

Department of Media, Culture and Communication  
New York University  
**MCC-GE 2147 Reality and Documentary TV**  
Summer 2012

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will survey the historical development and shifting definitions of documentary and reality television. We will explore the ways in which television has understood and utilized non-fiction formats at particular historical moments; trace the formations and deployment of realist aesthetics; explore the ethical obligations/problematics of these forms and their practitioners; examine the implications and meanings of documentary/reality hybrids; and consider the reception of and cultural meanings derived from particular documentary and reality texts and subgenres.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the course students should be able to:

- Provide an accurate definition of the genres of documentary television and reality television and their relationship.
- Describe the history of documentary forms on television and how it has been transformed by new formats and genres.
- Analyze the ideological, historical, political and ethical issues raised by documentary and reality television.
- Situate changing themes in documentary television in relation to the socio-historical contexts of their times.
- Assess the effects on documentary and reality television of new and emerging media markets and predict future formats.

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

+Murray & Ouellette, Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (NY: NYU Press) 2009.

+Blackboard readings listed below by week.

### **BLACKBOARD**

We will use blackboard in this class. Please check our page regularly for announcements and updates.

### **SCREENINGS**

You will be required to watch one screening per week outside of class.

### **ASSIGNMENTS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Attendance and Participation (15%). Students are expected to attend class and participate in discussion on a regular basis. You will be graded on the frequency and level of your participation. No more than **two** absences are allowed, or a drop in final grade will occur (unless there is a documented emergency or illness).
2. Midterm Exam (25%) Exam will be a combination of short answer and essay.
3. Final Exam (25%) Exam will be a combination of short answer and essay

4. Paper Proposal (10%) Students will hand in a one-page proposal containing a thesis statement and citations of three sources.
5. Research Paper (25%). Students are required to complete one 10 page research paper.

**Grading Scale:**

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| 90 – 100=    | A    |
| 80 – 89 =    | B    |
| 70 – 79 =    | C    |
| 60 – 69 =    | D    |
| 59 & below = | Fail |

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

[http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic\\_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity)

The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you

- cheat on an exam,
- submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors,
- receive help on a takehome examination that calls for independent work, or
- plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following:

- copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media;
- download documents from the Internet;
- purchase documents;
- report from other's oral work;
- paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or
- copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people's ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your

professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

### **Avoiding Academic Dishonesty**

- Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
- Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another's work need to be acknowledged.
- Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
- Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
- Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

### **STUDENT RESOURCES**

- Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#), 719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

### **Helpful Online Resources for Research:**

Project muse (academic journal articles) - <http://muse.jhu.edu/>

Ingenta (academic journal articles) - <http://www.ingenta.com>

Advertising Age - <http://www.adage.com/>

AC Nielsen - <http://www.nielsenmedia.com/>

Internet archive--moving images - <http://www.archive.org/details/movies>

FRAPA - <http://www.frapa.org/>

Vanderbilt TV News archive - <http://www.frapa.org/>

Hagley Library and Archive - <http://www.hagley.lib.de.us/>

Radio Script archive - <http://www.genericradio.com/library.php>

Hulu - <http://www.hulu.com/>

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### **SCHEDULE**

#### **WEEK ONE**

+Day 1

#### **Introduction & Documentary Basics, pt. 1**

Screening: Housing Problems, Nanook of the North

Nichols, "How Can we Define Documentary Film?"

Aufderheide, "Defining the Documentary"

+Day 2      **Documentary Basics, pt. 2**  
Screening: *Titicut Follies*  
Readings: Nichols, "What are the Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?" (Blackboard)  
Saunders, "Wiseman and Civil Reform: Four Institutions" (blackboard)

+Day 3      **Documentary and Television**  
Screening: *Harvest of Shame*  
Readings: Ellis and McClane, "New Channel: Documentary for Television" (blackboard)  
Philip Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts." (blackboard)  
Curtin, "NBC News Documentary: 'Intelligent Interpretation' In a Cold War Context" (blackboard)

+Day 4      **W – 5 Origins of Reality TV**  
Screening: *Candid Camera*  
Readings: Watts, "Melancholy, Merit, and Merchandise: The Postwar Audience Participation Show"  
McCarthy, "Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me"  
Gaines, "Everyday Strangeness: Robert Ripley's International Oddities as Documentary Attractions." (blackboard)

