

**APPROACH:** This course will interrogate the practices and issues arising from documentary depictions. Starting with specific practices (documenting, assembling, embodying, authorizing, etc.) related to *The Laramie Project*, as an example of documentary processes in various media, students will investigate the methods, materials, and effects of documentary work on this text and on related performances and films. The syllabus is divided into four units: the what, why, and how of documentary; documentary and alterity; social and political documentary; and documentary and domestic technologies.

Often described as a “discourse of sobriety,” documentaries are generally characterized by their effort to record and/(or) depict “the real.” The popularization of documentary films, videos, and reality television raises important questions about the nature of truth and representation as well as the social practice of film. Because practices of *signifying* and *looking* constitute and produce meanings that in turn (re)form our subjectivities and regulate behavior, visual culture is key to examining the relations between power and knowledge. By interrogating techniques and technologies of production and reception of meanings in a series of films, scripts, and performances chosen for their specific development of issues arising from documentary depiction, students will learn how to think critically about the discursive formations of subjects, others, and visual culture. Topics will cover ethical issues, documentary types, documentary history, evidentiary and political uses, live coverage, re-enactments, “reality TV,” and computer simulation. Materials will include screenings of films as well as readings in film theory, performance studies, cyberculture, and cultural studies. Instructional methods will include lectures, discussions, readings, presentations, writing assignments, and examinations.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

- **Attendance:** Course goals and methods necessitate conscientious class attendance. Excessive absences (more than 3), tardiness, or repeated violations of viewing and classroom protocols (see below) will adversely affect your final grade.
- **Preparation:** The quality and alacrity of your participation in classroom discussions, of your preparation of various assigned readings and projects, and of your execution of occasional in-class writing assignments will determine 20% of your final grade.
- **Presentations:** Each student will present one 10-15-minute report to the class during the semester (see below for dates). Topics will be arranged in advance (see below for topic due-date), and will consist in reporting on a documentary film that is not included on the syllabus. Presentations will follow the guidelines in pp. 168-177 of *Introduction to Documentary*. This classroom presentation, together with your submission of a written outline and annotated bibliography, will figure as 15% of your final grade.
- **Paper/Project:** Each student will compose a 6-8 page paper (or equivalent project) that addresses some topic of individual interest within course subject matter. The papers or projects may be collaborative and will be arranged by consultation during the second half of the semester. This assignment will be due on reading day (6 May – either submitted to me or performed/exhibited at Theater Night) and will determine 20% of your final grade.
- **Examinations:** As scheduled below, students will take midterm and final examinations covering all the material on the syllabus up to that date. The exams will test your command of material in both factual and analytical capacities, and will figure as the remaining 45% (midterm = 20%, final = 25%) of your final grade. **Forewarning:** students must score above 50% on identifications in order to have their essay(s) read. Absence from a pre-announced exam cannot be excused.
- **Screenings:** Films and videos will be screened in class, necessitating absolute promptness and other viewing protocols, as described below. Most materials (VHS or DVD) will also be on limited library reserve for students who wish to view or review them in the library at alternative times. Students are required to view all assigned films and tapes before they are scheduled for in-class discussion.
- **Late or Missing Work:** If approved in advance, I shall accept late work, but it will be penalized one letter grade. Otherwise, assignments are due for the class period as scheduled. *Students must submit all assignments to pass the course.*
- **Incompletes:** Grades of "Incomplete" will be assigned only by approval of a written petition from the student. This petition must explain the reasons for the request, and must be accompanied by documentation of either medical or personal emergency. All "Incompletes" must be converted according to the schedule in the College Catalog.
- **Events:** Students are required to attend the TFMS Film Series as well as each of the events included specifically on the attached syllabus. Additional (optional) events may be announced during the semester.
- **Readings:** Your syllabus contains an enumeration of the assigned readings and their due dates. The texts are available from the College Bookstore, and other readings are accessible by e-reserves or Web sites.
- **Honor Code:** Students must abide by the “Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities” in the *Student Handbook*.

