

Zenith Reflection

The following are a few questions anyone in my close proximity was plagued with at the very beginning of the Zenith Project: “Yo, what are you doing for your Zenith project?” “What do you think you’ll do for your Zenith?” “Do you know what you’re doing for Zenith?” I got a lot of different answers to these questions, but I did not have any answers myself. One day in film class, I said jokingly “What if I do a documentary about everyone else’s Zenith projects.”

The joke was that I wasn’t joking. I had actually thought a lot about it. For a while now, I’ve been interested in film and media that’s “meta”, whether it’s watching a documentary about the making of a (pretty bad) movie or having my own junior narrative film be about someone making a short film. I merged my interests and my idea for a documentary about the Zenith process was approved. The documentary would cover both my own Zenith process as well as highlight the projects of my classmates. It would include pre-production, interviews, filming, editing, etc.

Because the topic of my documentary is somewhat unconventional, I had to form a solid foundation of documentary types and structures. I conducted research and formed a master document detailing the different forms of documentary and details from example documentaries. From the research and examples, I determined that my documentary best fell into the genre of Reflexive with other aspects of Performative and Participatory. In short, my documentary would be about the process of filmmaking itself as well as the relationship between me (the filmmaker) and my audience and subjects. After narrowing down the genres, I made my documentary watchlist featuring documentaries like *Bowling for Columbine* and *Man with a Movie Camera*. Despite working to compile and study documentaries, my main artistic influences were narrative films like *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, *Tropic Thunder*, *American Movie*, and *Adaptation*. If

I had had more time for this project, I may have made a narrative film, but I was still working on my senior narrative and the thought of writing another screenplay was very overwhelming—and I just enjoy the documentary process the most.

Perhaps my favorite part about this project was that I got to collaborate with classmates in film, animation, and design. It was inspiring to talk to different people about their projects and hear about what they're passionate about.

The hardest aspect of the project was self-direction. Since my documentary was about my own zenith process, I had to stay on schedule and hold myself accountable in order to have content for my film. On one hand, this was great because it allowed me to put the right amount of pressure on myself to accomplish what I needed to get done. On the other hand, falling slightly behind could cause a cascading effect that would put me significantly behind schedule. The Zenith project definitely forced me to improve upon my collaboration and self-direction skills. Because a lot of my struggles were with productivity and self-direction, I didn't get to focus on creativity and technological literacy as I would have liked to.

In the future, I will hold myself more accountable for staying on track and meeting deadlines. I had a lot of barriers that came up for me during this process (Covid, AP testing, missing class, etc.) that put me behind where I needed to be. While one can never predict everything that could happen, I wish I had accounted for the possibility of setbacks. It would have been nice if I had myself some room to make mistakes and troubleshoot. In the future, I know not to assume that everything will go perfectly according to plan. As important as it is to hold myself accountable, it's also important to acknowledge that things happen and to cut myself some slack. If I accept that things may go wrong in the early stages, it won't be as daunting later when they do happen.

While I was excited about my Zenith idea at the beginning, part of me wishes that I had done a more conventional documentary. I was excited to mess around with B-roll and documentary structure, but the documentary being about my own process took me out of it, especially when the project became overwhelming. I wanted to do a documentary about something I was passionate about and interested in, but I found that I was very uninspired by my own project. In the end, I am glad that I explored this idea. It forced me to learn more about documentaries and explore how to blend genres. What I enjoyed most was talking to people about their projects, which is something I probably could have done without making a documentary about it.

If I were to do this project again, I don't know if I would choose a different documentary subject entirely or just choose a different approach to my original idea. Part of me wants to explore another topic but I also want to see if I can rework my idea to make it more interesting.

I think what's important about this project is to stay true to what you're passionate about. Even if your project doesn't work out the way you want it to, you can know for sure that you still explored something worthwhile.