RYAN SIMMONS, MFA

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Award-winning digital media professional and documentary filmmaker with an MFA in Documentary Filmmaking and experience producing high-impact educational, promotional, and story-driven content for the University of Michigan and broadcast media organizations. Skilled in translating complex ideas into clear, engaging visual experiences through video production, editing, motion graphics, and stakeholder collaboration. Proven ability to lead projects from concept through delivery while combining creative storytelling with strategic communication.

Core Competencies

Instructional Design, Video Production, Adobe Premiere Pro, After Effects, E-Learning Content, Faculty Collaboration, Accessibility Standards, LMS Content Development, Storyboarding, Motion Graphics, Stakeholder Management, Project Management, Digital Learning Strategy.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Michigan Regional Emmy Award, Technical Achievement | 2021
Stockholm City Film Festival, Semi-Finalist, Best Feature Documentary (Reel Conversations)

EDUCATION

Wake Forest University
Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Documentary Filmmaking
July 2022 – August 2024
GPA: 3.97

Western Michigan University
Bachelor of Arts, Film, Video, and Media Studies
August 2013 – December 2017

UNIVERSITY APPOINTMENTS AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Digital Media Designer (Instructional Learning Intermediate)
Office of Digital Education, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan | Ann Arbor, MI
January 2024 – Present

Produce instructional and academic media in collaboration with faculty and instructional designers, with a focus on aligning visual storytelling, media structure, and pacing to course-level learning objectives and program outcomes. Support undergraduate, graduate, and executive education initiatives through documentary-style faculty features, course media, and student-facing instructional content. Translate complex academic concepts into accessible audiovisual formats that support learning and assessment. Lead production workflows including pre-production planning, on-set production, post-production editing, and

multi-platform delivery. Coordinate production logistics involving faculty, students, and stakeholders, and contribute to pedagogically informed media design practices.

Teaching Assistant, Documentary Film Program (Graduate Level)
Wake Forest University | Winston-Salem, NC
August 2023 – December 2023
Course: Advanced Story Editing for Nonfiction
Led workshops in advanced story editing, narrative structure, and ethical documentary practice for graduate students. Provided detailed written and verbal feedback on works in progress, emphasizing clarity, pacing, and narrative cohesion. Supported assessment design and grading using established rubrics. Held scheduled office hours and mentored students through creative, technical, and logistical challenges in long-form nonfiction projects. Contributed to partial syllabus development and course planning in collaboration with faculty.

Teaching Assistant, School of Communication (Undergraduate Media Production)
Wake Forest University | Winston-Salem, NC
January 2023 – May 2023
Course: Media Production I
Assisted in instruction for introductory media production coursework covering pre-production, production, and post-production workflows. Facilitated hands-on workshops in camera operation, lighting, sound recording, and editing. Supported assessment and grading using rubric-based evaluation. Participated in critiques and provided constructive feedback on student projects. Offered one-on-one mentoring and instructional support during office hours.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE AND COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Grounds teaching approach in professional production experience, treating the classroom as an extension of real-world creative practice rather than a separate theoretical space. Emphasizes hands-on, project-based learning where students develop technical competency and creative judgment simultaneously, mirroring the collaborative workflows used in professional documentary and broadcast production. Draws on experience translating academic and scientific content into accessible visual storytelling, developed through work at the University of Michigan, to teach students how to communicate complex ideas to diverse audiences. Incorporates ethical documentary practice, including informed consent and subject welfare, as a core teaching value rather than a supplementary topic.

ACADEMIC SERVICE AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

Media Equipment Manager, Documentary Film Program
Wake Forest University | Winston-Salem, NC
August 2023 – December 2023
Provided technical and logistical support for graduate-level documentary courses and thesis projects. Advised students on equipment selection, field production workflows, and problem-solving in complex shooting environments. Supported ethical documentary practices and informed consent considerations. Assisted approximately 30 graduate students engaged in long-form and thesis-level nonfiction projects.

Media Equipment Manager, School of Communication
Wake Forest University | Winston-Salem, NC
February 2023 – May 2023
Managed and maintained production equipment supporting undergraduate media production coursework and labs. Trained students in the safe and effective use of cameras, lighting kits, microphones, and related production tools. Enforced equipment usage policies and safety standards. Provided technical advising directly connected to course assignments and field production needs.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Founder and Creative Director
Lighthouse Lens Productions LLC (formerly Ryan Simmons Video LLC) | Michigan
December 2018 – Present
Founded and led an independent media production practice specializing in cinematography, editing, and end-to-end nonfiction, narrative, and commercial production. Manage projects from concept through delivery, including budgeting, scheduling, production workflows, and post-production. Lead project teams and coordinate collaborators as needed. Professional practice directly informs teaching in visual storytelling, documentary ethics, editing, and production processes.

