

**HIST 391: Historical Documentaries**  
**Spring 2022, Section 1**  
**T/Th 12:30-1:45pm**  
**CCC 224**

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Office Hours: T/TH 2-3pm and by appointment

**Course Summary**

This is a course about seeing and hearing, looking and listening. It is designed to introduce students to the history, theory, and practice of historical documentaries. Throughout the semester we will analyze a range of documentary expression, challenging you to develop a critical eye regarding different film and video techniques, styles, and narrative structures. In particular, we will examine documentaries as a distinct form of historical interpretation and analysis. Students will be able to put these elements into practice by developing a documentary from start to finish. At the end of the semester, the documentary will be shown to the public.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students taking “Historical Documentaries” will develop skills for analyzing and interpreting history to a general audience through documentary film. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate how interpretations of the past are developed through historical documentaries
- Complete an experiential learning project by overseeing the development of a documentary for the community from start to completion
- Reflect on the experiential project by recognizing both theoretical and practical challenges in producing documentaries
- Collaborate by working in teams to produce a documentary for the general public
- Locate and synthesize source materials, including written texts, audio/visual material, and/or objects in a final project suitable for a public audience

**Required Texts**

Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (available at the UWSP Bookstore as a text rental)

Other assigned readings will be posted on Canvas.

**Assignments**

**Participation:** Class participation consists of more than just regular attendance. It also involves coming to class prepared and engaged, bringing assigned readings, listening to fellow classmates and guest speakers, and actively contributing to class discussions. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students may miss three classes before their final grade begins to drop 2% for each additional absence. It is not wise to

use all of your absences early in the term in case you have legitimate reasons for missing class later. Arriving late or leaving early from class will be counted as one-half an absence. Students facing extenuating circumstances affecting their attendance (such as serious and prolonged health issues, UWSP athletics, the birth of a child, military service, etc.) are encouraged to talk to me.

**In-Class Responses and Exercises:** There will be a series of in-class writing responses to questions about the readings as well as in-class exercises during class workshops. I will grade responses and exercises on a plus-check-minus system. A check-plus indicates exceptional work, a check represents basic competency, and a check-minus signals incomplete, inaccurate, or substandard work. Students who are absent will receive a zero for their participation grade that day and will not have an opportunity to make up the missing work. Students can drop their lowest response score.

**National History Day:** National History Day encourages more than half a million students to complete historical research on a topic of their choice. Students in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades enter projects such as exhibits, research papers, documentaries, performances, and websites at the local and regional levels, with top students advancing to compete nationally. Students will serve as judges for the Stevens Point regional contest hosted virtually in early March.

**Close Viewing Assignment:** Following the parameters of *Documentary Storytelling* (pp. 101-119), students will prepare a 3-page review of a historical documentary where they analyze the story structure and stylistic approach. Students will identify the documentary train, sample sequence, inciting incident, point of attack, exposition, and overall story structure. Students will analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the documentary structure and address the questions raised by the reading prompt.

**Editing Exercise:** Students will practice video editing by submitting a short (3-4 minute) video using Adobe Premiere Pro.

**Treatment/Storyboard:** In teams, students will write full treatments and storyboards of their documentary that addresses the both the narrative as well as oral histories, images, music, and other elements to be included in the rough and final cuts.

**Rough Cut/Final Cut:** Students are required to submit a rough cut and final cut of their projects. The rough cut will consist of approximately 50% of their footage (5-7 minutes) and the final cut will consist of a documentary approximately 10-15 minutes in length.

**Portfolio:** The portfolio represents the body of work that your team compiled over the course of the semester based on the individual team assignments and deadlines. In addition, each student will write a 3-page essay detailing their individual contributions to

the project, integrating major themes of the course through direct references to readings, films, and workshops.

**Peer Evaluations:** Collaboration is a major component of this course. At the end of the semester, your peers will write evaluations regarding your contributions to the project.

**Assessment Breakdown\***

Participation: 15%

In-Class Responses: 10% (divided evenly among responses)

Close Reading Assignment: 10%

Video Editing Exercise: 5%

National History Day: 5%

Treatment/Storyboard: 15% (5% treatment, 10% storyboard)

Rough Cut/Final Cut: 20% (5% rough cut, 15% final cut)

Portfolio: 10% (5% team portfolio, 5% individual essay)

Peer evaluations: 10%

\*For students taking this course as a 500-level seminar, additional readings and projects may be assigned. Please see me for more details.

