAI throughout the course. For GenAI use guidelines for students and for instructors, see the VPAA's website; for GenAI information, tools, resources, and courses, see BSU AI Initiatives website.

MDIA 499 GenAI Policy: No Generative AI Use (No GenAI use permitted for any coursework)

All work produced and/or submitted in this course should reflect your own ideas and demonstrate your current knowledge, abilities, and skills. Therefore, GenAI should not be used to complete any portion of the assignment(s). Doing so constitutes a violation of Ball State University's Student Academic Ethics Policy.

The Learning Center

The Learning Center offers free Tutoring and Academic Coaching for many courses at Ball State. Students can make appointments for online (Zoom) or in-person (NQ 350) appointments. To make an appointment, visit myballstate.bsu.edu and click on "Navigate" in the Academic Tools section, or just go directly to bsu.navigate.eab.com.

Testing accommodations for students with disabilities are available for students who have received the appropriate documentation from Disability Services. Tests may be administered in the Learning Center.

Supplemental Instruction is available in select courses. If you have an SI leader for your course, that person will provide students with information the first week of school regarding weekly study sessions. For more information about Learning Center programming, visit bsu.edu/learningcenter or call 765-285-1006. Follow us on Instagram: BallStateLC.

The Writing Center

All writers improve with practice and feedback, so as a student in this course, you are encouraged to use the Writing Center to get additional feedback on your writing. The Writing Center can help you at any stage of the writing process, whether you're just getting started and need help brainstorming or when you're wrapping up a project and just want a second set of eyes. We work with writers from all disciplines and with all kinds of writing, including essays, reports, reflections, research projects, web content, lesson plans, slideshows, poster presentations, resumes, and other digital or print texts.

You can choose from three appointment types: getting started on a new project (Planning appointment), discussing an existing draft (Feedback appointment), or scheduling time to work, with a tutor on hand to keep you motivated (Accountability appointment). To schedule a free appointment, go to bsu.edu/writingcenter. We offer online appointments any time we're open, or you can meet a tutor face-to-face in Robert Bell 295 during weekdays and Bracken Library First Floor West in the evenings. Make sure you plan ahead, because appointments book quickly!

The Basic Needs Hub

If you are having difficulty affording enough food, do not have a safe and reliable place to sleep, and/or experiencing an emergency or crisis, help is available through the Basic Needs Hub. The Basic Needs Hub has information, resources, and provides individualized support to students. To talk with a supportive staff member about your experience, receive one on one assistance, or learn more about resources, you can submit a Basic Needs Assistance Form.

The Counseling Center

The Ball State University Counseling Center offers free and confidential services to all students. The Counseling Center is located in Lucina Hall, Room 320. To schedule an appointment, you can contact us at 765-285-1736. Ball State also offers a 24/7 Crisis Line, which can be reached at 765-285-HOPE (4673). The Crisis Line is a mental health resource for those who are struggling with any mental health concerns, including thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide.

At the Ball State Counseling Center, we see students for a variety of reasons, some of which include homesickness, relationship concerns, anxiety, and depression. At your first appointment, you will work with a therapist to create a plan that will connect you with resources that best fit your needs. We assist students with getting connected to therapy at our Center as well as connecting students to self-help resources, other on-campus resources, and community-based resources. All Ball State students also have access to several on-demand, self-help resources through a variety of different platforms. All of these resources, including a direct link to our website, can be found at BSU Counseling Center.

The Speaking Center

The Speaking Center is a free resource available to all members of the BSU community wanting to improve their public speaking abilities. We offer personalized coaching designed to help you become a more confident and effective speaker. Our trained coaches provide constructive feedback and support throughout the entire speech preparation process, whether you are in the early stages of brainstorming ideas and organizing your thoughts, or you need to practice your delivery and refine your message.

The Center is in the David Letterman Communication and Media Building, room 302. To schedule an appointment, please access us through your Navigate app or use this direct link to sign up for a time**.** Appointments are available both in person and on Zoom. Appointments are available in person, on Zoom, and in virtual reality (VR) for those interested in practicing in an immersive speaking environment.

Canvas Accessibility

Canvas provides a user experience that is easy, simple, and intuitive. Special attention has been paid to making Canvas screen-readable. The Rich Content Editor encourages users to create accessible content pages (i.e. text formatting is accomplished using styles). Canvas is designed to allow limited customization of colors and schemes to be accessible for all users. The National Federation of the Blind granted Canvas the Gold Level Web Certification in 2010. **Find more information by visiting the Canvas Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT).**

FERPA and Privacy

As a student, your educational records are considered confidential. Under FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), your records are confidential and protected. Under most circumstances, your records will not be released without your written and signed consent. However, some directory information may be released to third parties without your prior consent unless a written request to restrict this is on file. You can learn more about student rights to privacy by reading **Ball State's FERPA and Privacy and Protection.**

Video Conferencing Recording

If the course is online. Suggested:@ In this online class, software may be used to record live class discussions. As a student in this class, your participation in live class discussions may be recorded. These recordings typically will be made available only to students enrolled in the class, to assist those who cannot attend the live session or to serve as a resource for those who would like to review content that was presented. Students who prefer to participate via audio only will be allowed to disable their video camera so only audio will be captured. Students who prefer to listen only must disable their audio capability and visual camera. If you have concerns, please discuss these options with me.

