

Fayetteville State University
College of Arts and Sciences
Department of English
English 470: Senior Seminar
Documentary, Truth-Telling, Activism
Spring 2012

I. Locator Information:

Instructor: Dr. Chuck Tryon

Course # and Name: English 470

Semester Credit Hours: 3

Day and Time Class Meets: T/H 11-12:15

Total Contact Hours for Class:

Class meets: Lyons Science 304 E

Office Location: Butler 126

Office hours: 8-9:30, 10:45-12:30, 5-6 T/Th

Office Phone: 672-2223

Email address: ctryon@uncfsu.edu

FSU Policy on Electronic Mail: Fayetteville State University provides to each student, free of charge, an electronic mail account (username@uncfsu.edu) that is easily accessible via the Internet. The university has established FSU email as the primary mode of correspondence between university officials and enrolled students. Inquiries and requests from students pertaining to academic records, grades, bills, financial aid, and other matters of a confidential nature must be submitted via FSU email. Inquiries or requests from personal email accounts are not assured a response. The university maintains open-use computer laboratories throughout the campus that can be used to access electronic mail.

Rules and regulations governing the use of FSU email may be found at
<http://www.uncfsu.edu/PDFs/EmailPolicyFinal.pdf>

II. Course Description: Directed study on special topics in English conducted by members of the Department. Prerequisite: Senior standing. Requirement for all English majors. Course offered during Fall and Spring Semesters.

III. Disabled Student Services: In accordance with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ACA) of 1990, if you have a disability or think you have a disability to please contact the Center for Personal Development in the Spaulding Building, Room 155 (1st Floor); 910-672-1203.

IV. Textbooks: All textbooks are available at the University Bookstore.

Evans, Walker and James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939, reprint 2001.

Eggars, Dave. *Zeitoun*. San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2009.

Other readings and films available online through electronic reserve, Blackboard, etc.

I will also place several essays on electronic reserve. All assigned movies will be on reserve at the Media Center in the FSU library. Students are expected to see all assigned movies by the beginning of class on the day they are due. Class discussion of specific scenes is no substitute for watching the entire movie.

V. Detailed Course Description: During this section of English 470, we will treat the topic of "Documentary, Truth-Telling, Activism." This topic will combine a focus on the history and ethics of

documentary in literature, photography, and film with a focus on how documentary techniques have been used to document or describe various forms of “injustice,” which I will define rather broadly to include the struggles of farmers during the Dust Bowl era of the Great Depression, culturally-inscribed racism, victims of torture in the prisons in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, among others.

In all cases, documentary has been used to call attention to injustice, and in many cases, to campaign for change, even while we are presented with documentaries that challenge our expectations of objective truth. For example, under what circumstances are re-enactments appropriate, if at all? What does it mean for a documentary filmmaker to speak for someone else? We will discuss the social and political role of documentary, as well as technological and social changes that have altered the influence of documentary. With that in mind, we will discuss both the possibilities and limits of documentary techniques in defining and representing injustice, as well as in changing the world’s problems.

VI. Course Requirements and Evaluation Criteria:

Grading Scale: The class grading scale is consistent with the university catalog. My specific numeric grading scale is based on a ten-point scale.

A=90-100

B=80-89

C=70-79

D=60-69

F=59 or less

Class Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class meetings, laboratories, and other instructional sessions for all courses in which they are enrolled. Students are also expected to arrive to class on time and remain in class for the entire scheduled period. When students must miss class for unavoidable reasons, i.e., illness, family emergencies, or participation in official university sponsored activities – they are responsible for informing faculty of the reasons for the absences, in advance if possible, and completing all missed assignments. When you miss class for one of these unavoidable reasons, please see me as soon as possible and we will discuss how you can make up any work that you missed.

During the first half of the semester/term, faculty will assign an interim grade of “EA,” Excessive Absences, for students whose class absences exceed 10% of the total contact hours for the class. Students who receive EA interim grades must either withdraw from the class or resume attendance. Students who resume attendance must consult with the instructor about completion of missed assignments. The EA is not a final grade, so students who are assigned an interim grade of EA, but do not withdraw from the class, will receive a final grade based on the evaluation criteria for the class.

Assignments:

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Paper 1 (4-5 pages): 20%

Paper 2 (8-10 pages): 35%

Oral Presentation (15 minutes): 10%

Midterm: 10%

Final: 15%

Paper One:

The first major paper in English 470 will ask you to begin thinking about some of the themes or issues raised by the practices, ethics, and politics of documentary. How did writers, photographers, and filmmakers use documentary filmmaking to enact social change? What ethical codes (if any) were put in place to ensure that documentary makers adhere to some definition of the truth? For this assignment, you will be expected to produce a 4-5 page paper engaging with one of the documentary texts (broadly defined) produced prior to 1945. You will be expected to do some research and to have at least three secondary sources.

Paper Two:

This will be a detailed research paper, in which you will develop an expanded argument about the ethical and political issues associated with documentary. You may choose a documentary from any era and take any approach you wish. Again, you can address the ethical or rhetorical aspects of documentary, but you may focus on any documentary text you choose. For this assignment, you will be expected to produce an 8-10 page paper with at least six secondary sources.

Oral Presentation:

Your presentation will be a fifteen-minute introduction to one of the authors or texts we are studying this semester. The presentation should be accompanied by a two-page abstract about the presentation that you will submit to me. The presentation should provide some historical background regarding the subject and should conclude with at least one or two questions for the class that you think will provoke conversation. These should not be yes-or-no questions but should be open-ended.

