

NRM 2061/ENV 2005 Environmental Documentaries: Knowledge to Action
Environmental Studies Department and
Department of Recreation and Outdoor Studies
Green Mountain College
Spring 2006 (Revision 1/11/06)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor	Office:	Phone:	Email
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Class Meetings

Tue 2:00-5:00	Griswold 001
Thur 3:30-5:30	Griswold 001 (To be confirmed)
Fri 2:00-3:15	Griswold 001 (To be confirmed)

Class website: <http://campus.greenmtn.edu/faculty/gregbrown/NRM2061/nrm2061.htm>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Visual images are a powerful medium to promote social and environmental change. The documentary film maker must deftly move between art, advocacy, and accuracy for a film to be effective. In this course, we will view environmental documentaries that are particularly effective in delivering their message. These films will provide a useful starting point to engage in critical discourse about important environmental issues such as old-growth forests, endangered species, indigenous land rights, nuclear energy, factory farming, urban sprawl, and wilderness protection.

The overarching theme of the course will be to examine what constitutes effective environmental advocacy. Many of the documentaries depict individuals engaged in various types of environmental advocacy ranging from civil disobedience to environmental education. There are heroes and villains, successes and failures. What lessons can be learned from those who engage in activities for social and environmental change?

Through viewing documentaries and reading supplemental materials, the course will provide substantive content about environmental and ecological processes, natural resource management practices, and social and political systems. Students will view the documentaries and conduct additional research to critically reflect on the subject matter. Critical thinking skills will be demonstrated through written and oral presentations.

Collaborative learning. Students located at Ecoleague partner Alaska Pacific University will view some of the documentaries concurrently with students at Green Mountain College. Critical

reflections and commentary on the documentaries will be shared by students using the “Moodle” internet course management system. Students will be evaluated on the substance of their contribution to the collaborative learning project.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify film characteristics that contribute to an effective environmental documentary and storytelling;
2. Describe various environmental worldviews;
3. Describe and evaluate trade-offs in environmental decision-making;
4. Understand the importance of social and economic systems to environmental problems and their solutions;
5. Describe a wide spectrum of environmental advocacy methods;
6. Communicate the wide range of environmental problems by the local and global community and suggest alternative pathways;
7. Communicate knowledge and understanding of the above effectively through written and oral assessments.

REQUIRED TEXTS.

Bernard, Sheila Curran. 2003. *Documentary Storytelling for Video and Filmmakers*. Focal Press. ISBN: 0240805399.

Supplementary reading materials will be assigned throughout the semester.

CLASS STRUCTURE

In general, two to three documentary films will be shown each week. One class each week will be devoted to discussion of the films. Students will be assigned a particular film where they will be responsible for leading the discussion. Students will also write critical thinking papers and participate in a collaborative learning project with another Ecoleague partner school, Alaska Pacific University.

Description of Course Requirements:

1. Throughout the semester, you will write a minimum of 7 two-to-three page critical thinking papers based on a documentary film subject. You may write more than 7 papers, but the best 7 will be used in the evaluation of your work. A separate handout (see below) will be provided with detailed instructions and expectations for the critical thinking papers.
2. You will engage in an internet discussion with students enrolled at our Ecoleague partner school Alaska Pacific University. Guidelines for participating in the discussion will be provided later.

3. Each student will be required to *lead* a class discussion for an assigned documentary. Leading means: 1) establishing desired learning outcomes, 2) developing a structure for the discussion, and 3) researching and knowing more about the film than your classmates.
4. Class participation is an essential and required component of this course. You cannot participate if you do not attend class.