WEEK TWO

+Day 5      **EXAM #1**

+Day 6      **Documentary/Reality Hybrids**  
Screening: *An American Family, 30 Days*  
Readings: Corner, "Performing the Real"  
Murray, "I Think We Need a New Name for it"  
Rouff, "A Real View of Middle-Class Life" (blackboard)  
Gilbert, Craig, "Reflections on An American Family" (blackboard)

+Day 7      **Reality TV & Docs in the 1980s-90s**  
Screening: *First Person Plural*  
Readings: Raphael, "Political Origins of Reali-TV"  
Aufderheide, "Public Intimacy: The Development of First Person Documentary" (blackboard)  
Beck, "Video Vigilantes" (blackboard)  
Mascaro, "HBO Documentaries: Form and Function" (Blackboard)

+Day 8      **Reality TV—Formats and Globalization**  
Screening: *Wife Swap and Trading Spouses*  
Readings: Magder, "Television 2.0"  
McMurria, "Globe TV Realities"  
Waisbord, "McTV: Understanding the Global Popularity of TV Formats" (blackboard)  
Moran, "The Pie and the Crust: Television Program Formats" (blackboard)

WEEK THREE

+Day 9      **Social Implications—Surveillance and Voyeurism,**

Screening: *Big Brother*  
Reading: Pecora, "The Culture of Surveillance" (blackboard)  
Andrejevic, "The Kinder, Gentler, Gaze of Big Brother": Reality TV in the Era of Digital Capitalism " (blackboard)  
Murray, "The Politics of Reality TV" (blackboard)

+Day 10      **Social Implications—Neoliberalism**  
Screening: *Nanny 911*, *The Swan*  
Reading: Becker, "Help is on the Way" (blackboard)  
Besley, "Social Education and Mental Hygiene: Foucault, Disciplinary Technologies and the Moral Constitution of Youth" (blackboard)  
Ouellette, Introduction to "Better Living through Reality TV" (blackboard)  
+PAPER PROPOSAL DUE+

+Day 11      **New Formats and Markets**  
Screening: TBA  
Readings: Eliis and McLane, "Some other Ways to think about Documentary" (blackboard)  
Osbourne-Thompson, "The Comedic Treatment of Reality"

+Day 12      **EXAM #2**  
**RESEARH PAPER DUE @ TK**

Reality and Documentary TV  
**Research Paper**

**Due Date: TK**

**Length:** 10 double-spaced typed pages

**Worth:** 25% of final grade

For this assignment, you will choose a current reality television program (one that we have NOT discussed in class) and compare it to a past or current documentary. These two media texts should have something in common---subject matter, approach, style, aesthetic or narrative strategies---in order for you to analyze the reality program and documentary in a manner that reveals the historical, industrial and aesthetic threads that connect and inform them.

Grading Criteria

**A range**

A grade of A is an excellent grade. The student's work shows originality, coherence, and a mastery of the primary and secondary research. The interpretation of the material is concise and well-argued and *all requirements of the assignment have been met*. Sources used are varied and are referenced correctly within the body of the paper. The writing is very strong. Sentences are complete and understandable and there are few, if any, grammar, punctuation or spelling errors.

**B range**

A grade of B is an above average grade. All requirements of the assignment have been met. The student has shown that he/she clearly understands the material and knows how to make an argument. There must be a solid presentation of research and interpretive skills, but some aspects of the argument are weak or digressive. The writing

may contain some grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors. It is clear that with some additional work, this type of paper could become an A paper.

**C range**

A grade of C is an average grade. The student has completed only the very basics of the assignment and the argument or analysis may need significant revision. Interpretation may be weak in that it may be factually incorrect, tenuously argued, or awkward. The writing may be rough, contain structural errors (incoherent development of a main point or unclear sentences or paragraphs) or contain quite a few grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors.

**D range**

A grade of D is a poor grade. The basic expectations of the assignment are not met. All questions are not answered and the argument does not hold together. However, student will not receive a failing grade, because he/she has provided some evidence of research. The writing may be inept or riddled with grammar, punctuation or spelling errors.

SAMPLE SYLLABUS