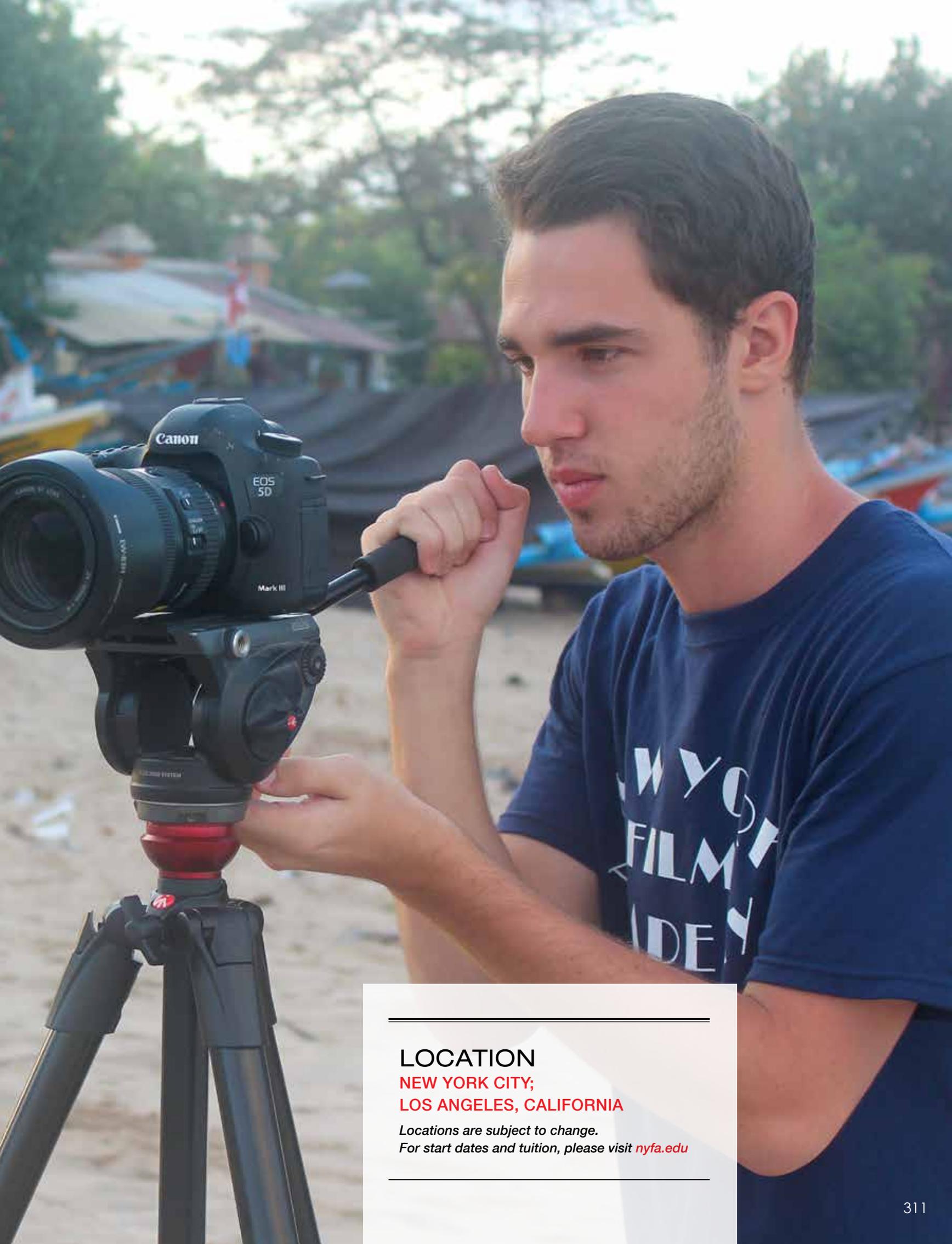




# One-Year Conservatory *in* DOCUMENTARY



*Documentary students shoot all around the world, either on location for their own productions or during the yearly class expedition. Pictured here, graduate Gary Benchehib shooting with the Canon 5D in Bali.*



---

## LOCATION

**NEW YORK CITY;  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

*Locations are subject to change.  
For start dates and tuition, please visit [nyfa.edu](http://nyfa.edu)*

---

## Students have the option to join a special one-week documentary exploration of an exciting locale\*

**T**he One-Year Documentary Filmmaking Program is an accelerated, hands-on conservatory program designed to immerse students in the study and profession of nonfiction filmmaking.