**Grading Scale**

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69

D: 60-66

F: 59 and below

**Classroom Policies**

Students are expected to arrive on time and to be attentive and engaged during class. This means you are not sleeping, reading/working on other materials, using electronic devices, talking to your neighbor, or disrupting class in any way. Students will raise their hands for questions and be respectful of fellow students and the professor. You may disagree with another person's comment or position, but do so with courtesy and respect. For more information on classroom expectations, see:

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/AcademicIntegrityBrochure.pdf>

All forms of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fraud, and unauthorized access to tests and assignments are strictly prohibited. Any words

or ideas borrowed from another person or source, whether through a direct quotation or through paraphrasing, must be cited properly to avoid plagiarism. Please familiarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Violations of the university's code of conduct are subject to sanctions ranging from a failing grade for an assignment to disciplinary hearings or potential failure of the course. For more information on academic dishonesty, see:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf>

If you have a learning or physical challenge that requires accommodation, please contact the Disability and Assistive Technology Center as early as possible. They will then notify me privately of the accommodations that will facilitate your success in the course. Their office is located on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of ALB, Voice: 715-346-3365, TTY: 715-346-3362.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies and resources, see:

<https://www.uwsp.edu/datc/Pages/default.aspx>

Computers and other electronic devices are not allowed in class without getting permission from me in advance. Studies have shown that students learn more and perform better by writing down the main ideas of lecture versus typing them. Students also perform better with their cell phones silenced and put away in their bookbags. For more information, see the article in *Scientific American* entitled "A Learning Secret: Don't Take Notes with a Laptop" (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>).

I hold regular office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-3pm (461 CCC). During this time, my priority is to talk to students about any questions or concerns they may have. I truly enjoy meeting with you to hear about how things are going. If you are struggling, stop by and let's chat. If you are unable to meet during office hours, email me and we will set up an alternative time.

*Please note that the syllabus is subject to change and assignments may be added. Given that we are working on actual community projects, our schedule may adapt based on the needs of our partners as well as the progress of our production schedule.*

### **Week 1: Course Introduction**

January 25: Course introduction and syllabus review

January 27: What are historical documentaries?

## **Week 2: Origins of Documentary Film**

February 1: Origins of Documentary Film

Readings Due: Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 1-16  
Barnouw, "Prophet" (on CANVAS)

February 3: Documentary Structure: A Case Study

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 19-52

## **Week 3: Narrative Development**

February 8: The Narrative Arc and Creative Approach

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 53-100

Eric Stange, "Splitters vs. Lumpers or How I Learned to Love the History Police" (on CANVAS)

February 10: Documentary Treatments

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp.139-174

## **Week 4: Team Projects**

February 15: Team Selections

Readings Due: Project Overviews; Team Selections (CANVAS)

February 17: Project Overview

Readings Due: TBD (on CANVAS)

## **DUE: Close Viewing Assignment**

## **Week 5: Project Overviews**

February 22: Visit to UWSP Archives (DATE SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 123-138

February 24: Hollywood and History

Readings Due: Mark C. Carnes, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*  
(CANVAS)

## **Week 6: Equipment and Oral History**

March 1: Equipment Overview

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 175-188

Other readings TBD (CANVAS)

March 3: Oral History

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 211-228

Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (CANVAS)

**Week 7: Visual Evidence**

March 8: Visual Organization/Storyboards

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 175-188

March 10: National History Day

**DUE: History Day Judging**

**Week 8: Editing**

March 15: Editing Overview

Readings Due: *Documentary Storytelling*, pp. 189-210

March 17: Editing Workshop

**DUE: Treatment**

**March 21-25: Spring Break (No Class)**

**Week 9: Sight**

March 29: Cameras and Lighting

Readings Due: Mercado, *The Filmmaker's Eye* (CANVAS)

March 31: Storyboard Workshop

**DUE: Editing Exercise**

**Week 10: Sound**

April 5: Sound

Readings Due: Bricca, *Documentary Editing* (CANVAS)

Other readings TBD (CANVAS)

April 7: Rough Cut Workshop, Part 1

**DUE: Storyboard**

**Week 11: Ethnography and Propaganda**

April 12: Ethnography

Readings Due: William Rothman, "The Filmmaker as Hunter: Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*" (CANVAS)

April 14: Propaganda

Readings Due: Tomasulo, "The Mass Psychology of Fascist Cinema" (CANVAS)

**Week 12: Rough Cuts**

April 19: Rough Cut Workshop, Part 2

April 21: Screening of Rough Cuts

**DUE: Rough Cut**

**Week 13: Final Cut**

April 26: Final Cut Workshop, Part 1

April 28: No Class

**Week 14: Screenings**

May 3: Final Cut Workshop, Part 2

May 5: Screening of Final Cuts

**DUE: Final Cut**

**Week 15: The Future of Historical Documentaries**

May 10: The Future of Historical Documentaries

May 12: Film Screening (TBD)

We will debut the film to the public at a date to be determined. The screening will take the place of our final class meeting on May 12.

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 17, 8am-10am, CCC 224

**DUE: Portfolio Essays and Peer Evaluations**