SYLLABUS Spring 2017
TFM 563 Documentary: History and Theory
Thursday 3:30pm to 6:10pm • SLHS 220

“… every cut is a lie.”
Jean-Luc Goddard or maybe Raoul Coutard, or perhaps André Bazin

“Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.”
Alfred Hitchcock (approximately and most likely)

“…stories of ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances…”
Lots of people, among them D.A. Pennebaker

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GA:
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Course Description
Both truth and reality are subject to manipulation in documentary films.

We all have some sense of what a documentary film is and possibly a sense of what it is not. It is perceived by most to be a record of something that is real, something that actually happened as it was recorded. It is not supposed to be made up. Many associate it with educational content as opposed to perhaps more escapist narrative films. We are supposed to receive its presented content as non- or un-fiction. How we process, question, debate, and analyze the information steams from documentary texts will be one of our primary areas of interest.

What are the genre expectations of documentary and the discourse conventions? What latitude do we permit the documentary filmmaker to encroach on or even to cross the fuzzy line into the narrative world? Can we recognize when the line has been crossed, and if it happens why did the filmmaker go down this path? Does this trespass call into question the ethical behavior of the filmmaker?

While focusing primarily on recent films we will also explore what filmmakers have done with the tools of documentary filmmaking in the past.

Method of Instruction
The class will utilize many modes of exploration including but not limited to: lecture, screenings of films and clips, discussion and debate, and in- and out-of-class writing.

Some of the films screened in class are not readily available and many of the clips are difficult to find. Because of this availability issue, class attendance is important.

Content Warning
Films screened in this class may have content that is: sexually graphic; violent; hate speech; gender, ethnic or racially controversial. If you want to avoid this type of content you should not be enrolled in this class.
Learning Outcomes
Our explorations of this genre will move the student toward a more dimensional reception and perception of nonfiction and near-nonfiction texts.

After completing this class the student should:
• recognize the structure and elements of documentary films;
• have a grasp of the history and development of the genre;
• be familiar with the cultural impact of documentary films;
• be able to construct a critical analysis of non-fiction films.

Text

PDFs and links to readings may be posted on Blackboard in the Assignments section. You should print these and annotate them with questions and observations for discussion in the next class meeting. Please be sure to bring these papers to class each week.

Evaluation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written in-class responses</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>ten at 2 pts each</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Examination</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>this is a take-home exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film critical analysis papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>out of class, four at 5 pts each</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%*</td>
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* Each MFA Student will prepare a 20-minute lecture and multi-media presentation on an historic topic to be discussed and assigned. This activity will replace the final paper.

In-class Written Responses
Most weeks you will be asked to prepare a written response to a film we have screened that may be informed by assigned readings or in response to prompts. Some of these brief essays may be started and discussed in class and expanded and polished at home.

Critical Analysis Papers
These may take two forms: written and video essay. In written they should not exceed two pages. In video essay format they should not exceed four minutes. Video essays should be brought to class and loaded onto my disk.

Important Notes
1. Only printed copies of out-of-class work will be accepted.
2. Video essays will be in Quicktime format either 720p or 1080p.
3. All work is due at the beginning of class on the day announced on Blackboard.
4. Late work will be penalized one letter grade for each day past the submission deadline.

Final Paper
Your final paper for this course may take two forms:

1. Research paper and multimedia presentation: a research paper illustrated with: film clips, graphs, illustrations, and still images as necessary. The typed text should be five to six pages, exclusive of title and sources pages and illustrations.
2. **Documentary film:** This should be made without utilizing the school’s equipment. A four- to five-minute “activist” documentary film that argues a position or that presents a balanced presentation of the debate surrounding a social issue.

You must submit a brief outline of your project or paper for discussion and approval by the date listed on Blackboard in Assignments.

**For Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated. (Freeman)

**DACA Students**

The CSU has affirmed its commitment to ‘protecting access, affordability, intellectual freedom, inclusivity, and diversity for all students... including supporting DACA students.’ Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status, and other categories of identity is prohibited. If you have concerns about your status at the university, please visit [http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/EOP/](http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/EOP/) for information or contact the Dean of Students or the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in your College.

**Add/Drop**

Students must add/drop or change grading basis or withdraw from the university by the announced deadline. Criteria for dropping a class will be approved only when there are “verified serious and compelling circumstances.” Approval will be made by Registrar's Office. (Freeman)

**Plagiarism**

Students should be especially careful to avoid “borrowing” from internet sources and each other. There will be “zero-tolerance” for plagiarism. Cheating or plagiarism will result in an “F” for the course and a report to the office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Be sure to cite all of your sources properly. (Freeman)