Over the course of the year, students will learn the art and technique of visual, nonfiction storytelling through in-class instruction, lectures, and hands-on workshops. As the year progresses, students will produce films of increasing complexity and depth.

By the end of the year, students will have produced six documentary films, including a final thesis film and, potentially, an expedition film. While the emphasis of the program is on hands-on immersion in the art of documentary filmmaking, students will also receive instruction on writing, film studies, and the industry as a whole.

Students will learn to develop, produce, direct, shoot, and edit their own film projects and be given the opportunity to further enhance their skills by acting as a crew member on their peers' films. Students will be assigned six film projects, which they will be expected to deliver on deadline.

Successful students graduate prepared to enter the industry as independent filmmakers, and as production team members on others' films and television series. Students are prepared with ample pre-production and production experience to assist them to enter the field and help them succeed in various roles.

***Students have the option to join a special one-week documentary filmmaking expedition. Most recently, students shot in Belize while monitoring dolphins, snorkeling the Mesoamerican Reef with local Belizeans and practicing underwater cinematography in the Great Blue Hole.***

*Please Note: curriculum and projects are subject to change and may vary depending on location.*

*Students should consult the most recently published campus catalog for the most up to date course information.*

*\*The documentary exploration is planned and supervised by NYFA faculty and staff. Please note, participants pay for the costs of their transportation, accommodation, and food. The trip is scheduled during a school vacation or semester break. It is offered as an optional experience, students are not required to participate.*

### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Skills learned as a result of successful completion of the program include the following:

- The ability to work successfully, both independently and collaboratively, in a variety of creative environments.
- An in-depth knowledge of HD cameras, lighting, and sound equipment.
- In-depth experience working as a director, producer, story producer, editor, and writer on student productions.
- The skills to create documentary content across platforms, including film, television, and transmedia platforms.
- The ability to script and pre-visualize a documentary project.
- The storytelling, aesthetic, and technical skills necessary to edit documentary content for a variety of platforms.
- In-depth experience working as a director of photography and sound recordist on student productions.
- Mastery of Avid Media Composer software.
- Knowledge of documentary film history and film studies.
- Knowledge of film language and aesthetics.

### WHAT YOU WILL ACHIEVE

- Complete 6 Original Documentary Films.
- Develop and Pitch a Non-Fiction Television Series.
- Amass Camera and Sound Credits on Several Other Students' Films.

# FILM PROJECTS



## OBSERVATION FILM

Each student produces a film that communicates a visual story about an activity or process. Students are challenged to tell a cinematic, nonfiction story using only moving images. The project focuses on the selection, execution and juxtaposition of shots to create a truthful and interesting documentary narrative. Use of camera angle, shot-size, focal length, and editing patterns are emphasized. Each student directs, shoots, and edits a short film.

## TRANSMEDIA

Each student creates a personal cyber-film and one other transmedia project of his or her choosing for distribution on the Internet. Students are challenged to utilize the intimate dimensions of the player window to their advantage, to attract and hold the interest of the web-surfing audience, and to inspire them to “share” the film. Each student directs, shoots, and edits two transmedia pieces of varying length.

## CHARACTER FILM

Each student is challenged to tell a story about an extraordinary or extremely ordinary person using only cinema vérité footage. Students record life as it happens, discerning and capturing the “scenes” that naturally occur in the subject’s life—neither staging them, nor interviewing the subject. Though the project includes the use of sound, it continues to challenge students to “show, don’t tell” the story. Each student directs, shoots, and edits a film of up to 7 minutes.

## SOCIAL ISSUE FILM

This project should employ a documentary narrative to explore a social issue about which the student feels strongly. Students will research the subject matter and will pre-script their films. A combination of interviews and narration form the required primary film language for this film. Third party materials including photos, footage, and music may also be used, and vérité scenes are encouraged as contributing elements. Students should attempt to provide a fresh perspective on a social or political issue or capture a local story that has larger implications. Each student writes, shoots, directs, and edits a film of up to 10 minutes.

