

**DePaul University**  
**School for New Learning**  
**AI 145 Documentary Film**

**Location:** Loop Campus  
**Dates:** Spring Quarter, Wed. 4/1 – 6/3  
**Hours:** 6:00-9:00 P.M.  
**Credits:** Four

**Instructor:** Gary Fox  
**Telephone:** 312-362-5952  
**E Mail:** kellox@ameritech.net

**Competences Offered:**

- A-1-X - Can analyze aesthetic forms of non-fiction films in historical contexts.
- A-5 - Can define and analyze a creative process.
- H-1-X - Can articulate the social value expressed in documentary filmmaking.
- H-2-X - Can describe and analyze how documentary film can explore a social issue while serving as an advocate for change.

*(Student and faculty can modify all “X” competences)*

**Course Description:** Since the invention of the camera, people have used it to document and preserve a moment in history, and to reveal the tragedies and delights of the world around us. Enthusiasm for documentaries has grown tremendously in recent years, achieving a relevancy and popularity that would have been hard to imagine not long ago. This course is intended as an introduction to the documentary form while exploring its relationship to society. Each class session consists of lecture, film screenings, and discussion. Works screened survey the history and range of documentary expression including the classics, as well as examples of challenging work by independent film and videomakers. Along with a consideration of their artistic style, structure and subject content, we will explore the social and political relevance of the films and attempt to assess their historical impact. This course challenges students to develop a critical eye, and to deepen their appreciation of the documentary vision.

**Instructor Bio:** In addition to teaching film, ethics and public speaking courses at SNL, Gary Fox has been an adjunct faculty member for the last 22 years at Columbia College Chicago where he teaches Film History, Film/TV aesthetics and public speaking. He has also taught at the Center for New Television, The Chicago Academy for the Arts, and in the Des Moines Public Schools’ “Talented and Gifted” program. Gary also has experience behind the camera as a film/video director and producer, and in front of the camera as a stage and film actor. He received his B.F.A. in Speech Communication and Theatre Arts from Drake University and his M.A. from DePaul’s *School for New Learning*.

**Suggested Textbook:** *Introduction to Documentary* by Bill Nichols, Indiana University Press, 2001. All other readings will be handed out or posted on the course Blackboard unless otherwise noted. <https://oll.depaul.edu>

**Learning Tools:** Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 1989.  
<http://www.metacritic.com/film/> and <http://www.imdb.com/>

**The Learning Experience/Course Objectives:** By the end of this course, you should:

- be familiar with the historical development of documentary practice
- be able to identify and understand the formal elements and grammar of the documentary
- be familiar with major documentary movements, films and filmmakers from a global perspective
- be able to analyze contemporary events and issues and appraise their suitability as themes for documentary films
- know how to distinguish between objectivity and subjectivity in documentary film practice
- have a critical skepticism about what you are told is “the truth”
- be able to identify and apply the range of documentary styles and approaches
- understand the role of storytelling and narrative structure in documentary filmmaking
- be able to write a critical analysis of documentary and nonfiction films

**Learning Activities: Students will be asked to:**

- Complete all assigned readings and attend all in-class screenings
- Participate in all large and small group discussions
- Complete two quizzes on films, lectures and readings
- Complete regular response papers to films and readings
- Write a final analytical paper and make a brief class presentation

**Course Assessment** will be based on the following:

- **Response Papers:** 40%
- **Final Paper:** 40%
- **Class Participation:** You are expected to attend regularly and contribute to discussions on topics and films discussed in class. 20%

Written assignments will be evaluated on the basis of the following:

- **Content:** Detailed and insightful discussion of the chosen topic, using relevant examples and support from course readings, class discussion, personal experience, and (where appropriate) outside research.
- **Organization:** Clear thesis statement, logical development of main points, and well-structured paragraphs.
- **Stylistics:** Logical sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation; careful proofreading; appropriate documentation of outside sources.

**Academic Integrity:** As the instructor of this class, I will uphold the University's guidelines on academic integrity found in the Student Handbook. Other than in collaborative writing assignments, students are expected to produce their own writing. In addition, students are encouraged to consult sources outside the class in the development of their assignments. In using these sources, students will be expected to cite any words in their text that are not their own work. It is necessary to give credit to other writers who have influenced a learner's work. Using the words of others as if they were your own is called plagiarism-academic dishonesty-and will not be accepted in work submitted for this course. In general, you can assume that I will uphold the University's guidelines on academic integrity found in the Student Handbook.

