

# Documentary Media

**Class** MIT 3832G: DOCUMENTARY MEDIA, Winter 2020  
Faculty of Information and Media Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
Screenings: Wednesdays 4:30-6:30pm HSB-11  
Lecture/Discussion: Thursdays 2:30-4:30pm FNB-2240

**Instructor** John Reed  
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FIMS/Nursing Building (FNB) 4081  
Available Thursdays 12:00pm-2:00pm or by appt.

This class explores the meaning, politics, and ethics of documentary media and practice. You will test and apply these critical framings by creating and critiquing some documentary projects of your own. No creative or production experience is needed nor expected, but you are expected to be a media producer who thinks as a media scholar.

## Description and Goals

### Pay attention to:

- How documentary media--such as cinema, print, performance, photography, the museum and digital media--affect the representation of stories.
- Ethical considerations between audiences, producers and subjects.
- The construction of 'truth,' 'objectivity,' 'realism.'
- Documentary's role in individual & community life.
- Power, race, class, gender and representation.
- The relation between technology, meaning and form.

## Required Texts

- Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (available at the campus bookstore)
- Lynda Barry, *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor* (available at the campus bookstore)
- All other readings are available for downloading on OWL.

## Evaluation

- Attendance, participation=10%
- Two Documentary Analyses (by Feb. 14)=30%
- Oral History Midterm Project (by Mar 6)=30%
- Final Research/Creative Project (last class)=30%

# Evaluation

## Attendance & Participation (10%)

ongoing

**I take attendance. After one freebie I'll deduct 2% for each undocumented missed class.** You are expected to be active participants in class discussions and do the readings. A great time to do this is in the time *between* screening and lecture! I consider the use of electronic devices to be a disruption to class, and using them during discussion and screening will have a strong negative impact on your grade. Just leave the room if you have to go online, folks!

## Documentary Analyses (30%)

2 due by Feb. 14;

**Two response experiments.**

**About 4 pages each, cited.**

These should demonstrate an understanding and interaction with the critical readings or concepts, but they are *applied* because you're testing out some ideas from class for yourself. I'll post several prompts that ask you to interrogate or test out an aspect of our material that week.

## Midterm Oral History Project (30%)

due by March 6

**The assignment has four components:**

1. A brief (1 paragraph) introduction to your subject, similar to what Terkel does at the beginning of his interviews.
2. The transcribed and edited interview (4-6 pages).
3. A brief (3-4 pages) analysis about what you have done and why. You'll cite the readings here.
4. At least two pages of your original transcription to text (with any notes, thoughts, etc. that indicate some of the changes you will make).

**Final Research Essay/Project (30%)**  
due at the final class.

There are two possibilities to this assignment:

(1) A traditional research essay about 10 pages long that employs 2 (or more) syllabus readings, and 2 (or more) outside academic sources. You can explore a documentary project, a documentary author or subject of your own proposal.

(2) You may undertake a final documentary project and analysis, but let's be realistic about the time of the year: it's hard to undertake one when all of your other work is coming due! As with the oral history project and documentary 'experiments', anything you produce is a vehicle to analyze. This is not a production class, and the main focus is on what you learn *from* the work.

**If you undertake a project of your own to analyze you need to submit a 1 page proposal to me in advance.** You cannot analyze something you produce without my permission.

**A Note About Screenings**

It is extremely important that you take in-class screenings seriously, and by that I mean that you should take notes and...you know...stay awake. Firing up your laptop or mobile device during a screening will have a *strong negative effect on your participation mark.*

# Guidelines

## **Laptops and Electronic Devices**

I consider laptops and other electronic devices to be a disruption to class. I'll post slides and class notes each week. Please see me with questions or concerns if you feel the need to use a laptop, of course!

## **Paper Format**

Students will be penalized for improper grammar and spelling. Papers must be typed and double-spaced, using a conventional 12 pt font (250 words/page). Papers should not include a separate title page, but should have student name, class, instructor name, and date on the top left of the first page in conventional style (Chicago Author-Date or MLA). All papers must include page numbers and a complete "Works Cited". Papers with excessive errors in style, format, or spelling/grammar may be required to re-submit the paper at the instructor's discretion.