In addition to revealing an authentic nonfiction story, students will also strive to make their films emotionally engaging to move their audience to action.

## DOCUMENTARY OR UNSCRIPTED TELEVISION SERIES PITCH

Working in teams, students will develop and pitch an original documentary or unscripted television series. Applying documentary and storytelling skills developed throughout the first semester, students are challenged to conceive and structure an original TV series that will attract and entertain a mainstream television audience for dozens of episodes. Student development teams will generate a written pitch and deliver live verbal pitches for their shows, generally to a network or development executive.

## THESIS FILM: INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY

The culmination of the One-Year Documentary Conservatory is a Thesis Film of the student’s own choosing. Using any film language and equipment learned throughout the year, as well as extensive research, writing, and planning, each student produces a Thesis Film of up to 30 minutes in length.

## COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

### DOCUMENTARY CRAFT I & II

This course introduces students to the craft of documentary filmmaking, establishing a foundation for all future projects. Through lectures, screenings, and workshops focused on the students' own films, the instructor highlights a documentary topic for students to analyze and discuss. Topics include observational film, character-driven documentary, cinéma vérité, ethical considerations, investigative techniques, journalistic objectivity, propaganda, reenactments, ethical considerations of working with documentary subjects, investigative techniques, the approach and point-of-view of the filmmaker, interview techniques, directorial manipulation of documentary subjects, viral video, the web as a platform, and transmedia (or cross-platform) production. The course guides students step-by-step through the process of making their short documentaries: finding, researching, and developing story ideas, pitching, working with subjects on- and off-camera, anticipating and strategizing approaches to various productions concerns, and shooting their documentaries.

### FILM DYNAMICS

This course is designed to further students' knowledge of the intricacies of documentary filmmaking by surveying the language and grammar of film, including the shot, sequences, mise-en-scène, continuity, axis, camera angles, composition, and montage. Even in the most observational, objective style documentaries, the filmmaker chooses where to point the camera, and which shots to use in the edited film. The choices the director makes ultimately determine whether or not it is a coherent story. This course will teach students how to make successful choices by mastering visual storytelling techniques and understanding the forces behind successful films.



Graduate, Xiaoxiao Chen, shoots back home on Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

**CAMERA & LIGHTING I & II**

Digital camera class sessions are designed to help students master the many elements of digital video photography, including white balance, apertures, shutter speed, focus, video latitude, frame rates, and scene menus. Through hands-on exercises, students will explore the possibilities of digital video and the idiosyncrasies of different HD and hybrid (still and video) cameras. Framing and composition will also be emphasized. Lighting classes help students maximize the use of available and natural light, set light for controlled situations and for a variety of interview conditions, and to creatively implement “guerilla lighting” techniques as needed. Sound classes introduce microphones, field mixers, and basic post-production sound tools. Students learn to record high quality sound under a variety of sometimes adverse circumstances.

**DOCUMENTARY PRODUCING I & II**

Documentary Producing I and II are designed to help students become more skilled in responding effectively to the real world issues and problems that are likely to arise in the course of making films. Students will prepare to meet the challenges of producing both their current and future films. These courses guide students in the line production of their work throughout the program. Topics covered include location scouting and agreements, permits, personal and materials releases, crew deal memos, shooting schedules, call sheets, and the creation, maintenance, and use of production “bibles.” This course examines the job of a producer by matching tasks and challenges with strategies to approach them. As students start to produce their own projects, the challenges will become clearer and class time will be devoted to the specific production “hurdles” they encounter with their own films. Students will hone group problem-solving skills (a film industry must-have) and learn through sharing real examples. All students will be required to turn in a production bible including a detailed project description for each film.

**EDITING I & II**

Documentary films, or films with nonfiction content, often find their true form in the editing room. This makes the editing process extremely important, because a story may take a different shape after the footage is reviewed. This class, in addition to teaching students the fundamentals of editing with Avid Media Composer, will also teach students how to deal with the particular challenges of documentary editing. Some class hours will be devoted to guiding students through the process of editing their own films.