### **OFFICE HOURS/ELECTRONIC ACCESS:**

T 12:00 – 1:15 PM

W 1:00 – 2:15 PM

and by appointment

MH 179C; ext. 4251

[jrklein@smcm.edu](mailto:jrklein@smcm.edu) (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

<http://www.smcm.edu/users/jrklein/Index.htm>

### **TEXTS:**

Gaines and Renov, *Collecting Visible Evidence*

Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*

Mann, *Testimonies* (optional)

Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*

Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (optional)

also xeroxed and electronically accessible materials, as assigned

### **TFMS FILM SERIES:**

During February, the Department of Theater, Film, and Media Studies will host its Fourth Annual TFMS Film Series:

Alternative Animation and Collage. Three filmmakers will present their work at 8:00 *pm* on Monday nights in Cole Cinema,

and at least one of the guests will conduct class on the following Tuesday. For details, consult the brochure distributed in class or check the TFMS Web site ([www.smcm.edu/tfms](http://www.smcm.edu/tfms)). Attendance of the film series is required.

### **SOME RELATED INTERNET LINKS (SEE ONLINE SYLLABUS FOR MORE LINKS) :**

Electronic Syllabus: <http://www.smcm.edu/users/jrklein/325.S11.pdf>

Matthew's Place - Human Rights Resources: <http://www.matthewsplace.com/>

Matthew Shepard Online Resources: <http://www.wiredstrategies.com/shepardx.html>

Center for Social Media (resources for social documentaries): <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/index.html>

Media Rights (resources for media that matters): <http://www.mediarights.org/index.php>

Errol Morris: <http://www.errolmorris.com/>

Errol Morris Blog: <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/>

Ifilm (Digital Movies on the Web): <http://ifilm.com/>

Yahoo's Film Theory/Criticism Index: [http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Movies\\_and\\_Film/Theory\\_and\\_Criticism/](http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Movies_and_Film/Theory_and_Criticism/)

Internet Movie Database: <http://us.imdb.com/>

British Film Institute: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/>

All-Movie Guide Glossary of Film Terms: [http://www.allmovie.com/avg\\_glossary.html](http://www.allmovie.com/avg_glossary.html)

Words of Art Online Film Studies Glossary: [http://www.ouc.bc.ca/fina/glossary/f\\_list/filmstudieshome.html](http://www.ouc.bc.ca/fina/glossary/f_list/filmstudieshome.html)

Words of Art Online Theory and Criticism Glossary: <http://www.ouc.bc.ca/fina/glossary/gloshome.html>

Voice of the Shuttle (Humanities Resources site): <http://vos.ucsb.edu/>

### **VIEWING AND CLASSROOM PROTOCOLS:**

- ▶ Some of the films we shall be watching in class are nearly 2 hours in length. Therefore, I shall start the films promptly at 10:00 am. Because of the particular significance of beginnings and endings, you will need to arrange your lives so that you can arrive promptly and remain through the end.
- ▶ Before class begins or films start, get yourself situated so that you will not need to leave the room, rustle your belongings, or pant from the exertion of stair-climbing during the screening. Do not distract others by making unnecessary noise or conversation. *Turn off cell phones and pagers.* Arrive in time to sign the roll sheet.
- ▶ Do whatever you need to do (get sufficient sleep at night, for example) in order to avoid sleeping during screenings.
- ▶ If something in a film offends you, close your eyes and/or cover your ears. If you are easily offended, drop the course. You are welcome to raise this issue – like any other issue related to the films – in class discussion or privately with me.
- ▶ If you MUST leave or enter the room during a screening, please avoid throwing light on the screen and distracting others.
- ▶ If you have extenuating circumstances that make it difficult for you to comply with any of these protocols, let me know.

**WEEK**                      **TOPIC (ASSIGNMENTS DUE)**                      **(\*\*SPECIAL EVENTS\*\*)**

18 Jan T Course Introduction: Whose Truth is It, Anyway?

**Documentary: What, Why, and How?**

R Troubled Boundaries and Ethical Issues (*Introduction to Documentary*, pp. ix-41)

25 Jan T Case Study: The Laramie Project (*The Laramie Project*) (\*\*Screening of A&E documentary, *American Justice: Matthew Shepard – Death in the High Desert*, in class, 60 min\*\*)