## **Late Paper Policy**

At the discretion of the instructor, a request for an extension may be granted for a legitimate reason; such requests must be made at least ONE WEEK before the due-date of the paper to be considered. Late papers without accompanying documentation of illness or emergency will receive a penalty of 3% a day for up to four days; on the fifth day, the paper will receive an automatic fail.

## **Respect**

Disruptions in class and online are taken seriously, as outlined in the current Undergraduate Calendar (see the online version). Students are to adhere to the "Principles in the Use of Information Technology." These Principles and resulting actions for breaches are stated in the current Undergraduate Calendar.

# Schedule

**Jan. 09**    **Introduction and Overview**

**Jan. 15 & 16**    **What is Documentary Film?: Cinéma Vérité as Collaborative**

•**Screen:** *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) dir. Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch

**Read:**

- Broderick Fox, “A Brief History of Documentary: Movements and Modes” in *Documentary Media: History, Theory Practice*
- Edgar Morin. “Chronicle of a Film” in *The Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*.

**Jan. 22 & 23**    **What is Truth? Revealing the Constructed Nature of Objectivity**

•**Screen:** *Gates of Heaven* (1978) Dir. Errol Morris

**Read:**

- Homi Bhaba and Errol Morris, “Conversation: The Anti-Post-Modern Post-Modernist”
- Selections from *Three Documentary Filmmakers* ed. William Rothman

**Jan 29 & 30**    **Oral History and ‘Panning for Gold in Every Story’: Studs Terkel’s *Working***

•**Screen:** *Studs Terkel: Listening to America* (2009) Dir. Eric Simonson

**Read:**

- Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (selections posted to OWL)
- Rick Ayers, “Editing Lesson” in *Studs Terkel’s Working: A Teaching Guide*

**Feb 06 & 08**    **Terkel, Continued: Preparing for Your Own Project**

•**Screen:** No Screening, but we’ll hold class both days

**Read:**

- Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (selections posted to OWL)
- Andrea Gustavson “From “Observer to Activist”: Documentary Memory, Oral History, and Studs Terkel’s “Essence” Narratives” in *Journal of American Studies*

**Feb 13 & 14**

**Domestic Photography Online/Offline**

\*2 analyses are due this week

•**Screen:** No screening, but we'll hold discussions on both days

**Read:**

- Patricia Holland, "The Family Album" in *Family Snaps*
- José van Dijck, "Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory" in *Visual Communication* 71(1):2008

**Feb 19 & 20**

**Spring Reading Week**

**Feb 26 & 27**

**Autobiography and the Archive: Identity, Memory and Family Relations**

•**Screen:** *Tarnation* (2003) dir. Jonathan Caouette

**Read:**

- Orgeron and Orgeron, "Familial Pursuits, Editorial Acts: Documentaries after the Age of Home Video" in *The Velvet LightTrap*, Number 60, Fall 2007

**Mar 04 & 05**

**The Bio-Pic: Representational Struggles Over the Subject**

\*Oral history due this week

•**Screen:** *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987) dir. Todd Haynes; *Nobody's Business* (1996) dir. Alan Berliner

**Read:**

- Mary Desjardins, "The Incredible Shrinking Star: Todd Haynes and the Case History of Karen Carpenter" in *Camera Obscura* 57 (Volume 19, Number 3), 2004

**Mar 11 & 12**

**Writing and Collage: How to Remember Something You Can't Imagine**

**Read:**

- Selections from Lynda Barry's *What It Is* and *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor*

**Mar 18 & 19**

**What Does it Mean to be a Documentary Subject?**

• **Screen:** *Cannibal Tours* (1987) dir. Dennis O'Rourke; *Couple in a Cage* (1993) dir. Paula Heredia, Coco Fusco

**Read:**

- John Berger, 'Uses of Photography'
- Barbara Rosenblum, 'I Have Begun the Process of Dying'
- Coco Fusco, 'The Other History of Intercultural Performance' in *TDR* Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 1994)

**Mar 25 & 26**    **You Introduce a Camera and Change Reality: Revisiting Cinéma Vérité**

•**Screen:** *The Act of Killing* (2012) dir. Joshua Oppenheimer

**Read:**

•Nicolas Rapold, 'Interview: Joshua Oppenheimer' in *Film Comment*

**Apr 02**    **Final Class**

• Wrap-up; share your projects if you wish :)

\*Final project due

# NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

Winter 2020

## Rights and Responsibilities

The conditions governing a student's ability to pursue their undergraduate education at Western are ratified by Senate and can be found on the Academic Policies section of the University Secretariat:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic\\_policies/rights\\_responsibilities.html](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html)

## Statement on 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 the following Web site:

[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 a 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. All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software Turnitin 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.

## 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

semester, 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:

- during exam periods,
- 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 the FIMS Undergraduate Student Services 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](#) and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](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 Academic Calendar](#).

## Grading at FIMS

- Normally, first year courses required for entry into an MIT or MPI module (MIT 1020E and MIT 1025F/G) are expected to have a course average between 68-72%.
- Normally, second year required courses (MIT 2000, 2100, 2200, 2500) are expected to have a course average between 70 and 75%.
- Normally, third year required courses (MIT 3000, 3100) are expected to have a course average between 72 and 77%.

**Elective courses and 4<sup>th</sup> year seminars have no recommended course averages.**

## Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

## SUPPORT SERVICES – LINKS

Office of the Registrar:

[www.registrar.uwo.ca](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca)

Student Development Centre:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca)

Psychological Services:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/psych](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/psych)

Services for Students with Disabilities:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd)

Accessibility

Information:

[www.accessibility.uwo.ca](http://www.accessibility.uwo.ca)

[/ Writing Support](#)

Centre:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing)

Learning Skills Services:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning)

[g](#)

Indigenous Services:

[http://indigenous.uwo.c](http://indigenous.uwo.ca/)

[a/](#)

International and Exchange

Student

Centre:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/int](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/int)

Centre at Western:

[www.success.uwo.ca/careers/](http://www.success.uwo.ca/careers/)



## Appendix A: Suggested Grade Ranges in MIT, MPI and MTP

### Guidelines to the MIT Grade Range

These guidelines are benchmarks, and are not to be followed as rigid regulations. They will be adjusted as appropriate to take into account the level of the course and any specific instructions given by a professor. As well, competency in English language usage (including spelling and grammar) may be taken into account in the assignment of grades by individual instructors. Note that the 70-79 grade range is broken into two divisions, as this is the grade range into which a large number of students fall.

#### 90-100 (Outstanding, A+)

The report shows sparkling originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic. Sophisticated synthesis and analysis of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of the topic are demonstrated. Mastery of complex material and ideas is immediately evident. The topic is treated with sensitivity and subtlety of thought. The quality of the writing and background research is exemplary.

#### 80-89 (Excellent, A)

The report shows originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic; it gets to the heart of the matter with comments and/or questions. It is clearly focused and logically organized. The quality of writing makes the report immediately understandable. Mastery of complex material and ideas is demonstrated. The report is of appropriate length, while preserving the priorities and emphasis of the material, so that the result is meaningful, not simplistic.

#### 75-79 (Very Good, B+)

The report shows above average analysis, critical thinking and independent thought. Claims are supported by ample evidence and the components of the topic are well-researched and presented. The topic is addressed in reasonable depth and/or breadth and covers material appropriate to the course. The analysis is organized around focal points and the argument is easily followed. The report demonstrates an above average ability to write in an intelligible style and to condense material meaningfully and with a concern for priorities of that material.

#### 70-74 (Good, B)

The report shows an attempt at analysis and critical thinking. Claims are supported by reasonable evidence. The topic is addressed in some depth and/or breadth, with references to the appropriate literature and course material. The analysis is organized around focal points. The report is generally well written and well argued.

#### 60-69 (Competent, C)

The report demonstrates adequate comprehension of the topic. The report is on topic and is a reasonable summary of material covered in the course, but goes no further. Facts are stated accurately; the quality of writing is sufficiently intelligible with enough elaboration and enough connections made between ideas to permit a reader to understand the point of the report.

#### 50-59 (Marginal, D)

The report shows less than adequate comprehension of the topic and of the material covered by the course. The report is a less than adequate summary of sources and/or is considerably off-topic. Facts are stated inaccurately or ambiguously; the writing style is difficult to follow; there is insufficient elaboration to permit reader's comprehension of relations among ideas; little judgment is shown in selecting detail for inclusion in the report.

#### Below 50 (Unacceptable, F)

The report demonstrates a failure to comprehend the topic. The material is disorganized and unintelligible. The report clearly does not meet the minimal requirements of the assignment.

## Appendix B: Guidelines of Academic Appeals for FIMS Students

### Grounds for Appeal:

The Faculty of Information and Media Studies does not view the appeals process as an opportunity for students to solicit a second opinion on a grade assigned to a particular piece of work. Appeals must pertain to the final grade in a course, and will only be entertained if sufficient grounds for appeal can be met, including: medical or compassionate circumstances, a defect in the evaluation process, bias, inaccuracy or unfairness.

### Stages in the Appeals Process:

**The first stage of the process is a discussion of the disputed grade with the appropriate Teaching Assistant (if applicable), and subsequently, the course Instructor.** For grades assigned to individual assignments, essays, lab reports, projects and tests completed throughout the term, the student first must appeal to the Teaching Assistant or Instructor of the course, within three weeks of the date on which the Instructor or Teaching Assistant returned the assignments to the class. The Appeals Committee will not hear any further appeals about the final grade in any course unless this first step has been taken.

**If completion of the first stage has not resolved the matter, the student may appeal the final grade in the course to the FIMS Appeals Committee.** Appeals of final grades must be **within the time frame indicated in the Undergraduate Calendar.** It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the appeal is submitted within the deadline. The student shall submit a formal letter to the FIMS Appeals Committee outlining the grounds for the appeal, the remedy sought and relevant materials including the information about when and with whom (Teaching Assistant and/or Instructor) the student met, as described in Stage 1. If the appeal involves a request for work to be regraded, the original marked work and a clean copy (if possible) must be included. If the appeal is commenced once the deadline has passed, it will not be considered either by the Appeals Committee or by the Associate Dean.

### **The FIMS Appeals Committee has the discretion to determine whether the grounds for appeal have been met.**

If the Committee deems that the reasons for the appeal are not legitimate, the Associate Dean will be informed. The appeal will be terminated and the student will be informed.

### **If the Committee decides that the grounds for appeal have been met, the following steps will be taken:**

1. the course Instructor will be shown the appeal letter and offered an opportunity to make a written response;
2. if work is to be regraded, a reader will be appointed who is competent in the area in question and was not involved in the assignment of the original mark. The reader will consider the work in question and will arrive at an independent evaluation. If there is a large discrepancy between the original mark and the regraded mark, a second reader may be appointed by the Committee. **If the appointed reader(s) arrive at a grade within five marks of the original, the original grade will stand.**

### **The FIMS Appeals Committee will review the evidence and will make a recommendation on the case to the Associate Dean Undergraduate.**

The Associate Dean Undergraduate will consider the recommendation from the Appeals Committee, and will make a decision. The student and the instructor will be notified promptly and in writing by the Associate Dean of the decision and of the change in grade, if any. Within the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, the Associate Dean's decision on the matter is final.

Further appeals are possible under certain circumstances to the Senate Review Board Academic (for Undergraduate students) or to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (for Graduate students) but the student should carefully consult the guidelines regarding such Appeals.