Summary of evaluation weighting

- 30% Critical thinking papers
- 15% Classroom discussion
- 10% Leading a class discussion
- 20% Collaborative learning participation
- 25% Final exam

TENTATIVE TOPICAL OUTLINE/SCHEDULE

Week	Dates	Topic	Documentary Film	Readings
1	Jan. 17-20	Course Introduction A Contrast in Political Systems? Maybe.	“30 Frames a Second” The WTO comes to Seattle. (75 min) “Triumph of the Will” Leni Riefenstahl’s classic documentary about the Third Reich (120 min)	Curran: Introduction, pp. 1-9.
2	Jan. 23-27	Ecology, agriculture, and culture conflict.	“Varmints”. Prairie ecology and cultural conflict. (91 min) “Killing Coyote”. Agriculture and predator control. (83 min)	Curran: Chapter 2, pp. 13-25.
3	Jan. 30- Feb. 3	Wildlife management.	“The Buffalo War”. Conflict over an American icon. (57 min) “El Caballo”. Is there a place for the wild horse in N. America? (30 min) “Cull of the Wild: The Truth Behind Trapping” (27 min)	Curran: Chapter 3, pp. 27-39
4	Feb. 6-10	The forests and the trees.	“Butterfly”. Fulfilling a promise to protect the forests (80 min) “Tree-sit: The Art of Resistance” (120 min) “Green Rolling Hills”. Wood pulping the South. (30 min)	Curran: Chapter 4, pp. 41-61
5	Feb. 13-17	Personal transformations and spiritual journeys. APU Collaborative Film #1.	***“The Witness”. A story of personal transformation (43 min) “A Reason for Hope”. Jane Goodall’s search for meaning in life. (60 min)	Curran: Chapter 5, pp. 63-73

			<p>"Mad Cowboy". The story of Howard Lyman and his crusade against mad cow disease. (79 min)</p> <p>"Grizzly Man" The story of Timothy Treadwell and his adventures in Alaska (104 min)</p>	
6	Feb. 20-24	<p>Social structure and the environment</p> <p>APU Collaborative Film #2</p>	<p>***"The Corporation" A critical look at the most powerful social force in modern society (145 min)</p> <p>"Blue Vinyl" The world's first toxic comedy (97 min)</p>	Curran: Chapter 6, "Approach" pp. 75-84
7	Feb. 27-Mar. 3	<p>Wilderness and wild places.</p> <p>APU Collaborative Film #3</p>	<p>"American Values, American Wilderness". The expression of wilderness values from diverse perspectives. (57 min)</p> <p>"Monumental: David Brower's Fight for Wild America" The story of David Brower and his crusade for wild places (74 min)</p> <p>"Yosemite: The Fate of Heaven" Are we loving national parks to death? (58 min)</p>	Curran: Chapters 7,9 pp. 87-102; 115-132
Spring Break Mar. 6-11				
8	Mar. 13-17	<p>Indigenous people and the environment.</p> <p>APU Collaborative Film #4</p>	<p>***"In the Light of Reverence". Public lands, resource management, and Native Americans (60 min)</p> <p>"Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action" (88 min)</p> <p>"Fight for Country". Nuclear energy and Aboriginal land rights in Australia. (62 min)</p>	Curran: Chapters 11,12,13 pp. 143-192
9	Mar. 20-24	<p>Biodiversity and endangered species</p>	<p>"The God Squad". The politics of endangered species (57 min)</p> <p>"Being Caribou." Two Canadians follow the caribou on their annual migration to calving grounds. (72 min)</p> <p>"Oil on Ice". The conflict over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (90 min)</p>	
10	Mar. 27-31	<p>Water Resources</p>	<p>***"Cadillac Desert: An American Nile" (55 min)</p>	