Policy on missed assignments: Deadlines in English 470 are strictly enforced. Because I will assign papers weeks in advance, you will have ample time to complete your paper by the due date. For that reason, papers must be submitted by the beginning of class on the day they are due. If you do not submit the paper by the beginning of class, your paper grade will be lowered by one letter. Electronic copies (email attachments) of your papers are not acceptable. Plan ahead. Assignments that are not turned in will be graded as zero points. If you fail to turn in one of the major papers, you will not pass the course.

Academic Honesty: According to the FSU Code of Student Conduct, a student violates the Academic Dishonesty Policy if he or she *attempts* to cheat or plagiarize, *cheats*, *plagiarizes*, *falsifies*, or *aids and abets* others to cheat or plagiarize.

Because this is a writing course, absolutely every word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph that you submit for credit must be your own work. Because you have all graduated from high school or the equivalent, you obviously understand the difference between your words and the work of others. This course's instructor has adopted a "zero tolerance" policy on plagiarism. This means that any student who turns in another writer's work pretending that it is his or her own will earn an "F" for the entire course.

Cell phone/behavior policy: I allow cell phones in class, but I require them to be in a pocket and on vibrate. If your cell rings, you are to leave the room quietly to answer it. I do not want them out on a desk or in view at any time. Do not get caught text messaging in my class. In general, you should behave respectfully towards your peers and towards the instructor in order to contribute to the best possible learning environment for yourself and your classmates.

Academic Support Resources – The English and Foreign Languages **Computer Lab** is located in Butler 312. The department also has a **Writing Center** located in the Helen T. Chick Building; the center is designed to give students one-on-one tutorial assistance with writing their papers; instructors

receive weekly reports of students who attend the center. Writing tutors are also available through the online service, **Smarthinking.com**, which you can access via Blackboard. Tutors are available for one-on-one chats or to read and comment on drafts of your paper. Papers submitted to Smarthinking.com normally are returned within 24 hours, so if you intend to use the service, be sure to plan ahead.

Teaching Strategies/Philosophy: English 470 is a capstone course, the culmination of four years of study towards your degree in English. With that in mind, I will be putting a lot of responsibility on you as students to contribute to class discussion and to produce papers that demonstrate sophistication and effort. I believe that students learn better in classes that combine lecture and discussion formats and to that end, you will be expected to discuss the readings, photographs, and films that are assigned for class. Lack of preparation will seriously hurt your class participation grade and will, in the long term, pose problems as you prepare for the midterm and final exams. That being said, I also believe that we can learn from each other in focusing on the theme of “Documentary, Truth-Telling, Activism.”

Course Schedule:

Key: ER=Electronic Reserve

OL=Online

Week One:

January 10-12:

T: Introduction to Course

H: Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave,” ER.

View Matthew Brady photographs

Week Two:

January 17-19:

T: Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, selections (including photographs), OL.

H: Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, see especially chapters 24-25, OL.

Week Three:

January 24-26:

T: Dorothea Lange, “Migrant Mother” and other FSA photographs, OL.

H: Robert Capa, “Falling Soldier” (photograph)

“New Doubts Raised Over Famous War Photo,” OL.

Week Four:

January 31-February 2:

T: Federal Theater Project, “Living Newspaper,” OL.

H: Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 1-98.

Week Five:

February 7-9:

T: Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 101-93.

H: Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 197-252.

Week Six:

February 14-16:

T: Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 255-316.

H: In-class screening: Pare Lorentz, *The River*, movie (1938), available on archive.org.

Week Seven:

February 21-23:

T: Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 317-416.

Paper One due.

H: Screening: *Night and Fog* (1955), dir. Alain Resnais.

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Documenting the Ineffable," ER.

Week Eight:

February 28-March 1:

T: Screening, *Medium Cool* (1969), dir. Haskell Wexler.

Reading: Michael Renov, "The 'Real' in Fiction," ER.

H: **Midterm**

March 6-8 No Class, Spring Break.

Week Nine:

March 13-15:

T: Screening: *Winter Soldier* (1972), dir. Winterfilm.

View: "Make Your Own History: Documents from the GI Resistance, 1969-1975," OL.

H: In class screening: 1970s activist videos from TVTV and Paper Tiger TV

"1972 GOP Convention Four More Years" and "Herb Schiller Reads *The New York Times*"

Reading: TBA

Week Ten:

March 20-22:

T: Screening, *The Thin Blue Line* (1989), dir. Errol Morris.

H: Linda Williams, "Mirrors without Memories," ER.

Week Eleven:

March 27-29:

T: Screening: *Roger & Me* (1989), dir. Michael Moore.

Reading: Paul Arthur, "Jargons of Authenticity (Three American Moments)," ER.

H: Dave Eggars, *Zeitoun*, Part 1

Week Twelve:

April 3-5:

T: Dave Eggars, *Zeitoun*, Part 2

H: Dave Eggars, *Zeitoun*, Part 3.

Week Thirteen:

April 10-12:

T: Screening: *Strange Culture* (2007), dir. Lynn Hirschman Leeson.

H: Shaun Huston, "Life into Art."

Week Fourteen:

April 17-19:

T: Screening: *Watermelon Woman* (1996), dir. Cheryl Dunye.

H: Thelma Willis Foote, "Hoax of the Lost Ancestor."

Final Paper due.

Week Fifteen:

April 24-26:

T: Screening, *The Age of Stupid* (2009), dir. Franny Armstrong.

Reading, Chuck Tryon, "Digital distribution, participatory culture, and the transmedia documentary," OL.

H: Occupy Wall Street, *We are the 99% Tumblr*. Other OWS documents via archive.org

Final Exam:

TBA