

**HISTORY OF DOCUMENTARY FILM:** Cinema 4: Section 0585

**Instructor:** L. Casser (casserl@wlaac.edu) TTH 9:35 - 11:40AM

Office hours (by appointment) Thursday 11:40 - 12:00

This **survey** course will discuss how documentaries or "non-fiction" films have informed, influenced, and entertained audiences since their inception through modern times. Notable documentaries or film clips will illustrate how films that engage with reality may also distort or enhance our perception of reality. Through weekly screenings, lecture and discussion of social, political, arts, personal and nature documentaries, students will develop critical standards for judging non-fiction films and their impact on our culture and society. Students will screen a wide variety of documentaries that attempt to educate and persuade audiences. They will gain knowledge of how the non-fiction film has the power to impact our understanding of the natural world and social issues. **This course will also explain how documentaries evolved, are developed and produced.**

#### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This course will help students achieve the following

##### **Institutional Student Learning Outcomes:**

- \* Communication
- \* Critical Thinking
- \* Aesthetics

**The goal of this course is Media Literacy, so that the student may come to recognize propaganda, and identify the elements of media manipulation.** Students will learn to recognize cinema techniques, and evaluate how they are effectively employed for various purposes in the non-fiction film. Students will become aware of the formative power of documentaries and related media.

##### **COURSE SLO's**

At a minimum, at the conclusion of this course, students will have achieved the following student learning objectives: be able to NAME significant milestones in documentary filmmaking from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day & DISCUSS why they are important. They will be able to ANALYZE documentary films according to specific criteria (e.g style, structure, historical relevance and cultural significance).

**EVALUATION:** Evaluation by the instructor is based on student's attendance, punctuality, class contributions, assignments (60%), and FINAL exam (40%). **THERE WILL BE NO MAKEUP EXAMS.** Excessive absenteeism and tardiness will lower your grade, as well as walking in and out of class, or texting during class.

**TEXT AND SUPPLIES:**

NEW HISTORY OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM: Ellis and Maclane: 2006

**COURSE CONTENT**

Lecture, screenings of theatrical (feature) and TV documentary films and clips to illustrate different styles of the non-fiction film, class discussion and assignments.

**WLAC POLICIES AND STANDARDS**

Students who are absent for more than 3 consecutive sessions of class are subject to possible exclusion from the class for non attendance (advise instructor re: extenuating circumstances). *Students who are no longer interested in completing this class are responsible for DROPPING/WITHDRAWING themselves at the Office of Admissions & Records. (See WLAC Schedule for drop/add dates) Failure to do so will result in a Semester grade of "F" for this class.*

**\*\*\*Plagiarism (plagiarize: to steal or purloin or pass off as one's own ideas, writings, etc. of another). Plagiarism will result in an "F" on the plagiary. In addition, the vice president of student services will be notified.**

Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disabled Students Programs and Services located in HRLC 119, phone number 310-287-4450 as soon as possible to better ensure such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

**TOPICS: SEE ADDENDUM ATTACHED TO SYLLABUS HANDOUT FOR CHANGES IN SCREENINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS!**

Weeks 1 - 3

Unit: Introduction to the non-fiction film; definitions, terms. Formal elements of film.

Unit: Survey: categories of documentaries: social, nature, performance, political, expose, informational and "reality" TV, rockumentary, mockumentary.

Unit: Pioneers: Lumiere Bros, Flaherty, Vertov,

**SAMPLE DOCUMENTARIES CORRESPONDING TO TOPICS TO BE CHOSEN FROM BELOW:**

- \* NANOOK OF THE NORTH
- \* VISIONS OF LIGHT
- \* MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

Weeks 4 - 6

Unit: Propaganda: historical; war films, Capra and Reifenstahl

Unit: Introduction to cinematic techniques

Unit: Engaging with reality: variations; Grierson to Pennebaker

Unit: Analysis formal elements of film employed in non-fiction cinema, i.e. archival footage, news footage, interviews, additional photography, editing, music and narrative.

**SAMPLE DOCUMENTARIES: (see ADDENDUM)**

- \*THE WONDERFUL HORRIBLE LIFE OF LENI REIFENSTAHL
- \* WOODSTOCK
- \* GIMME SHELTER
- \* HARLAN COUNTY

Weeks 7 - 10

Unit: Direct Cinema/Cinema Verite. Observational documentaries and the politics of the '60s.

Unit: True lies: mediated reality. Selection, choice, organization and interpretation of subject.

Unit: Propaganda: contemporary; Michael Moore, Fox News, Frontline, the expose.

- \* HEARTS AND MINDS
- \* WHY WE FIGHT (2)
- \* BATTLE OF ALGIERS
- \* SPINAL TAP

**SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT:** Discuss the cinematic techniques employed in the hybrid, fictional film BATTLE OF ALGIERS to make it look like a documentary.

Weeks 11 - 13

Unit: Content by means of technology; evolution of the documentary. Errol Morris

Unit: Cinema verite style influence on fictional films.

- \* HOOP DREAMS
- \* MARCH OF THE PENGUINS
- \* THE THIN BLUE LINE
- \* DOGTOWN AND Z BOYS

**SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT:** Essay: Analyze if Nova documentary JUDGEMENT DAY: Intelligent Design on Trial is fair and balanced.

TOPICS: Weeks 14 - 16

**Guest Speaker:** Documentary Filmmaker TBA

Unit: Developing and Producing the documentary.

Unit: Digital advances: Editing and Camera

Unit: Documentarian as chronicler, advocate, poet, observer, reporter and explorer.

\* CATFISH

\* TROUBLE THE WATER

\* SICKO

\* MAN ON WIRE

**SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT:** Documentary Proposal: Student will choose as a subject for a documentary a topic, event, personality or issue that interests them, and develop it as a written proposal.

FINAL EXAM