COMM 3303.001 Documentary Studies

Spring 2016
TR 930-1045 ECDC 219C
Dr. Ethan Thompson
Office Hours: BH 3.28, M 2-3, T 1:30-3, W 2-3, R 1:30-3 and 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 Texts:

_Introduction to Documentary_ by Bill Nichols, Second Edition

Contemporary Documentary edited by Daniel Marcus and Selmin Kara

SCREENINGS:

You must subscribe to Netflix for this course. While some shorter screenings will be conducted in class, many will be done outside of class on your own time. These are noted on the syllabus.

Evaluation:

Paper 1: 25%. About five pages. Examines and describes elements of a documentary and argues for how they make a documentary meaningful.

Paper 2: or Project: 25% About five pages. If a creative project, scope should be appropriate. Details to come.

Midterm Exam: 20%. Multiple choice and essay.

Final Exam: 20%. Multiple choice and essay.
Attendance/Participation: 10%. You must not only come to class, but actively participate in discussions and group activities.

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 may not make up any missed work. Excused absences require official documentation. Two "lates" (or leaving early) equal an absence. Five or more unexcused absences will result in automatically failing the course.

**E-Communication Policy:**

- I will respond to email within 24 hours, except for Friday at 3 pm until Monday at 9 am.
- 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.
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.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**WEEK 1:** JAN 21: Introduction to the Class.

**WEEK 2:** Elements of Documentary

JAN 26: READ: Nichols, Ch. 1 pp. 1-33, How Can We Define Documentary Film?

JAN 28: READ: Fallon, “Interrogating the Media” (M&K)

Screening: *The Thin Blue Line* (E. Morris, 1988, 103 minutes)

**WEEK 3:** What’s “doc-worthy”?

FEB 2 READ: Ch. 1 pp. 33-41, How Can We Define Documentary Film?

FEB 4: READ Landesman, "Lying to Be Real" (M&K)

Screening: *Nobody’s Business* (A. Berliner, 1996, 60 minutes)

**WEEK 4:** Ethics & the Filmmaker

FEB 9: READ Ch. 2, Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?

FEB 11: READ Baron, “The Ethics of Appropriation” (M&K)

Screening: *Act of Killing* (J. Oppenheimer, 2012, 2 h 46 minutes)

**WEEK 5:** Addressing the Audience

FEB 16: READ Ch. 3, What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own?

FEB 18: READ Hight, “The Mockumentary” **PAPER 1 DUE**

Screenings: *Night Mail* (Watt & Wright, 1936, 25 minutes); *History and Memory* (R. Tajiri, 1992); Forgotten Silver (Botes & Jackson, 1995)

**WEEK 6:** Art and Propaganda

FEB 23: READ Ch. 4, What Makes Documentaries Engaging and Persuasive?

FEB 25: In class screenings: *Triumph of the Will* (L. Riefenstahl, 1935, 114 minutes, excerpts), *Battle of San Pietro* (J. Huston, 1945, 32 minutes)

**WEEK 7:** Elements of History

MAR 1: READ Ch. 5, How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started?

MAR 3: **MIDTERM**

**WEEK 8:** Expository vs. Poetic Modes

MAR 8: READ Ch. 6, How Can We Differentiate among Documentaries?

**SPRING BREAK**

**WEEK 9: Observational Mode**

MAR 22: READ Ch. 7, pp. 172-194. How Can We Describe the Modes of Documentary?

MAR 24: READ Wilson, “Indigenous Documentary Media” (M&K)

Screening: *Titicut Follies* (F. Wiseman, 1967, 84 minutes)

**WEEK 10: Participatory Mode**

MAR 29: READ Ch. 9, How Can We Write Effectively about Documentary?

MAR 31: READ Hughes, “Documentary and the Survival of the Film Auteur” (M&K)

Screening: *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (W. Herzog, 1997, 80 minutes)

**WEEK 11: Reflexive and Performative Modes**

APRIL 5: READ Ch. 7, pp. 194-211. How Can We Describe the Modes of Documentary?

APRIL 7: READ Roe, “Animated Documentary” (M&K)

Screening: *Waltz with Bashir* (A. Folman, 2008, 90 minutes)

**WEEK 12: Archival Documentaries**

APRIL 12: READ: “Best Practices in Fair Use” (PDF)

APRIL 14: In class screening: *Atomic Café* excerpts (K. Rafferty et al, 1982, 86 minutes)

**WEEK 13: Representing Social Issues**

APRIL 19: READ Ch. 8, How Have Documentaries Addressed Social Issues?


Screening: *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Prices* (Greenwald, 2005, 98 minutes)

**Paper 2/Project Due**

**WEEK 14: Is reality TV documentary TV?**

APRIL 26: READ Kompare, “Extraordinarily Ordinary” (PDF)

APRIL 28: READ Ouellette, “True Life” (M&K)

Screening: *An American Family* (TV Series, C. Gilbert et al, 1973, excerpts)

**WEEK 15: Bringing it all back home.**

MAY 3: Review for final and screening of any projects.
**FINAL EXAM: Thursday, May 5, 8 am – 10:30 am**

**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.

**Disabilities Accommodations**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance 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, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean.