Syllabus: COMM 4854/6854

**Documentary Form in Broadcasting**

**Objectives:**

The course will examine the history, methods, and impact of documentary storytelling in radio, television, and newer electronic media. Students will explore the special nature of documentary that distinguishes the form from other types of broadcast, cable, and internet programs. Students will be expected to develop the standards they need to be critical viewers of documentaries and to understand the contributions of the form in an educated democracy. Although not a production course, it is hoped that members of the class will go on to conceive and create documentaries of their own.

NOTE: The companion course, COMM 4853/6853 Documentary Form In Film, ideally should be completed first. Although there is overlap in the two courses’ concerns with documentary theory and ethics, 4854/6853 includes early filmmaking, theatrical documentaries, and the auteurs who created the form before the coming of television. COMM 4854/6854 focuses on the documentaries produced primarily by journalists within broadcast news organizations who adapted the form to the needs of electronic mass media.

**Required Texts:**

*Introduction to Documentary* by Bill Nichols

*Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* by Patricia Aufderheide

**Additional Readings In:**

*Documentary In American Television* by A. William Bluem

*Documentary Storytelling for Film and Videomakers*

by Sheila Curran Bernard

*An Introduction to Television Documentary: Confronting Reality*

by Richard Kilborn and John Izod

**Weekly Writing Assignment:**

Students will be required each week to write an analysis of a television documentary viewed outside class. These papers, 500 to 1,000 words in length, must demonstrate research beyond the information provided within the documentary itself and must deal with issues raised by the course. The format to be used will be discussed in class.

**Additional Requirements for Graduate Students:**

Graduate students enrolled in this course will be required to write, in addition to the assignment described above, a term paper/presentation demonstrating a high level of research and analysis on a topic approved in advance by the instructor. Each graduate student also will be required to schedule individual monthly meetings with the instructor to discuss issues encountered in the student’s research and writing and to explore further subjects raised in classroom discussions.

**Typed Papers Only:**

All outside-of-class writing assignments must be computer-typed and printed and must have been checked for spelling, punctuation, and proper grammar. Any papers not copyedited will be returned not graded.

**Due Dates Are Firm:**

Completed assignments must be submitted on the dates and times they are due. Assignments submitted late will not be given full credit. Missed exams can not be taken later.

**Academic Integrity and Student Conduct:**

All writing assignments and exam papers must be your original work and yours alone. Original work includes your words and ideas as the author of your papers as well as the properly quoted or cited words and ideas of others. Any case of work copied from a source without proper documentation constitutes plagiarism, which will result in a failing grade and can lead to expulsion from the university. Expectations for academic integrity and student conduct are described on the website of the Office of Student Judicial and Ethical Affairs (<http://saweb.memphis.edu/judicialaffairs>), particularly in the sections entitled “Academic Dishonesty,” “Student Code of Conduct and Responsibilities,” and “Disruptive Behaviors.” The instructor for this course will expect students to be aware of these guidelines and to conduct themselves accordingly.

**Grade Components:**

Weekly Critiques (40%)

Mid-Term Exam (25%)

Final Examination (25%)

Class participation (10%)

**Grading Scale:**

**A+** (99-100) **A** (92-98)  **A-** (90-91)

**B+** (88-89) **B** (82-87) **B-** (80-81)

**C+** (78-79) **C** (72-77) **C-** (70-71)

**D+** (68-69) **D** (60-67) **F**  (59 and below)

**Participation:**

Classroom discussions and your participation in them are extremely important. We are studying communication, and you must learn to express your ideas verbally as well as in writing. That is why a significant part of your grade for the course will be based upon the quality of your contributions to our classroom discussions of documentaries we view and the issues they raise.

**Absences:**

The only absences that will be considered “excused” are those resulting from illnesses, deaths, or court appearances. Such circumstances must be explained with written documentation, such as letters from physicians or officers of the court, preferably before the absence occurs. In the event of an unexcused absence from all or part of a class, please follow these rules: (1) Do not ask the instructor to “catch you up” on what was discussed during your absence. Instead, get the information you need from a fellow student. (2) If you arrive for class after the scheduled start time, please enter the room carefully to avoid distracting other students and the instructor. (3) If you leave a class meeting for any reason other than a personal hygiene emergency — to take a phone call or send an email, for example — please do not re-enter the classroom until the class has been dismissed.

**No Electronics:**

No cell phones, beepers, cameras, recorders, or other personal electronic devices may be used in the classroom. All such devices must be turned off before class begins and must be kept out of sight. Students wishing to use laptop computers for taking notes during this course must meet with the instructor to arrange permission.

**Private Meetings:**

Students should arrange periodic private consultations with the instructor in his office. Time will be found to discuss further any ideas raised in class, any problems you may have in the class, or any reasonable suggestions you may have for improving the course.

**Special Needs:**

If you require physical assistance to participate in this course, please contact the Office of Students with Disabilities (Scates Hall 215). The Office for Students with Disabilities coordinates a variety of support services designed to ensure educational access to facilities and to enhance individual development of students with disabilities.

**Class Schedule of 16 Weeks:**

(Subjects are tentative and may be changed at the discretion of the instructor.)

Week 1 – September 1

Definitions: What makes it a documentary?

Case study: *Evil Wins.*

Week 2 – September 8

History: Documentaries find a new home on TV: *Victory At Sea.*

From the shame of quiz show scandals to *Harvest of Shame*.

Week 3 – September 15

Documentary structure: The demands of storytelling.

Case study: *Peter Jennings Reporting: GUNS.*

Week 4 – September 22

Ethics, casting, fairness, and trust.

Case study: *Brokaw Reporting: Why Can’t We Live Together?*

Week 5 – September 29

Objectivity? The documentary argument.

Case study: *CBS Reports: The War Machine.*

Week 6 – October 6

NO CLASS MEETING

Week 7 – October 13

Today’s TV documentary, new channels, new voices.

Case study: *A Discovery Channel Special: Prison Medical.*

Assignment of Mid-Term Exam paper

FALL BREAK

Week 8 – October 20

TV newsmagazines: Is this documentary?

Mid-Term Exam paper due

Week 9 – October 27

Newsmagazine case study: *Yosemite Summer.*

Newsmagazine case study: *Baby Lift.*

Week 10 – November 3

Public TV: PBS takes over from the news divisions.

PBS case study: *Frontline.*

Week 11 – November 10

Narration, voice, who’s talking?

Case study: *The Chemo Ate My Homework*

Week 12 – November 17

Researching the “Truth.”

Case study: *Brokaw Reporting: The Greatest Generation.*

Week 13 – November 24

Writing by not writing.

Case study: A Work In Progress.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14 – December 1

Local TV documentaries.

Case study: *When HAIR Came to Memphis.*

DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING TERM PAPER

Week 15 – December 8

Review: What have we seen?

Week 16 – December 15

FINAL EXAM 6:00–8:00 pm

This syllabus and files to be used during the course can be found on the UMdrive —

<https://umdrive.memphis.edu/cleake1/public> — in the folder labeled COMM 4854/6854.