

University of Montana

## ScholarWorks at University of Montana

---

University of Montana Course Syllabi

Open Educational Resources (OER)

---

Spring 2-1-2022

### JRNL 391.01: Special Topics - Documentary Film History

R. Ryan Weibush

*University of Montana, Missoula*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi>

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

#### Recommended Citation

Weibush, R. Ryan, "JRNL 391.01: Special Topics - Documentary Film History" (2022). *University of Montana Course Syllabi*. 12605.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/12605>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Educational Resources (OER) at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Montana Course Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

## **JRNL 391 | 33896 | ST: Documentary Film History | Spring 2022**

MW 12:30 - 1:50 PM | DAH 316

Ryan Weibush | robert.weibush@umontana.edu

McGill 222 | 406.243.2764

Office Hours: by appointment

### **Course Description:**

This course focuses upon the history of American Documentary Film. We will pay special attention to the area in which the tenets of journalism, such as objectivity and impartiality, have met the elements of filmmaking, such as narrative and aesthetics. We will explore the significant movements of non-fiction film, and attempt to place each within the larger contexts of Art and Journalism.

The structure of the course will consist of screenings, both in class and out, as well as discussions regarding the films, directors, and readings.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To gain a thorough understanding of the history and trajectory of American Documentary Film
- To gain an understanding of the various movements in the genre
- An ability to discuss intelligently, and successfully analyze

### **Course Requirements:**

Attendance and participation are an essential element of the course. You are expected to attend, and to be prepared to discuss both readings and viewings. In addition, students will:

- complete a viewing log with entries for each film viewed during the semester (unless otherwise noted). Checked periodically throughout the semester.
- Complete a treatment and grant application questions for a non-fiction film of their own creation.

### Assignments:

- Viewing Log

### Final Film Proposal

- Treatment
- Application Questions
- Presentation/Pitch

### Class Attendance & Participation

- Participation will include short responses to questions posed during class time, to be handed in the following class meeting

**Course Structure:**

In general, Screenings will be held on Mondays, while discussions will take place on Wednesdays. Each week will comprise of an in class screening, as well as out of class viewings you will be responsible to watch on your own time.

**Required Text:**

There is no required text for this course, however we will be reading assigned articles (via moodle or handout) throughout the semester.

You will also be required to view films outside of class. This may require purchasing them on demand, or as part of a subscription service such as Hulu or Netflix. Whenever possible, I will provide a screening link gratis.

**Big Sky Documentary Film Festival:**

We are fortunate enough to have the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival taking place during the semester. Filmmakers and film professionals from around the United States and abroad will be in town during the week of Feb. 18th-27th. You will be required to attend screenings and talks during the festival, which will provide you with first hand knowledge regarding documentary filmmaking today.

**UM Writing Center**

The Writing and Public Speaking Center provides one-on-one tutoring to students at all levels and at any time in the writing process. Visit now. Visit often. We're ready when you are. [www.umt.edu/writingcenter](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter).

**Attendance Policy**

Due to the nature of this course, attendance is central to your success. Many films we'll be watching this semester are difficult to find and may only be seen in class. You will be expected to contact the instructors after any unexcused absence in order to explain. Also, please contact classmates for notes and other information covered on the day of your absence. Four or more absences will result in a failing grade for this course.

Punctuality: please arrive to class on time. Due to screening times, films will be started as close to 12:30PM as possible. Entering late will cause a disruption. If you are more than fifteen minutes late, you will be marked absent.

During class meetings, we will be viewing screenings and discussing assigned readings. Leaving class early will also result in being marked absent.

Please contact the instructor as soon as possible if you believe you will have an excused absence. Acceptable reasons: documented or contagious sickness, death or emergency in family, absence due to disability status, artistic opportunities.

## **Communication**

Communication is key. Email turnaround time is typically 24 hours for all emails sent between 9 AM– 5PM. Emails sent after 5PM on Fridays may not receive a response until the following Monday afternoon.

Please respect common courtesies in communication with your instructors. All email correspondences must begin with some form of salutation (Hi Prof. Weibush) and end with a sign-off ('Best', 'See you soon', etc.).

## **Assignment Submission Guidelines:**

Written Files: last name\_first name\_assignment name.doc

## **Assignments:**

### Film Log

For each film we view this semester, students will write a short response/review. These will be compiled and turned in periodically throughout the semester

### Treatment

Students will write a 1-2 page treatment for a non-fiction film they'd like to produce or direct.

### Application

In conjunction with their treatment, students will complete a grant application template regarding the film they would like to produce or direct.

### Presentation/Pitch

Students will have the option of an oral presentation, or creating a video in the form of a pitch of their film.

## **Grading:**

Film Log -30  
Participation - 20  
Attendance - 10  
Treatment - 10  
Application - 10  
Final Presentation - 20

## **Late Submission Policy**

Do not plan to turn in late assignments, as there is no guarantee late assignments will be accepted. In fairness to those students who meet deadlines, if you turn in an assignment late, 1 letter grade will be deducted per week that the assignment is late. If you will be absent the day an assignment is due, make arrangements to submit the assignment before you will be absent.

## **Excused Late Submissions**

In some rare cases, late work will be accepted without penalty. Email me as soon as possible and provide documentation associated with your reasoning for requesting an excused late submission. Broken computers and lost project files are never an excuse for a pass on late submission – always back up your work!

## **Policy on Electronic Devices, Food and Drink**

No personal electronic devices of any kind are permitted in the classroom at any time. If you must bring them with you, they must be turned off and stored in your bag. They must not be visible at any point during our course meeting time, including during breaks. I am happy to discuss accommodating any accessibility needs for electronic devices in the classroom.

