

Department of English & Writing Studies  
Film Studies Program**Documentary Film**  
**Film 3374F (001)**  
Fall 2022

**Instructor:** Dr. C.E. Gittings  
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course messages for all non-  
emergency correspondence)

**Office Hours:** TBA

**PLEASE READ THIS SYLLABUS THOROUGHLY, AND IN AN ENGAGED MANNER AS SUCCESS IN THE COURSE IS DEPENDENT ON YOU UNDERSTANDING THIS DOCUMENT.**

**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:** **asynchronously** via licensed Weldon Streaming sites  
<https://guides.lib.uwo.ca/findingandstreamingvideos/streamingvideos>

and the Lumière collection at University of California, Berkeley (links to all Lumière collection screening titles will be listed with weekly titles in the Course Schedule).

Additional screenings may be streamed via Western's **McIntyre platform**.

**LECTURES recorded and** posted to OWL **Lessons** under Zoom Lectures by **Wednesday** to be viewed asynchronously **BEFORE** the tutorial. You will receive a message notifying you that the lecture has been posted.

**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 onto 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 nineteenth-century France and John Grierson in early twentieth-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?

**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 reception study assignment and 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* 3<sup>rd</sup>.d Edition (Indiana UP, 2017) Available from the Bookstore. **Plus additional readings posted on OWL—see Lessons: OWL PDF Readings**

#### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS for Success**

- All students will view films and lectures prepared to participate in discussions based on the week's assigned readings and screenings.
- Notes should be taken during or immediately following all screenings.
- Come to class with questions or comments that have arisen from your readings, the lecture and screening.
- Make notes during the lectures, and class discussions, with a view to challenging or developing some of the points expressed.
- Review lecture slides frequently to ensure comprehension of concepts

### Methods of Evaluation

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

Participation		10%
Take-Home Mid-term exam due	<b>26 October</b>	20%
*Two <u>thoughtful</u> discussion questions per week		15%
*Essay or Short Documentary Film	<b>01 December</b>	25%
<b>Proposal for Short Documentary due on or before 20 October</b>		

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Total Term		70%
Final Exam		30%

**\*For assignment details, please see 'Course Assignments' below.**

### Midterm and Final Exam on OWL

#### **Take-Home Mid-Term Exam**

The midterm-exam will be posted to OWL on **21 October** before it is due to be submitted for assessment. You will submit your responses to the mid-term questions via OWL Assignments by midnight on **26 October**.

Your responses must be submitted as an MS Word file. **PDF files will not be accepted.** Midterm responses not uploaded to OWL Assignments by midnight on 26 October will not be graded unless accommodation is sought and granted through your Dean's Office.

**Take-Home Final Exam:** The final exam will be posted to OWL 48 hours before it is due to be submitted for assessment via OWL Assignments. The date of the final exam will be circulated once the exam timetable is published.

**Please note:** The Department of English and Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

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>.

### Attendance

- Please arrive on time to all lectures/tutorials **and** screenings. Lateness and/or early departures will adversely affect your participation grade.
- **Do not miss screenings** Assignments are based on film titles listed in the syllabus. You must view all course titles, including films you have viewed previously.
- Departmental policy provides that students may be refused permission to write the final examination if their level of attendance is unacceptable (more than four unexcused absences per term).

### **Participation:**

- Participation marks will be awarded for **active** and **informed** engagement in tutorial discussions. You are required to post questions and comments on the week's readings and film(s) to the instructor via OWL Messages. **Questions must be posted by 17:00 Wednesday.**

### **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)

*Exit Through the Gift Shop* (UK, Banksy, 2010) 87 min.

*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)

*Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004) excerpts

*I Am Not Your Negro* (Raoul Peck, 2016)

*Do Not Resist* (Craig Atkinson, 2016)