Plagiarism Detection

The campus subscribes to Turnitin, a plagiarism prevention service, through Canvas. You may need to submit written assignments to Turnitin. Student work will be used for plagiarism detection and for no other purpose. The student may indicate in writing to the instructor that he/she refuses to participate in the plagiarism detection process, in which case the instructor can use other electronic means to verify the originality of their work.

Proctoring

This course will require the use of the Respondus LockDown Browser and Monitor for online exams. Watch this short video to get a basic understanding of LockDown Browser and the optional webcam feature (which may be required for some exams.) Instructions for obtaining the software can be found in our course.

University Media Services Checkout

Equipment from the University Media Services Checkout facility is not to be used for personal work. This equipment is reserved for students completing assignments and/or working on projects as part of a student group. All students given permission to checkout equipment/gear through University Media Services must follow the policies of University Media Services Equipment Checkout.

https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/university-media-services/mediaservices/equipmentcheckout

University Lab Software

University labs are updated with the current versions of software at the beginning of each academic year. That version remains in place throughout the academic year. This software version is the same across campus. This allows you to move from lab to lab and continue your work.

To maintain your ability to work on projects continually between your own computer and a lab computer, your version of the software must be the same as that in the labs. Do not update to a new version or you will be unable to move seamlessly between personal and university owned computers.

Inclement Weather/University Closing Statement

If inclement weather forces the closing of the university, that information will be made available on the Ball State website. If the university closes because of weather and this class is cancelled, information on the rescheduling of any assignments, exams, presentations, etc. will be made available on the class Canvas site as soon as possible, or will be sent to you via email, or will be announced at the next regularly scheduled class period. Any makeup of a class day cancelled because of weather will be determined by the university administration and will be announced in class or via email.

2026 © Copyright Statement

All materials for this class have been created for the private, non-commercial use of students enrolled in this class through Ball State University in the current semester. Any material provided to students, including, but not limited to, syllabus, lectures, class notes, PowerPoint presentations, assignments, information, quizzes, exams, or class news, is the property of the course instructor and/or Ball State University and may not be reproduced, distributed, or publicly posted without written permission of the instructor. Selling or distributing course materials may violate the Code of Student Conduct and/or the Information Technology Users' Privileges and Responsibilities policy. Violations will be reported to the Director of Student Rights and Community Standards.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Course Participation Expectations

- This course is designed with weekly activities, discussion, and other forms of regular collaboration and communication.
- It is recommended that you log into your Canvas course 3 to 4 times a week and check your official Ball State email account daily to view announcements and prepare for class.
- Complete all assignments, quizzes, tests, and any other activities by the stated due dates.

Feedback Policy

- I will respond to email from your official Ball State email address within 24 hours during week days (Monday-Friday) and within 48 hours on the weekend.
- I will read every discussion post but I will not always personally comment on posts.
- I will grade your quizzes, assignments, and discussions as quickly as my schedule permits.
- Contact me directly if you have questions or concerns about your performance in class.

Late Assignment Policy

- All assignments are due by 11:59 pm EST/EDT time on the due dates indicated.
- Assignments posted after the indicated due dates will be subject to a deduction of one letter grade (10 points) per week. *Example: An assignment earning 100 points submitted one calendar week late would receive 90 points; An assignment earning 100 points submitted two calendar weeks late would receive 80/100 points.*
- Internet connectivity and technical issues may occur and impede you from turning in work on time. Begin assignments early, save and submit your work frequently, and submit before the deadline when possible. You should also have a back-up plan, such as using a campus or local library computer, borrowing a device, or identifying another reliable internet connection.
- You have one (1) permitted late assignment to allow for these issues, to which you can turn in one assignment 24 hours late.
- Canvas will not accept assignments for grading after 11:59 pm EST/EDT on the final day of class.
- To meet the university's grade submission deadline, I cannot accept assignments for grading after 11:59 pm EST/EDT on the final day of class.

Assignment Submission Policy

- All written assignments should be submitted as Word documents with extensions of .doc or .docx unless otherwise indicated in the assignment description.
- All video assignments should be submitted as .mp3 or .mp4 files.
- Assignments, unless otherwise indicated, should be submitted using the assignment link in the module**.**

Grading Policy

- It is my policy that appropriate evaluation of your academic performance is an integral part of your learning experience.
- In the absence of mistakes, fraud, bad faith or incompetence, I will be the key decision-maker on the assignment of grades.

Engagement Expectations

To support a respectful and engaging academic community that encourages the free exchange of ideas and civil discourse, we will follow these ground rules:

- **Respect different perspectives.** Share your ideas and let others share theirs.
- **Challenge ideas, not people.** Disagree respectfully. No personal attacks or put-downs. Focus on exploring ideas critically and constructively.
- **Listen to understand.** Stay curious, ask questions to understand, and give others space to speak.
- **Assume good intentions.** Approach discussions with curiosity and compassion.
- **Keep it private.** What is shared in class stays in class. Do not share others' words or work without permission.
- **Be respectful.** Avoid hurtful language, stereotypes, or content that may demean others. Keep feedback constructive.

COURSE SCHEDULE

To support a learning experience that is responsive to the needs, interests, and pace of our class community, the course schedule may shift over the semester. The most current version of the schedule will always be available on Canvas. I encourage you to check Canvas regularly for updates and contact me if you have any questions.

SUBJECT TO CHANGE STATEMENT

This syllabus is subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.