Multimedia Editor
Wake Forest University, Office of Online Education | Winston-Salem, NC
August 2022 – December 2023
Produced digital content for e-learning platforms using Adobe Creative Suite. Developed and edited video lectures, motion graphics, and multimedia assets to support student engagement and knowledge retention. Collaborated with faculty and instructional designers to create accessible, high-quality educational content aligned with course objectives.

Commercial Promotions Producer
WOOD TV8 (Nexstar Media Group) | Grand Rapids, MI
September 2020 – June 2022
Led production for Weather Experience, an Emmy Award-winning educational children's television program integrating science education with broadcast storytelling. Collaborated with cross-functional teams to produce multi-platform promotional and educational content aligned with programming and outreach goals.

Digital Media Specialist (Freelance/Part-Time)
Career Dress | Pontiac, MI
April 2019 – December 2021
Developed and executed video marketing strategies to increase brand awareness and advance organizational mission. Produced promotional videos, testimonials, and event highlights for web and social media distribution.

News Editor and Photojournalist
WXMI TV FOX 17 (Tribune Media) | Grand Rapids, MI
January 2018 – November 2018

Edited news segments and captured video and still photography supporting investigative reports, feature stories, and breaking news coverage. Maintained newsroom standards for accuracy, fairness, and professional ethics.

Sports Journalism Intern
WJBK TV FOX 2 Detroit | Southfield, MI
September 2017 – December 2017
Assisted with research, script preparation, rundown organization, and live production support for sports broadcasts and feature segments.

Technical Director and Camera Operator
Western Michigan University, Bronco Productions | Kalamazoo, MI
August 2016 – April 2017
Operated broadcast cameras for live and recorded sports productions and supported multi-camera workflows in time-sensitive environments.

CREATIVE SCHOLARSHIP AND PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

Reel Conversations **| Feature-Length Documentary (MFA Thesis) | Runtime: 56:46**
Director
Practice-based documentary research project exploring genetics, mental illness, and grief through observational, participatory, interview-based, archival, and hybrid methods. Developed using informed consent and ethical documentary frameworks. Picture locked.
Festival Recognition: Royal Starr Film Festival (Official Selection); Grand Rapids Film Festival (Official Selection): Stockholm City Film Festival (Semi-Finalist, Best Documentary); Paradise Film Festival (Official Selection); The Reel Mind Film & Theatre Series (Official Selection).

The Box **| Scripted Web Comedy Series | 2025 – 2026**
Director of Photography (one of two)
Eight-episode comedy series; managed cinematography, lighting design, and visual consistency. Best Web-Series (NY Shorts Awards), Best TV Series/Pilot/Web (LA Indies Fest).

Artist Profile **| Documentary Web Series | 2020 – 2021**
Director, Producer, Editor
Four-episode documentary web series featuring emerging regional musicians and bands. Distributed on YouTube in partnership with local artists.

Weather Experience **| Children's Educational Television Program | WOOD TV8**
Producer and Editor
Educational television program integrating science education with hands-on activities for young audiences. Distributed via broadcast and educational platforms including ZOOM.
Award: Michigan Regional Emmy Award, Technical Achievement (2021).

INVITED TALKS AND PANELS

Panelist, Career Day
Western Michigan University | February 2025

COURSES PREPARED TO TEACH

Introduction to Media Production
Media Production I
Documentary Production
Advanced Story Editing for Nonfiction
Editing for Film and Media
Ethics in Documentary Film
Digital Storytelling
Motion Graphics for Nonfiction
Visual Storytelling for Social Impact

SKILLS

Teaching and Assessment
Workshop facilitation, critique participation, grading and rubric-based assessment, office hours, and student mentoring.

Software & Platforms
Adobe Premiere Pro, After Effects, Audition, Photoshop, Final Cut Pro X, Blender (basic), Microsoft Office, Google Workspace.

Production Equipment
Sony FS5, FS7, FX3, FX6; Canon C70, C100, C200, C300, C400, C700; Zoom F6 and F2 audio recorders; Rode and Sennheiser microphones.

Leadership & Communication
Grant writing, interviewing, in-depth research, visual storytelling, narrative development, project management, team leadership, and archival producing.

REFERENCES

Chris Zaluski
Program Director and Associate Professor - Wake Forest University
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