**Attendance:** All students are expected to attend all class meetings and be prompt. If you know you cannot attend, please advise the instructor as soon as possible at either the phone or e-mail address above. *Missing more than two classes will have serious grade consequences.*

**Tentative Topics and Time Framework. Readings may be adjusted as we go.**

### **WEEK 1**

Introduction, Syllabus. What is a documentary? Discussion on the non-fiction film and its particular characteristics.

**Screen:** *Spellbound*

**Assignment:** Read Chapter 5, "How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started?"  
Response Paper on *Spellbound*

### **WEEK 2**

How did documentary get started? Discuss the evolution of documentary film and ethical issues related to documentaries.

**Screen** *Nanook of the North* (1922, Robert J. Flaherty), & *Nanook Revisited* (1990, Claude Massot) If time permits, view early non-fiction shorts (Lumiere, Edison, etc.)

**Assignment:** Read Rabiger's chapter on Screen Grammar

### **WEEK 3**

Discussion on SOCIAL REALISM, GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTARIES AND PROPAGANDA.

**Screen:** excerpts from *Triumph of the Will* (1935, Leni Riefenstahl), *Prelude to War* (1942, Frank Capra)

**Assignment: Read Chapter 6, "What Types of Documentaries Are There?"**  
Response Paper

### **WEEK 4**

Begin discussion on **modes of documentary.**

Introduce Poetic Mode

**Screen:** *Listen Up: Lives of Quincy Jones* (1990)

**Assignment:** Read link on Blackboard about *Listen Up!*

### **WEEK 5**

Expository Mode

#### **Quiz One**

**Screen:** *Always for Pleasure* (60 min), excerpts from American Experience series.

**Assignment:** Read Chapter 4, "What Are Documentaries About?"  
Response Paper on either Week 4 or 5 films

### **WEEK 6**

Observational Mode.

**Screen:** *The War Room*

Segments from *High School*, *Gimme Shelter*, *Don't Look Back*. & *An American Family*

### **WEEK 7**

Participatory Mode

**Screen:** *Bowling for Columbine* or *Super Size Me*.

**Assignment:** Response Paper on either Week 6 or 7 films

### WEEK 8

The Personal Portrait or Biographical Documentary

**Screen:** *Crumb* or *To Be and to Have*

**Assignment:** Chapter 7 *How Have Documentaries Addressed Social & Political Issues?*

### DISCUSS FINAL PAPER

### WEEK 9

#### QUIZ TWO

Documentaries on Social & Political Issues

**Screen:** *Harlan County USA* or Segments from three films relating to the war in Iraq

### WEEK 10

Performative & Mockumentary Modes

Discuss the performative mode and its desire to draw attention to the filmmaking process. Discuss the “Mockumentary” and its attempt to satirize the documentary’s formal conventions.

**Screen:** segments *Reel Life*, *Zelig*, *This is Spinal Tap*. *Bob Roberts*.

Students give short presentations on final papers.

### WEEK 11

#### Final papers due

Other films that may be discussed or used for final papers include *The Thin Blue Line*, *Winged Migration*, *Fahrenheit 911*, *Hearts and Minds*, *The War Room*, *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, *Kurt & Courtney*, *Dogtown & Z Boys*.

This course and its assessment tools are designed to actively incorporate the four cornerstones of a high quality learning relationship here at DePaul University -

**Empathy:** students are actively involved in the discussion of moral choices; **Clarity:** approaches to film study are clearly designed and described; **Integrity:** course work leads to discussion of ethical decisions in life as reflected in the arts, and **Flexibility:** students are encouraged to adapt class to the demands of their professional and academic objectives.

#### Class Policies:

- You are responsible for notifying the instructor prior to any planned absence in order to get your assignments, and as soon as possible after any unplanned absence. Please refer to the contact information at the beginning of this document.
- Instructor will not fax or email missed assignments or handouts to you. Be sure to ask for them in advance or arrange to get copies from a fellow student.
- All cell phones must be turned off. All pagers must be turned off or in vibrate mode.