

HIST 395: Historical Documentaries
Spring 2016, Section 1
T/Th 12:35-1:50pm
CCC 224

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Office Hours: T/TH 2-3:30pm 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. Students will be able to put these elements into practice by developing a documentary from start to finish. This semester our film focuses on the legacy of World War I in central Wisconsin. As part of a larger community initiative, the documentary will be shown to the general 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

Sarah Scripps, Ryan Bottomley, and Kyle Ebelt. *Handbook for Historical Documentaries*. Posted on D2L.

Other assigned readings will be posted on D2L.

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 health issues, UWSP athletics, the birth of a child, military service, etc.) are encouraged to talk to me.

Film Review: Students will write a 3-4 page review comparing two documentaries on warfare. The review should include an analysis of: point of view, composition, style, form, quality of evidence and argument, sound and visual production aspects of the documentaries (camera work, lighting, sound quality, etc), and the interview techniques of production.

In-Class Responses: There will be a series of in-class writing responses to questions about the readings as well as summaries of primary sources submitted on D2L. I will grade responses 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.

Transcript/Screenplay: In teams, students will write full transcripts and screenplays of their documentary that includes the both the narrative (transcript) as well as oral histories, images, music, and other elements (screenplay) 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. All materials created by your team should be included. In addition, each student will write a 3-5 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%

Film Review: 10%

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

Transcript/Screenplay: 15% (5% transcript, 10% screenplay)

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

Portfolio: 10% (10% team portfolio, 10% 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

This semester, we have two advanced students, Ryan Bottomley (Ryan.M.Bottomley@uwsp.edu) and Kyle Ebel (Kyle.M.Ebel@uwsp.edu), working as teaching assistants to help manage the documentary project. They are here to assist you with any questions or concerns you may have.

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: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>

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 6th floor the LRC, 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, see:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/ADA.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. 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 2-3:30pm (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.

Week 1: Course Introduction

January 26: Course introduction and syllabus review

January 28: What are historical documentaries?

Readings Due: "History of Historical Documentaries," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries*, (D2L)

"Steps in Producing a Documentary" *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

Week 2: Origins of Documentary Film

February 2: Origins of Documentary Film

Readings Due: Barnouw, "Prophet" (on D2L)

Screenings: Muybridge, Edison, Lumiere brothers

February 4: Team Selections

Readings Due: "Documentary Teams," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

In class, we will divide soldiers' letters that require summaries

Week 3: Narrative Development

February 9: Film Analysis

Screening: *Wartorn* (HBO)

The Great War (BBC, watch independently)

February 11: The Narrative Arc

Sheila Curran Bernard, "Documentary Storytelling" (D2L)

"Choosing a Topic," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

Week 4: Archival Research

February 16: Visit to UWSP Archives (DATE SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Readings Due: "Archival Research," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

DUE: Film Review

February 18: Visit to PCHS Archives (off campus)

Week 5: World War I

February 23: World War I: An Overview

Readings Due: Gerard J. De Groot, *The First World War* (on D2L)

February 25: World War I in Wisconsin

Readings Due: Letters from Wisconsin troops (on D2L)

DUE: Letter summaries

Week 6: Screenplay

March 1: Documentary Transcript

Readings Due: "Documentary Transcripts," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

March 3: From Transcript to Screenplay

Readings Due: "Documentary Screenplays," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

Week 7: Film Editing

March 8: Equipment Overview

Readings Due: "Equipment," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

March 10: Film Editing

Readings Due: "Film Editing," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

Week 8: Spring Break

March 22: No Class

March 24: No Class

Week 9: Sound

March 29: Oral History

Readings Due: "Oral History," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

DUE: Transcript

March 31: Hearing History

Readings Due: Dan Sipe, "The Future of Oral History and Moving Images" (D2L)

Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (D2L)

Screening: *The Ghost of Bobby Dunbar*

Week 10: Images

April 5: Working with Images

Readings Due: "Visual Aids," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

April 7: Photographic Evidence

Screening: *The Plow that Broke the Plains*

Readings Due: James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (D2L)

Robert Coles, *Doing Documentary Work* (D2L)

DUE: Screenplay

Week 11: Propaganda

April 12: Propaganda

Readings Due: Susan Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (D2L)

Screening: Propaganda Films

April 14: Class workshop to prepare rough cut

Readings Due: "Finishing and Polishing," *Handbook for Historical Documentaries* (D2L)

Week 12: Ethnography

April 19: Ethnography

Screening: *Nanook of the North*

Readings Due: William Rothman, "The Filmmaker as Hunter: Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*" (D2L)

April 21: Screenings of Rough Cuts

DUE: Rough Cut

Week 13: Final Cut

April 26: Class workshop to prepare final cut

April 28: Class workshop to prepare final cut

Week 14: Hollywood and History

May 3: Hollywood and History

Readings Due: Mark C. Carnes, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (D2L)

Screening: *Flyboys*

May 5: Final Cut Debut

DUE: Final Cut

Week 15: The Future of Historical Documentaries

May 10: The Future of Historical Documentaries

Readings: "World War II Museum's 'Beyond All Boundaries' is Beyond Spectacular" (D2L)

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.

DUE: Any edits to the final cut prior to the public debut

Final Exam: Wednesday, May 18, 10:15am-12:15pm, 224 CCC

DUE: Portfolios and Peer Evaluations