COMM 4311 Documentary Film

Spring 2014  
MW 2-315 OCNR 131  
Dr. Ethan Thompson  
Office Hours: BH 3.28, MW 11-2 & By Appointment  
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Course Catalog Description

Historical and critical study of the nonfiction film with attention to changing technologies, to varying uses and styles of documentary, and to contemporary critical and theoretical issues

Student Learning Outcomes

- Recognize and identify key films and filmmakers in the development of documentary.
- Describe the techniques and principles that define various documentary approaches.
- Explain the connections between major styles and movements in documentary and their technological and social contexts.

Required Text & Materials:

*Introduction to Documentary* by Bill Nichols, Second Edition

Subscription to Netflix for screening films outside of class.

One pack of 4 x 6 notecards

Evaluation:

Midterm Exam: 25%. Multiple choice and essays.

Final Exam: 25%. Multiple choice and essays.

Paper: 25% About 5 pages. Details to come.

Attendance/Participation: 10%. You must not only come to class, but actively participate in discussions and group activities.

Responses: 15%. You will be given a prompt about the week’s screening to write about each week.

Grade Scale: A = 100-90, B = 89-80, C = 79-70, D = 69-60, F = 59 and under.
Other Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Two absences are acceptable, but any additional unexcused absences will cause a five-point deduction from your attendance and participation grade, and you many not make up any missed work. Excused absences require official documentation. Two "lates" (or leaving early) equal an absence.

E-Communication Policy:

- I will respond to email within 24 hours, except for Friday at 3 pm until Monday at 9 am.
- I will respond to queries on the Facebook group within 24 hours as well.
- I will be happy to talk on the phone, instant message, Facetime etc with you during my office hours TWR 11– 2.
- I am also happy to meet with you in person during office hours or some other time arranged in advance!

Students are expected to:

1. Silence and put away cell phones. Texting (including the reading of texts!) is not allowed in class. Your social life will survive until the break, I promise.
2. Come to class on-time. Do not get up and leave early.
3. Participate in class discussions. In addition to the enlightening lectures, our goal during each class will be to have a lively, informed discussion. You will not get an “A” if you do not regularly contribute to class discussion in a productive manner.
4. Be responsible for any information and materials missed when absent.
5. Complete readings and assignments as assigned. All assignments must be handed in on time; exceptions will be made only for extraordinary cases and official documentation is needed. Exams may not be rescheduled. Do not make travel plans that conflict with exams.
6. Proofread all work before turning it in. Really.
7. Seek help with writing if necessary. The Writing Center of TAMU-CC, located in GSSC 112, provides free help for students at any stage in the writing process. More information is available at the Center for Academic Student Achievement website, casa.tamucc.edu.
8. Properly cite sources. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form, and will result in an automatic zero for the assignment and further disciplinary action. A useful guide to citing references in APA style is located at http://library.nmu.edu/guides/userguides/style_apa.htm.
9. Respect the privacy and opinions of fellow students. I expect students to participate in discussion, and I expect students to respect each other’s (hopefully well-informed) opinions. Grades and course performance are considered private...
information. Students are not to openly discuss their grades (good or bad) inside my classroom.

10. **Meet with the instructor during office hours.** I will not discuss individual student grades in the classroom. I will, however, be happy to discuss grades on papers, exams, course performance, etc. during office hours. I also do not allow the following topics to be openly discussed in the classroom: student opinions about other faculty, student opinions about other students, student grades in other classes.

**Academic Integrity/Plagiarism**

University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in an automatic zero on the assignment and further disciplinary action.

**Dropping a Class**

Events sometimes occur that make dropping a course seem necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class.

**Classroom/Professional behavior**

Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

*Notice to Students with Disabilities*: Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible. Please have your accommodation letter from Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi Disability Services (DS) Office with you when you come see me. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning
disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Disability Services Office (located in 116 Corpus Christi Hall) at 361.825.5816.

**Academic Advising:** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College's Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

***GRADE APPEALS PROCESS:** Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, claus.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**WEEK 1:** JAN 22: Introduction to the Class.

**WEEK 2:** JAN 27: How Can We Define Documentary Film? READ: Ch. 1 pp. 1-33

JAN 29: WATCH: *The Thin Blue Line*

**WEEK 3:** FEB 3: How Can We Define Documentary Film? READ: Ch. 1 pp. 33-41

FEB 5: WATCH: *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*

**WEEK 4:** FEB 10: Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking? READ Ch. 2

FEB 12: WATCH: *Harvest of Shame*

**WEEK 5:** FEB 17: What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own? READ Ch. 3

FEB 19: WATCH: *Sherman’s March*

**WEEK 6:** FEB 24: What Makes Documentaries Engaging and Persuasive? READ Ch. 4

FEB 26: WATCH: *Roger & Me*

**WEEK 7:** MAR 3: How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started? READ Ch. 5

MAR 5: MIDTERM

SPRING BREAK
WEEK 8: MAR 17: How Can We Differentiate among Documentaries? READ Ch. 6
MAR 19: WATCH: Rivers and Tides

WEEK 9: MAR 24: How Can We Describe the Modes of Documentary? READ Ch. 7
MAR 26: WATCH: The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter

WEEK 10: MAR 31: How Have Documentaries Addressed Social Issues? READ Ch. 8
APRIL 2: WATCH: Queen of Versailles

WEEK 11: APRIL 7: How Can We Write Effectively about Documentary? READ Ch. 9
APRIL 9: WATCH: Nobody’s Business

WEEK 12: APRIL 14: What is archival filmmaking? READ: Archival Filmmaking excerpt, Blackboard
APRIL 16: WATCH: Atomic Cafe

WEEK 13: APRIL 21: Is reality TV documentary TV? READ: Murray, “I think we need a new name for it” Blackboard
APRIL 23: WATCH: An American Family

APRIL 30: WATCH: Story of a Family

WEEK 15: MAY 5 PAPER DUE

FINAL EXAM AT OFFICIAL TIME AND PLACE