

Department of English & Writing Studies  
Film Studies Program

**Film Studies 3374F (001)**  
**Documentary Film**  
Fall 2025

**Instructor:** Professor Janelle Blankenship



*Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005)

**Prerequisite:** At least 60% in Film Studies 1020E or Film Studies 1022, or 1.0 of English 1000-1999 plus English 2112F/G, Film 2212F/G, or Theatre Studies 2212F/G, or 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.

**Course Objectives**

This course will introduce students to the history and theory of documentary cinema from the earliest actualities to the present. We will consider how documentary film developed as an aesthetic form and a mode of cultural expression and also study how technological changes had an impact on the development of the form. Topics include the Lumière Brothers and early actualities, Robert Flaherty and the ethnographic gaze, montage and the city symphony, the poetic documentary and essay film, *cinéma vérité*, Michael Moore, the postmodern “mockumentary,” the digital image and documentary ethics.

**Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of the course you will be able to identify key movements and techniques in documentary film history. Successful students will be able to examine ethical considerations in documentary film production, critically examine documentary “truth” claims and interpret the aesthetic and cultural significance of documentary film. Successful students will also be able to demonstrate enhanced written and oral communication skills, employing them in evidence-based arguments.

### Course Materials

**Required Textbook** (available in the University Bookstore):

*\*Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, New and Expanded Edition, Ed. Berry Keith Grant and Jeanette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013 expanded edition) [DtD], University Bookstore \$49.95

*\*Other required readings will be available on our course webpage on OWL Brightspace in weekly reading folders [Content tab]*

All students are required to complete the required reading assignment and come to class with questions and substantive comments concerning assigned readings. Suggested readings are optional.

### Methods of Evaluation

• **Class Participation 25%** Includes active seminar participation and at least 6 thoughtful asynchronous posts to our WEEKLY FORUM discussion board on OWL Brightspace (Top course banner – Communications – Click on Discussions and Weekly Topics). Minimum length: Each Forum reply to our discussion board on OWL should be 6 -8 sentences. Please tie in our assigned readings when possible. **Please note that the final deadline for all FORUM posts for this course is the last day of the term, Monday Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> 2025.** The FORUM posts will be marked at the end of the term. FORUM contributions are worth 10% of the overall grade in this course. Active seminar participation is worth 15% of the overall grade.

• **Short Essay 25%** {Assignment details will be posted to OWL Brightspace in advance} [Due Oct. 13th]

• **Group Presentation or Documentary Project 20%** {Assignment details will be posted on OWL Brightspace in advance} [Due Nov. 17th]

• **Final Paper or Creative Project 30%** {Many Options!! More details soon!!} [Due Dec. 9th]

**Please Note:** The film for this course are all viewed online asynchronously. Assignments handed in late without prior approval will be penalized 3% per day. You must request an extension before the due date, and extensions will be given at my discretion.

### Statements

#### **Academic Consideration**

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student's Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
  - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
  - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
  - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to the **final project or paper** must be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term **always** require formal supporting documentation.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory in all classes. 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.

### **Gender-Based and Sexual Violence**

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

[https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence**

Unless stated otherwise, the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools/software/apps is not unacceptable in this course.

### 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](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.

### Schedule of Classes and Assignments

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