

English 370: 001 introduction to documentary
Fall 2015 | TR 10:30--11:45am
Planetary Hall 126

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Hours: TR 12-1pm or by appt
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He Took His Camera and Walked

Yesterday she asked a sensitive question. That's why I'm saying delete it.
--*The Oath* (Laura Poitras 2010)

He was like an immigrant discovering a new city. When he wanted
to be alone, he took his camera and walked
--*Return to Homs* (Talal Derki 2014)

Description: This introduction to the study of documentary considers fundamental concepts of form, style, and subject matter, as well as aesthetic, political, and ethical issues. We will conduct close analyses of a series of representative films to ask these questions: how are documentaries like or unlike news or reality TV or YouTube? How are documentaries personal or political? How are they objective or persuasive? How do they manipulate story, create knowledge or convey truth? How do they tell stories, for whom, and about whom?

Grading: Attendance in every day class earns a C. From this base, grades are calculated according to multiple measures, including quizzes, participation in class and blackboard discussions, class presentations, creative projects, analysis essays, and a final exam.

Blackboard: I will post paper topics and initial blog discussion assignments on blackboard. Coursework includes in-class and on-blackboard writing assignments, a group presentation, a creative project, and unannounced quizzes on readings and films. You can make up one quiz with a good excuse; others missed will affect your grade. More than two unexplained absences will result in an automatic grade deduction.

Class time: Please do not use laptops, tablets or cell phones in class for non-class work. Please do make a habit of taking notes as you watch the films, as you will need them for in-class quizzes, your papers and blackboard work, and the final exam.

Textbook: Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2nd Edition. Bloomington: Indiana UP 2010, at GMU bookstore

Optional text: Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, at Amazon and elsewhere

Films and videos: Available on DVD at the JC Media Reserve Desk, and most from Netflix, iTunes, Amazon, etc. They are also available in Dropbox, for which you may purchase a temporary account. You must see all films before class discussions and quizzes.

Requirements

class participation, quizzes	30%
two documentary analyses (2-4 pages)	20%
blackboard assignments (complete first 3, then 5 more)	20%
one creative project	10%
one class presentation (with outline and bb questions)	10%
final exam	10%

Writing Center: please take advantage of the GMU Writing Center in person or online, if you have questions concerning the construction of arguments, correct grammar and punctuation, or formal styling (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/index.html>, ext. 3-1200, Rob A114).

Disability Resources: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474.

Honor Code: George Mason University's Honor Code requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee. See honorcode.gmu.edu for more detailed information.

Schedule

Week 1

Sep 1 introduction: documentary concepts and practices

Sep 3 bb assignment (required) due 9/2 11pm: your link to example of documentary, with 100 words describing your reasons

Week 2

Sep 8 *Trouble the Water* (Tia Lessin and Carl Deal 2008) HV636 2005 .N4 T76 2008 + Nichols 1 "How Can We Define Documentary Film?" (1-41)

Sep 10 bb assignment (required) 9/9 11pm + *Harlan County USA* (Barbara Kopple 1976) HD5325.M63 1973 .H37 2006

Week 3

Sep 15 presentation groups assigned + *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston 1990) HQ77.95.U6 P37 1992 + Nichols 2 "Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?" (42-66)

Sep 17 bb assignment (required) 11pm 9/16 + *Hoop Dreams* (Steve James 1994) PN1997 .H665 2005

Sep 17 Extra credit: *Crossing Over* with filmmaker Katrina Sorrentino 4pm JCC

Sep 18 Extra credit: Best of FAVS 3-6pm with reception Harris Theater

Week 4

Sep 22 *Nanook of the North* (Robert Joseph Flaherty 1922) E99.E7 N18 1998 + "Kanuck Uncovered" (*Documentary Now* 2015) + Nichols 5, "How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started?" (120-141) + presentation

Sep 24 *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov 1929) PN1997 .M349 1998 + Nichols 9 "How Can We Write Effectively about Documentary?" (253-272) + presentation

Week 5

Sep 29 *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog 2005) QL737.C27 G75 2005 + Nichols 3 "What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own?" (67- 93) + presentation

Oct 1 *Knuckle* (Ian Palmer 2011) GV1127.I73 K58 2011 + presentation

Week 6

Oct 6 bb assignment: paper proposal (required) 10/7 11pm + *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki 2004) HV6556 .C36 2004 + presentation

Oct 8 2-page sequence analysis due + *Capturing the Friedmans*

Week 7

Oct 13 No class

Oct 15 *Cutie and the Boxer* (Zachary Heinzerling 2013) NX512.S55 C88 2014 + Nichols 6 "How Can We Differentiate Among Documentaries? Categories, Models, and the Expository and Poetic Modes of Documentary Film" (142-171) + presentation

Oct 15 Extra credit: *Back on Board: Greg Louganis* with filmmaker Cheryl Furjanic 4:30pm JCC

Oct 16 Extra credit Studio A with Cheryl Furjanic, 2:30pm Innovation Hall 4th Floor

Week 8

Oct 20 *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris 1988) PN1995.9.D4 T55 2005 + presentation
Oct 22 *The Jinx* (Andrew Jarecki and HBO 2015) + presentation

Week 9

Oct 27 *Jesus Camp* (Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady 2006) BR1641.A1 J47 2006 + Nichols 7 "How Can We Describe the Observational, Participatory, Reflexive, and Performative Modes of Documentary Film?" (172-211) + presentation
Oct 29 *Hell and Back Again* (Danfung Dennis 2011) DS371.43.H37 H45 2011 + presentation

Week 10

Nov 3 *Cartel Land* (Matthew Heineman 2015) + Nichols 8 "How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?" (212-252) + presentation
Nov 5 *The Life And Mind Of Mark DeFriest* (Gabriel London 2015) + presentation

Week 11

Nov 10 *The Newburgh Sting* (David Heilbroner, Kate Davis 2014) + presentation

Nov 11 Extra credit (T)Error, with filmmaker Lyric R. Cabral 4:30pm JCC

Nov 12 *Return to Homs* (Talal Derki 2013) + presentation

Nov 13 Extra credit Studio A with Lyric R. Cabral, 2:30pm Innovation Hall 4th Floor

Week 12

Nov 17 bb assignment: paper proposal (required) + *The Oath* (Laura Poitras 2010) DS371.414 .O28 2010
Nov 19 3-4 page sequence analysis due + *The Oath*

Week 13

Nov 24 *My Kid Could Paint That* (Amir Bar Lev 2008) NX164.C47 M95 2008 + presentation
Nov 26 Thanksgiving

Week 14

Dec 1 *The Woodmans* (C. Wills Scott 2011) TR140.W675 W66 2011 + presentation
Dec 3 *Evolution of a Criminal* (Darius Clark Monroe 2014) HV6248.M66 E96 2014 + presentation

Week 15

Dec 8 creative project due + *Last Train Home* (Lixin Fan 2011) HD5856.C5 L37 2011
Dec 10 *Closed Curtain* (Jafar Panahi 2014) + presentation

Week 16

Dec 15 Final exam 10:3am-1:15pm