

**School of Undergraduate Studies
Antioch University
Los Angeles**

Documentary Film & The American Psyche

PSY 3920B

Winter 2026, 4 Credits

Wednesdays 4-6:50pm

This class will meet synchronously via Zoom. The class Zoom link will be posted on this course's Brightspace/Welcome page and emailed to students.

Charley Lang, M.A., LMFT

Office hours: Tues/Wed by appointment via email

clang1@antioch.edu

Students are encouraged to turn first to the course instructor with any concerns. If unresolved, please contact the program chair (MeHee Hyun, mhyun@antioch.edu).

Course Description:

This course will explore the psychology of documentary filmmaking and resulting impacts on individuals, communities and the culture at large, through the study of numerous particular films. Students will investigate various narrative forms of documentary film (poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative) and critically analyze the ways in which these forms enhance (and/or detract from) the impact of related issues, including media, civil rights, celebrity, political activism, and various mental health issues. An interactive class format will be utilized including critique of all assigned readings, weekly film screenings, guest artist Q&As, large and small group discussion, and self-reflective written assignments, along with a final project, either research paper or short film, submitted by each student.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Repeat Policy: Students who have earned credit for this course may not repeat the course for credit.

Program Learning Objectives

- Engage in critical inquiry that employs relevant sources and methods.
- Consider diverse perspectives, including opposing points of view and marginalized voices.
- Connect learning with theories and experience through reflective practice.
- Analyze power, oppression, and resistance in pursuit of justice.

- Communicate effectively in oral, written, and visual forms.
- Examine issues in both local and global contexts.

Course Learning Objectives:

Students fulfilling the requisite objectives for this course will have illustrated the following:

- 1) Articulate an understanding of, as well as ability to distinguish between, the various narrative forms of documentary filmmaking studied in this course.
- 2) Analyze the psychological implications of documentary film based on its subject matter and its delivery through a particular narrative form of filmmaking.
- 3) Identify the impact of documentary film (related to narrative form, subject matter, filmmaker intention) on individuals, community, media, politics and/or other aspects of the American culture of the time.

All course readings are listed below and under Weekly modules on Brightspace.

Assignments

1) Weekly Online Postings: Each student will post a response (Brightspace/Discussions) to each week's assigned readings (100+ words), in advance of the subsequent class, identifying:

- a) responses to the reading for the following class: what in this material is familiar, surprising, thought-provoking and/or elicits apprehension, excitement, curiosity? and
- b) any residual thoughts/reactions you have to film(s) screened in last week's class.

Each student will also respond to at least one post from another student, with a comment, question or request for clarification. **All weekly postings are due by 7pm Monday** before our next class. Each missed posting counts as half a missed class, only one absence is permitted in order to receive credit for this course.

The final Brightspace posting, due the end of week 10, will identify the student's learning from this class and how, if at all, their viewing of documentary film has shifted through the experience of this course.

2) Midterm (5-6 pages, due week 6). The objective of the midterm paper is to identify four films screened to date (13 total) and their narrative style, then compare and contrast two of them focusing on your personal response.

Part 1: For each of the four films you choose:

- **Identify the narrative style(s)**
- **Provide evidence** from the film to support your identification.
- **Explain** how the narrative style helps convey the film's message.

Part 2: Choose two of these films and:

- **Compare and contrast the films** and how they affected you. Consider your psychological, emotional, and/or cultural responses.
- **Critique how the narrative styles** used in each film impacted your response.

3) Final Project (due week ten). Choice of two options:

Option 1: Create a 4-minute documentary film, details to be discussed in class.

- Submit a 2-page description of the filmmaking process, including the narrative style(s) of your film. All 4-minute films will be screened in our final class.

Option 2: 7-8 page paper based on one of the films listed below.

- Screen film with at least one other person, sharing highlight(s) of post-screening conversation.
- Identify one scene that was most impactful for you and why.
- Research the film's development (how, why, where, when it was made).
- Provide relevant information about the filmmaking process.
- Identify the film's narrative style(s) and your sense of a major theme.
- Critically consider the film's psychological impact on the culture of its time (film subjects, media, mental health, and any other relevant sources).
- Identify the film's overall effect on you as an observer.
- Include at least four outside sources along with additional reference page.

Thin Blue Line (1988)

Bowling For Columbine (2002)

Alone in the Wilderness (2017)

High School (1968)

Hearts and Minds (1974)

Man On Wire (2008)

Stopping the Steal (2024)

Finding Vivian Meier (2017)

Amy (2015)

Won't You Be My Neighbor? (2018)

Woodstock (1970)

The Work (2017)

The Bridge (2005)

Common Threads: Stories From the Quilt (1989)

Citizenfour (2014)

Crumb (1994)

Free Solo (2018)

Tower (2016)

An Inconvenient Truth (2006)

Listen To Me Marlon (2016)

Spellbound (2003)

Written Assignment Requirements

Written assignments are to be submitted in word doc format von Bright Space. All must be typed in proper APA format, which includes: 12-point standard font and double-spaced with standard margins; correct grammar, spelling and punctuation are expected of upper division college level work. Papers that do not meet collegiate-level writing standards or that do not appropriately address the assignment's prompt will be returned for revision. Failure to complete re-writes as assigned by the instructor will result in no credit for the course.

