

Department of English & Writing Studies
Film Studies Program

Documentary Film
Film Studies 3374F (001)
Fall 2021

Instructor: Dr. C.E. Gittings
UC 4414
661-2111 x85781
gittings@uwo.ca (But use Owl course email
for all non-emergency correspondence)

Office Hours: TBA

Prerequisites: At least 60% in [Film Studies 1020E](#) or [Film Studies 1022](#) or special permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

VIRTUAL SCREENINGS: **Wednesdays 16:30-19:30** or **asynchronously** via licensed Weldon Streaming sites (links to Weldon and other streaming sites are listed in the syllabus with each weekly film title)

LECTURES recorded and posted to OWL Zoom on **Wednesdays** to be viewed **asynchronously BEFORE** timetabled slot: **Thursdays 12:30-14:30**

Synchronous Tutorial Discussions: Live On OWL Zoom (weekly in second hour of timetabled Thursday lecture slots: **13:30-14:30**)

Course Description

“Non-fiction contains any number of ‘fictive’ elements, moments at which a presumably objective representation of the world encounters the necessity of creative intervention.”
Michael Renov in *Theorizing Documentary*: 2

Historically, the dominant perception of documentary or non-fiction cinemas is that they teach us about the ‘real’ world by documenting truth transparently. However, this course will consider documentary as a form of representation and as such, trouble its relationship to the ‘objective reality’ it seeks to represent. What is at stake in representing the ‘historical real’? What issues of selection and mediation intrude between the reality unfolding in front of the lens and the projection of that reality on a screen? As theorists such as Michael Renov and Bill Nichols argue, although a documentary film references the historical world and actual people, it also constructs an audience’s understanding of this world and its inhabitants through point of view and the post-production process.

Early practitioners and theorists of documentary were well-aware of this contradiction; John Grierson, the so-called ‘father’ of documentary film and one of its first theorists describes documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality,” but audiences were frequently unaware of this creative element, often reading documentary film as ‘true’. To begin to answer the questions posed below, the course will examine the theoretical and historical development of non-fiction filmmaking from the work of early pioneers like the Lumières in late 19th-century France and John Grierson in early 20th-century United Kingdom and Canada to more contemporary and innovative filmmakers who complicate and innovate documentary’s basic conventions by questioning notions of objectivity, reality and verisimilitude.

Collectively we will pose the following questions:

- What is documentary?
- How did documentary filmmaking get started?
- Why are ethical issues central to documentary filmmaking?
- What makes documentaries engaging and persuasive?
- How have documentaries addressed political and social issues?
- What roles have documentaries played in colonization/decolonization?
- How can we differentiate between documentary modes and models?

Course Objectives:

- Understandings of the historical trajectory of documentary cinema.
- Mastering the language and modes of documentary cinema.
- The above will be acquired by students through a capacity for argument, research, judgment and analysis that will be fostered by essays, and other assignments, and by in-class small-group and whole-class discussion of documentary film.
- Communication skills will be imparted through in-class discussion and credit will be given for frequency and quality of contributions.
- Research skills will be developed through the research required for the term paper.
- Essays and other written assignments are marked in accordance with the grading criteria listed below and include benchmarks for the expectations associated with each grade.
- Awareness of the limits of knowledge will be enhanced by exploring the legitimate differences of opinion and methodology within the field, and by requiring students to negotiate the formulation of their own opinions in-class with the terms and knowledge brought to discussions by other students and the instructor.

The ability to argue and decide on complex issues will be fostered by essays and in-class discussion. Time management skills will be fostered by the need to prepare properly for class and to deliver assignments in a timely manner. Academic responsibility will be developed by the need to source assignments accurately

Course Materials

Required Readings:

Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* 3rd.d Edition (Indiana UP, 2017) Available from the campus Bookstore. **Plus additional readings to be posted on OWL**

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Attendance and Participation		10%
Mid-term exam	TBA	20%
*Two <u>thoughtful</u> discussion questions per week		15%
*Essay or Short Documentary Film	TBA	25%
<hr/>		
Total Term		70%
Final Exam		30%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

A provisional list of course screenings in documentary from which 12-14 titles will be selected:

Actualités and Attractions—Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory (1895), *Arrival of a Train*, 1895) (AAVV, c. 1895 – 1910)
F for Fake (Orson Welles, 1973)
In the Land of the Head Hunters (Edward S. Curtis, 1914)
Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, 1922)
Trick or Treaty (Canada, Alanis Obomsawin, 2014) 85 min
Man with a Movie Camera ((Tziga Vertov, 1929)
Song of Ceylon (Basil Wright, 1934)
Triumph of the Will (Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1935, 110 min)
Listen to Britain (Humphrey Jennings and Stewart McAllister, 1942)
Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, 1960)
Shoah (Claude Lanzmann, 1985) excerpts
Now (Santiago Álvarez, 1965) 5m
LBJ (Santiago Álvarez, 1968) 18m
Ryan (Chris Landreth, 2004)
Cocalero (Alejandro Landes, 2006)
Fig Trees (John Greyson, 2009)
Gasland (Josh Fox, 2010)
The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, & Christine Cynn, 2012)
Trick or Treaty? (Alanis Obomsawin, 2014)
Citizenfour (Laura Poitras, 2014)
My Prairie Home (Chelsea McMullan, 2014) or Ivan Coyote
Fahrenheit 9/11(Michael Moore, 2004) excerpts
I Am Not Your Negro (Raoul Peck, 2016)
Do Not Resist (Craig Atkinson, 2016)

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence:

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see:

[Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

For the **Student Medical Certificate (SMC)**, see:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.