Eat before (or after) you come to class

## How to Earn the Grade That You Want

- Arrive to class on time, and don't miss class.
- Arrive to class ready to watch and listen with your full attention.
- Take notes during class and during films, participate in discussions.
- Schedule regular time to work on the course throughout the week. This includes, especially, maintaining an active production schedule - filming, writing, etc..*
- Thoroughly read all assignment info and be sure to meet all requirements.
- Turn your assignments in on time.
- Start your work early so you can ask questions before the deadline.
- Communicate with the professor. Ask for clarifications, ask for help. Come to office hours.
- Read all assigned readings, every week. Research other writing about the films.
- Read and know the information on this syllabus! Refer back throughout the course.

## **Other Course Policies**

### Plagiarism, Cheating and Academic Dishonesty

I take academic dishonesty very seriously. Plagiarism means using any text, in whole or in part, that you did not write. This means – do not copy and paste anything, from anywhere, into your written assignments. Any written work I suspect may contain plagiarized material will be scanned with a plagiarism detection application. Any plagiarized work, in whole or in part, will result in a 0 grade with no option to make up those points. On second offense, the student will be reported to the Dean of Students for violation of the conduct code. The repercussions are serious – don't risk it.

### Sensitive Subject Matter & Censorship

This course operates under a no censorship policy, and you should feel free to experiment with challenging topics in your projects. That said - if you submit work with violent or sexually explicit themes, containing hate speech, racial slurs or other sensitive subject matter, I might contact you to request more background information on your choices.

### Be Kind

Be respectful to each other, help each other, and be considerate in your communications with everyone involved in the course. No trolling shared work and ideas. Be constructive with any critical feedback you give.

### Academic Misconduct and Student Conduct Code

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University.

All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The code is available online at [http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student\\_conduct.php](http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php)

### Accessibility

I am happy to work with you and provide reasonable accommodations for any accessibility concern. Be in touch with me as soon as possible.

### COVID 19

- Mask use is required within the classroom or laboratory.
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don't come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress. This will be done via online viewings and zoom meetings when/if needed.
- UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.
- Where social distancing (maintaining consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts.
- Class attendance and seating will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.

JR NL 391		Screening	Due:
1.1 9	Introduction to the class - Screening		
1.2 4	<i>Grass</i> (1925) Dir. M. Cooper		
1.2 6	• Intro/Discussion	<i>Nanook of the North</i> (1922) Dir. R. Flaherty	Lumiere - Last Interview Grierson - First Principles
1.3 1	-The "Actuality" Film - Era of Newsreels  Selected Newsreels	Selected Newreels	Grierson - Propaganda
2.2	• Discussion	• "Granton Trawler" (1934) Dir. Grierson	Grierson - Last Interview
2.7	Modernism, The Empire Marketing Board, and Pare Larentz  Screenings: Land Without Bread Housing Problems The River	"Night Mail" (1936) Watt & Wright	Excerpts from Nichols' Documentary Modes
2.9	Discussion	"A propôs de Nice" (1930) Dir. Vigo "O Dreamland" (1953) Dir. Anderson	Nichols - Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde
2.1 4	- Robert Drew & Associates - The Era of News	<i>Primary</i> (1960) Dir. R. Drew	
2.1 6	Discussion	"Happy Mother's Day" "Lonely Boy"	Robert Drew Interview
2.2 1	<b>PRESIDENTS DAY</b> - No Formal Class Meeting		
2.2 3	<b>BSDFF - DocShop</b>		
2.2 8	Cinema Verite - Direct Cinema	<i>Salesman</i> (1968) Dir. Maysles	
3.2	Discussion	excerpts	Maysles Interview
3.7	Objectivity and Anthropology - the science of non-fiction film	<i>Chronique d'un été</i> (1960) Dir. J. Rouch	Rouch Interview Politics of Cultural Anthropology
3.9	Discussion	<i>Obedience</i> (1969) - Dir. Milgram	Excerpts from Nichols' Documentary Modes

3.1 4	Activism In Film Form	<i>Growing Up Female</i> (1971) - Dir. J. Reichert & J. Klein	
3.1 6	Discussion	<i>Titicut Follies</i> (1967) Dir. F. Wiseman	<b>J. Reichert Interview Wiseman Articles</b>
3.2 1	SPRING BREAK		
3.2 3	SPRING BREAK		
3.2 8	Minnesota Declaration - Herzog, Wenders, and Morris - Ecstatic Truth	<i>Burden of Dreams</i> (1982) Dir. Les Blank	
3.3 0	Discussion	"La Soufriere" (1977) Dir. W. Herzog  <i>Vernon, Florida</i> (1981) Dir. E. Morris	<b>The Anti-Post Modern Post Modernist - E. Morris</b>
4.4	Minnesota Declaration Continued	<i>A Poem Is A Naked Person</i> (2015) Les Blank	
4.6	Discussion		<b>Treatment</b>
4.1 1	The rise of the "Social Issue" and Celebrity Docs - Michael Moore, Super Size Me, and Al Gore.	<i>Roger &amp; Me</i> (1987) Dir. Moore	
4.1 3	Discussion		
4.1 8	Nontraditional forms I - Personal Essay Doc	<i>Sherman's March</i> (1985) Dir. Ross McElwee	
4.2 0	Discussion		<b>Application</b>
4.2 5	Nontraditional Form II -	<i>Beaver Trilogy</i> Dir. Trent Harris	
4.2 7	Television News, The Internet, and Post-Modernist Documentary	<i>Self Induced Hallucination</i> (2018) Dir. J. Schoenbrun	
5.2	- Screening:	"The Spiritual Life of Wholesale Goods" (2017) Dir. J. Wilson -	
5.4	Presentations		<b>Final Presentation</b>
5.9	Final Exam TBA		Presentations Cont'd

\*subject to change