Students will learn advanced editing techniques used in documentary films. Through the exploration of Avid Media Composer, students will learn its many possibilities as a tool for transforming raw material for a broad audience. The goal is for students to master the program and process so that they have a wealth of tools with which to express themselves creatively in their own documentary projects.

**WRITING FOR THE DOCUMENTARY I & II**

Like fiction films, documentaries tell stories. From research to shooting to editing, one’s subject matter continues to reveal itself and evolve over time. Regardless, the director is still responsible for delivering a narrative and documentary filmmakers must go into a project as prepared as possible and with a strong sense of the story they want to tell.

This course will cover the role of writing, as a storytelling and planning tool in a documentary film. Students will master the basic elements of narrative as tools for recognizing and conveying authentic, engaging documentary stories. Elements explored include action, three-act structure, characters, conflicts, story beats, the scene, dramatic questions, climaxes, story development, and dramatic arc. The course will introduce different storytelling approaches: unwritten (visual story beats, character “dialogue”, vérité scenes, situations) and written (commentary, narration). Students will learn to identify story beats and to write and work with loglines, synopses, and a documentary shooting script. They’ll explore various styles, uses, and ways of writing narration and voiceover.

## DOCUMENTARY CINEMA STUDIES I & II

Documentary Cinema Studies I introduces students to the critical concepts of documentary filmmaking through lectures, screenings, and group discussions. It's focused on providing an overview of documentary film history and creating contexts for important movements and directors. Each session gives students the chance to consider a significant documentary film or filmmaker. Documentaries with groundbreaking styles and/or structures are given high priority. Particular attention is paid to the practical lessons that new filmmakers can take away from each film screened in class.

Documentary Cinema Studies II explores at an advanced level the themes that students were introduced to in Documentary History in the first semester. It also branches out to include nonfiction television programs and hybrid works that combine elements of both documentary and fiction. Student investigate at a deeper level the connections between content and form—between what a film says and how it says it. All the works screened in Cinema Studies are specifically selected to provide students with a wide range of inspiring examples for their own films.



*Documentary students master the 5D in Union Square, New York City with the assistance of instructor Arsenio Assin.*

## DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION WORKSHOP I & II

Production Workshop is designed to demystify the craft of filmmaking. It is a hands-on class in which students shoot exercises under the supervision of the instructor. The technical aspects of filmmaking are seen as tools to realize and better tell the story. The guiding idea is that once students can articulate the objective of a given scene, the necessary craft and techniques will follow.

## BUSINESS OF DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

The purpose of Business of Documentary Filmmaking functions as survey course familiarizing students with the business practices and legal concepts needed to monetize their films and gain employment in the industry after graduation. In this class, students encounter a wide range of topics including contracts, festivals, limited liability corporations, 21st century finance and distribution, including crowdfunding and self-distribution. They create business plans and budgets, personal bios, resumes and cover letters, and generate internship and career strategies.



*Jaguaribara, Brazil. As his family's village reemerges from the lake that swallowed it 12 years ago, NYFA documentary thesis student Lucas Dantes returns to Brazil to search for the childhood home he lost.*

### **UNSCRIPTED TELEVISION**

Through this course, students gain a deeper knowledge of unscripted television storytelling approaches and practices. In addition, it adds to a student's skill set and helps them to understand and potentially pursue a variety of job opportunities in the world of television.

Students learn how to develop an idea for an unscripted television show, and about unscripted television series formats and structure. They develop and deliver a pitch to industry insiders and receive feedback to hone their skills.

### **DOCUMENTARY THESIS**

The culmination of the One-Year Documentary Program is a Thesis Film on a subject of the student's own choosing. Through extensive research, story development, and planning, each student develops, produces, and directs a Thesis Film of up to 25 minutes in length. Students then digitally edit their Thesis Films under the tutelage of one of the top documentary editors in the business. This film should demonstrate the theory and technical skills learned throughout the year. Students work closely with instructors to develop their characters and story into a cohesive narrative as they hone their skills producing, shooting, and editing their own film.