		APU Collaborative Film #5	<p>“Mining Seven-Up Pete” Open pit mining in Montana. (30 min)</p> <p>“The Element of Doom” Lead mining in the Ozarks (30 min)</p>	
11	Apr. 3-7	<p>Food choices, impacts, and ethics.</p> <p>APU Collaborative Film #6</p>	<p>***“A Cow at My Table.” The effects of large-scale factory farms and the philosophy of vegetarianism (90 min)</p> <p>“Diet for a New America” How to win an argument with a meat eater (60 min)</p> <p>“Peaceable Kingdom” A close look at animal-based agriculture. (77 min)</p>	
12	Apr. 10-14	Local action, community resistance, and land use planning	<p>“Fury for the Sound”. Womens’ resistance to environmental destruction (84 min)</p> <p>“Store Wars”. Community resistance to globalization. (60 min)</p> <p>“Save our Land, Save our Towns”. Meeting the challenge of urban sprawl (57 min)</p>	
13	Apr. 19-21*	Environmental victims	<p>“Libby, Montana”. The story of a town forsaken. (124 min)</p> <p>“Trade Secrets.” A Bill Moyers exposé. (60 min)</p> <p>“Wal-Mart” The high cost of low prices. (20 min version)</p>	
14	Apr. 24-28	Energy resources	<p>“The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and Collapse of the American Dream.” (78 min)</p> <p>“Powder River Country”—the consequences of gas development in Wyoming (34 min)</p>	
15	May 2	TBA	TBA	
	May 5		Final Exam 1:00 pm	

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Critical Thinking Papers

Nuts and Bolts: Papers should be short (3 pages or 750 words max.) that analyze and critically reflect on the concepts, ideas, and images presented in the weekly documentaries, drawing upon both personal insight and outside references. Figures, quotes, and ideas should be properly cited and referenced (see http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/practical_guide.shtml for referencing of books, journals, etc. and <http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/online.shtml> for referencing of internet resources). Assignments must be written professionally (grammar and spelling count!).

Getting Starting: Write a brief synopsis/summary of the documentary. Good summaries are challenging to write. Think of the summary as an “abstract”. An abstract in scientific research communicates the nature of a problem, how the problem was investigated, and what results were found as a result of the investigation. Similarly, a documentary presents a particular subject matter, uses various storytelling techniques to present one or more perspectives on the subject matter, and guides the viewer (either overtly or subtly) to some sort of conclusion about the subject. You should convey the most important summary ideas in a very limited space (spend no more than 250 words on your summary).

Critical thinking and reflection. Critical thinking is the use of cognitive skills or strategies that are purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed. Critical thinking is involved in problem solving, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions. Critical thinking is the basis of presenting sound and reasoned argument. Your initial summary will require that you systematically reflect on the contents of the documentary. The weekly documentaries are intended to engage both your mind (cognition) and heart (affect/emotion). Having a strong reaction (positive or negative) to the documentary is healthy. This means you were “tuned in”. But documentaries offer the filmmaker’s perspective. The documentaries are intended to inform but you should be skeptical about the veracity (truthfulness) of the information. There are at least three approaches to completing the critical thinking paper:

Approach 1—Expand the topic. Provide more comprehensive information about the topic covered in the documentary. Documentaries only provide a limited amount of information. The documentaries provide a starting point for you to dig deeper into the topic. For example, what is the WTO? What is the magnitude of the farmed animal trade? What is the current state of old-growth forests in N. America? Use library and internet resources to research the topic in greater depth.

Approach 2—Extend the topic through analogy. An analogy is a logical inference based on the assumption that if two things are known to be alike in certain ways, they must be alike in other ways. You can extend the documentary topic to other contexts (e.g., how are free-trade agreements like/unlike the WTO? How are old-growth forest issues in N. America like or unlike global forestry issues? Do aboriginal peoples of Australia have similar relationships with animals like the “Buffalo people”?)

Approach 3—Analyze the film by reflecting on the film’s structure. Curran provides background about the elements of film structure (see Curran, Chapter 4). Using the language of shots, scenes, sequences, and acts, describe the film’s structure. She provides examples of this approach using two case studies found on pp. 51-60.

Approach 4—Do what you want. This approach is riskier. Impress me. Show insightfulness. Consult outside references. Demonstrate creative thinking.

Paper Assessment. The papers will be graded using 4 criteria—1) the quality of your synopsis and interpretation, 2) the quality of your argument(s) and reasoning, 3) the quality of evidence presented in support of your argument(s) including references, and 4) grammar, style, and general presentation.

Don’t be afraid to ask questions!!!!