MEDA 3303 Documentary Studies

FALL 2017: TR 930-1045 BH 205
Dr. Ethan Thompson
Office Hours: BH 3.28, MW 2-3, TR 11-12:30 and by appointment
Email: ethan.thompson@tamucc.edu
Phone: 825-5993

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 and materials:

*Introduction to Documentary* by Bill Nichols, Second Edition
*Contemporary Documentary* edited by Daniel Marcus and Selmin Kara
Subscription to Netflix

SCREENINGS:

As noted above, 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.

Blog: doctamucc.blogspot.com

Occasionally I will post clips to this blog, and we may work with it for class assignments or exercises as well.

Evaluation:

Paper 1: 20%. About five pages. Examines and describes elements of a documentary and argues how they make a documentary meaningful.

Paper 2/Treatment: 20%. About five pages. Details to come.

Group Presentation: 10%. 15-20 minutes on a chapter of the Marcus/Kara book, with clips and slideshow.
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 is mandatory. Two absences are acceptable, but any additional unexcused absence will cause a two-point deduction from your final grade, and you may not make up any missed work. Excused absences require official documentation. Two “lates” (or leaving early) equal an absence.

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 with you during my office hours.
- 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: Introduction to Documentary Studies

AUG 29: Introduction to the Class.

AUG 31: READ: Renov, “Poetics of Documentary” (PDF) & Fallon, “Interrogating the Media” (M&K) WATCH: The Thin Blue Line (Netflix)

WEEK 2: What’s a Documentary?

SEP 5: READ: Nichols, Ch. 1, How Can We Define Documentary Film?

SEP 7: READ Landesman, “Lying to Be Real” (M&K) WATCH: Exit through the Gift Shop (Netflix)

WEEK 3: Ethics & the Filmmaker

SEP 19: READ Nichols, Ch. 2, Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking? WATCH: The Look of Silence

SEP 21: READ Baron, “The Ethics of Appropriation” (M&K); hooks, “Is Paris Burning?” (PDF); WATCH: Paris is Burning (Netflix)

WEEK 5: Addressing the Audience

SEP 26: READ Nichols, Ch. 3, What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own?

SEP 28: READ Hight, “The Mockumentary” (M&K); WATCH: American Movie

PAPER 1 DUE

WEEK 6: Art and Propaganda

OCT 3: READ Nichols, Ch. 4, What Makes Documentaries Engaging and Persuasive?

OCT 5: READ: Marcus, “Documentary and Video Activism” (M&K); WATCH: 13th (Netflix)

WEEK 7: Elements of History: Film & TV Documentaries

OCT 10: READ Nichols, Ch. 5, How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started? WATCH: Harvest of Shame

OCT 12: WATCH: Stranger with a Camera. MIDTERM ASSIGNED

WEEK 8: Expository vs. Poetic Modes

OCT 17: MIDTERM DUE


WEEK 9: Observational Mode
OCT 24: READ Nichols, Ch. 7, pp. 172-194. How Can We Describe the Modes of Documentary?

OCT 26: WATCH: *Titticut Follies*

**WEEK 10: Participatory Mode**

OCT 31: READ Nichols, Ch. 9, How Can We Write Effectively about Documentary?

NOV 2: READ Hughes, “Documentary and the Survival of the Film Auteur” (M&K) 
WATCH: *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (Netflix)

**WEEK 11: Reflexive and Performative Modes**

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

NOV 9: READ Roe, “Animated Documentary” (M&K); WATCH: *Tower* (Netflix)

**WEEK 12: Archival Documentaries**

NOV 14: READ: “Best Practices in Fair Use” (PDF)

NOV 16: WATCH: *TV Family* (Vimeo)

**WEEK 13: Representing Social Issues**

NOV 21: READ Nichols, Ch. 8, How Have Documentaries Addressed Social Issues? 
WATCH: *Audrie and Daisy* (Netflix)

NOV 23 THANKSGIVING

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

NOV 28: READ Kompare, “Extraordinarily Ordinary” (PDF); Murray, “I think we need a new name for it” (PDF); Ouellette, “True Life” (M&K)

NOV 30: **PAPER 2/PROJECT DUE**

**WEEK 15: Seriality and Quality (Documentary) TV**

12/5 FINISH WATCHING: *The Keepers* (Netflix)

**FINAL EXAM:** Tuesday, 12/12, 8-10:30 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 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. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466 or log onto http://cla.tamu.cc/advising/.

**Grade Appeals:** As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, http://cla.tamu.cc/about/student-resources.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

**Statement of Academic Continuity:** In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi; this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.