Course Objective and Description:
The focus of this course is historical and contemporary film documentary practice, theory and aesthetics. The emphasis of this class will be how cinematic artists working with non-fiction narrative forms have constructed and depicted reality, history and truth. Students will be challenged to consider the nature and assumptions of the genre and the underlying theories of film and culture that have informed documentary practice. In this course students will be asked to reflect on the conceptual issues intrinsic to documentary, including such notions as the aesthetics of Realism as ideological position and creative method, the ethical responsibility of the filmmaker to the subjects being filmed, the film artist as socially engaged activist/advocate, the role of reflexivity in cinema and the way in which the documentary genre provides a unique way for an artist to represent their own, personal experiences. Three aesthetic modes in particular will be examined: documentary as genre, documentary as the representation of “reality,” and documentary as a mode of reception. We will also examine the relationship between historical reality and historical event, and the way in which these films construct narratives of history and memory. In particular, the course will interrogate how documentary films position themselves in relation to the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. While there will be some discussion of film technique and form, the primary focus is on theories of film, narrative and non-fiction practice.

Reading Assignments:
The reading load for this course is quite heavy, though the number of reading assignments will vary from Session to Session. Even though lectures may not draw on the reading directly, it is imperative that you complete the readings in a timely manner. The variety and range of readings are deliberately designed to enhance your understanding of the films and the topic of each class. Readings due for a given Session are to be done before the class meets.

Grading Policies:
15% Attendance and Participation (Incl. On-Line Components).
20% First Short Formal Essay
25% Second Short Formal Essay
40% Term Paper
Required Texts:
Bill Nichols, Introduction to Documentary Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001
Articles via Course Moodle Site (Links to articles from journals will be posted on the Moodle).

Recommended Texts:

Written Requirements:
3 – 4 page short paper on a “classic” documentary film. An assignment prompt will be provided by the instructor. Students will be provided with a list of ten films and will have the opportunity to choose one of three questions to answer regarding their chosen title. The short essay will be due in class Session 5.

4 – 5 page short essay on an influential feature length documentary film. As with the first short paper students will be required to answer one of three questions from an assignment prompt provided by the instructor. Students may choose to write about any feature length animated documentary. The second short essay will be due Session 7.

10 - 15 page term paper on a recent documentary (one released after 1990) on a topic of the student’s choosing. This longer essay will require an explicitly developed and stated thesis, bibliographic research, close analysis of the texts(s) and an engagement with the theoretical background of documentary and realism as delineated in one or more of the assigned readings. While students will select their own topic and film(s), the thesis must engage the larger themes of the class. The term essay will be due in class Session 10.
Course Schedule:

Session One:

**True Stories: An Introduction to Documentary**
Screening:
- *True Stories* (David Byrne, 1986)
- *Bob Roberts* (Tim Robbins, 1993)

Session Two:

**Ethnography**
Screening:
- *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty 1922) 79 min.
Excerpts:
- *King Kong* (Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, 1933)
- *Dead Birds* (Robert Gardner, 1965)
Readings:
2. Ellis and McLane *New History of Documentary* p. 1 – 27

Session Three:

**Mediating Reality**
Screening:
- *Man With A Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929) 54 min.
Readings:
1. Nichols, Chapter Two
3. Ellis and McLane, p. 27 – 44.

Session Four:

**Direct Cinema**
Screening:
Excerpt:
- *Primary* (Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, 1960)
A Chronicle of a Summer (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1960)

Readings:
1. Nichols, Chapter Three.
2. Ellis & McLane, p. 208 - 227.
5. Bruzzi, Part Two, p. 73 - 120.

Session Five:

Social Justice

Screening:
Thin Blue Line (Errol Morris 1987) 105 min.

Readings:
1. Nichols, Chapter Seven
3. Ellis & McLane, p. 258 – 292.
4. Bruzzi, Part Two, p. 120 - 152.

Session Six:

Compilation Films

Screening:
The Atomic Café (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, 1982) 92 min.

Readings:
1. Nichols Chapter Six
2. Ellis & McLane, p. 293 – 325.

Session Seven:

Poetic Monologues

Screening:
Baraka (Ron Fricke, 1992)

Excerpt:
Koyaanisqatsi (Godfrey Reggio, 1983)

Readings:
1. Ellis & McLane, p. 326 – 341.

Session Eight:

History, Memory, Mourning

Screening:
4 Little Girls (Spike Lee, 1997) 102 min.
Night and Fog (Alain Renais, 1955)

Readings:
1. Ellis & McLane, p. 77 – 104.
2. Sally Flitterman Lewis “Documenting The Ineffable” in Grant, p. 204 – 222.

Session Nine:

Satire

Screening: Roger and Me (Michael Moore, 1989) 91 min.
Supersize Me (Morgan Spurlock, 2005)

Readings:
1. Nichols, Chapter Four and Five

Session Ten:

Essay Films

Screening: Sans Soleil (Chris Marker, 1982) 100 min.

Readings:
2. Dianne Scheinman “The Dialogic Imagination of Jean Rouch” in Grant, p.188 – 203.
5. Jeffrey Ruoff “A Bastard Union of Several Forms” in Grant, p. 286 – 301.