R Re-Presentation in *The Laramie Project*: Mimetic or Constitutive? (<http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/2000/town.cfm> and <http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/2000/form.cfm>, *American Theatre*, May/June 2000, “Town in a Mirror” and “Into the West: An Exploration in Form”)

1 Feb T Documentary and Performance: Embodying the Social Actor (\*\*Screening of *The Laramie Project*, in class, 96 min\*\*) (VOG follow-up fun: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHzdsFiBbFc> )

R Embodied Knowledge and the Politics of Location (visit [www.erroldmorris.com](http://www.erroldmorris.com) , read his Harvard address: <http://www.erroldmorris.com/content/lecture/theantipost.html>; recommended reading: *Blurred Boundaries*, pp. ix-16 and pp. 92-106)

8 Feb T Documentary Voices and Documentary Subjects (\*\*Screening of *The Brandon Teena Story*, in class, 88 min\*\*)

R Voices and Subjects (*Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 42-81)

15 Feb T The “Extra Body” of the Actor (\*\*Screening of *Boys Don’t Cry*, in class, 116 min\*\*)

R History, Types, and Uses of Documentary (*Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 82-138 and Gaines/Renov, pp. 46-83)

22 Feb T Continue Discussion of History, Types, and Uses of Documentary; Class meets with film series guest, James Duesing, computer animator and video installation artist @ 11am

**Documentary and Alterity**

R Ethnographic Discourses (recommended reading: *Blurred Boundaries*, pp. 63-91) (\*\*Screenings of *Passing Girl: Riverside and Reassemblage*, in class, 25 min and 40 min\*\*)

1 Mar T Troubling Ethnography (Gaines/Renov, pp. 116-175; **presentation topics due**)

R Alterity and Intervention (\*\*Screening of *The Good Woman of Bangkok*, in class, 82 min\*\*)

8 Mar T First hour: David Ellsworth, experimental documentary filmmaker; Second hour: The Ethics of Intervention (Gaines/Renov, pp. 176-189)

R **Midterm Examination**

15 Mar T **Spring Break** (no class meeting)

R **Spring Break** (no class meeting)

## Documentary Advocacy: Social and Political Issues

- 22 Mar T Apparatuses of Production and Reception (Gaines/Renov, pp. 1-45; recommended reading: *Blurred Boundaries*, pp. 17-42) (\*\*Attend Women Studies Colloquium Events, [http://www.smcm.edu/wgsx/annual\\_colloquium/index.html](http://www.smcm.edu/wgsx/annual_colloquium/index.html)\*\*)
- \_\_\_\_\_R\_\_\_\_\_ Personal Portrait Documentary; Class Meets with WGSX Colloquium Guest, Gabriela Bolisova (*Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 139-167; **paper/project proposals due**) (\*\*Screening of *The Life and Time of Rosie the Riveter*, **in class, 65 min**\*\*)(\*\*Attend Women Studies Colloquium Events, [http://www.smcm.edu/wgsx/annual\\_colloquium/index.html](http://www.smcm.edu/wgsx/annual_colloquium/index.html)\*\*)
- 29 Mar T **Advising Day** (no class meeting)
- R **Student Presentations** (Presentations due, as scheduled) (\*\**Mother Hicks* opens, 8PM, Bruce Davis Theater\*\*)
- 5 April T **Student Presentations** (Presentations due, as scheduled)
- R **Student Presentations** (Presentations due, as scheduled)
- 12 April T **Student Presentations** (Presentations due, as scheduled)
- R Presentation Follow-up Screening (\*\*Screening of presented documentary film, as voted by class\*\*)
- 19 April T Politics and Documentary (Gaines/Renov, pp. 84-102 and pp. 190-215)
- R Social Issue Documentary (\*\*Screening of *Roger and Me*, in class, 91 min [or class choice of another Michael Moore film]\*\*)

## Documentary and Domestic Technologies

- 26 April T TV, Liveness, *Film-souvenir*, and Reality (Gaines/Renov, pp. 241-254 and pp. 292-312; recommended reading: *Blurred Boundaries*, pp. 43-62)
- R Computers, Simulation, and Loss of the Indexical (Gaines/Renov, pp. 274-291 and 313-325)
- 4 May W **Theater Night**, TBA (Papers/Projects due)
- 9 May M **Final Examination, 7:00-9:15PM**