Week-to-Week Schedule - Films subject to change (DVF, Thin Blue Line, Marwencol, Rogers):

Week 1: Introductions, review of syllabus. Screenings: *Surfridge* (2020, 4), *Capturing Reality: The Art of Documentary* (2008, 30), *Live to Tell: The First Gay & Lesbian Prom in America* (1994, 24).

Week 2: The six styles of narrative documentary filmmaking. Translating personal passions into documentary film. Screenings: *What We Leave Behind* 2020 (4), *Eight Days a Week* 1997 (43), *Summer of Soul* (2021, 7), *Samsara* 2011 (21).

- 6 Types of Documentary Film (narrative styles)
- Top 10 Tips for Documentary Film Interviews
- Eight Days a Week Director Interview
- Online postings

Week 3: The observational and reflexive styles of filmmaking. Screening: *Capturing the Friedmans* 2003 (107).

- Interview with Andrew Jarecki
- His Father's Son: The Haunted Men of Capturing the Friedmans
- Online postings

Week 4: Participatory documentary filmmaking. Screening: *Grey Gardens* 1974 (95), *Portrait of Jason* 1967 (29), *Silent* 2022 (4).

- Directing the Truth: An Interview with Albert Maysles
- Albert Maysles on Grey Gardens
- Portrait of Jason and the Life of Movies
- Online postings

Week 5: The audience as observer. Screenings: *How to Survive a Plague* 2012 (109), *Andi's Story* 2022 (9).

- David France: Witness to a Plague
- Online postings

Week 6: Midterm paper due. Documentary film as historical record. Unmasking systems of oppression and the fight for civil rights in US history. Screening: **13th** 2016 (100).

- **Ava DuVernay's 13th Reframes American History**
- **Online postings**

Week 7: Television's history and the shaping of social and cultural discourse. Screening: **Wise Guy: David Chase** 2024 (74) az. **Old Girl in a Tutu** 2024 (9).

- **Sopranos 20 Years Later**
- **Sopranos episode 1 (pw: hbo)**
- **Online postings**

Week 8: Religion, social activism and challenging the patriarchy. Screening: **Rebel Hearts** 2021 (103) max, **I Want Heavy Things** 2021 (5). (Easy Riders Raging Bulls 2002 (113) youtube).

- **Rebel Hearts commentary**
- **Online postings**

Week 9: Screenings: **American Symphony** 2022 (104), **A Film Called Quack** 2020 (4).

- **Suleika**
- **Online postings**

Week 10: Screening of final project student films and submission of final papers.

Evaluation Criteria:

All readings for this class are posted on Brightspace. It is imperative that each week's assignments are read prior to the start of the class for which they are assigned. Student reactions, responses and questions to the assigned readings will jumpstart the collaborative conversations at the start of each of our class meetings.

Evaluation will also be based on the student's ability to synthesize the relationship between particular narrative forms of filmmaking studied and how these forms influence the subject matter at hand, along with the resulting impact on the student as observer.

Collaborative participation in all large and small group class discussions, along with thoughtful reflection, critical thinking and respectful curiosity regarding the experiences of others will also feature in the evaluation process.

As film screenings are an essential ingredient of this course, it is imperative that students arrive to class on time and remain present with videos 'on' throughout all screenings. Any exceptions to this protocol must be discussed in advance with the instructor.

Recommended Reading

- Aufderheide, P. (2007). *Documentary film: a very short introduction*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Bernard, S. C. (2010). *Documentary storytelling: creative non-fiction on screen*. Burlington, MA: Focal Press.
- Fadiman, D. (2008). *Producing with passion: making films that change the world*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.
- Kahana, J. (2016). *The documentary film reader*. London: Oxford University Press.
- McLane, B. (2012). *A new history of documentary film*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Page, J. H. (2013). *Documentary filmmaking: a contemporary field guide*. Oxford University Press.
- Quinn, J. (2013). *This much is true: 14 directors on documentary filmmaking*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Rollyson, C. (2006). *Documentary film: contexts and criticism*. Lincoln, NE: Carl Rollyson.

Attendance and Participation Policy:

Only one absence is permitted in order to receive credit for this course. In order to maintain academic integrity and uphold the quality of the learning community, undergraduate courses emphasize active participation. Students are expected to attend all class sessions, submit assignments by their due dates, and participate in online discussions as required in the syllabus. If a student anticipates absence for religious observance, work obligations, or if unavoidable circumstances arise, the student should contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss implications. Per university policy, excessive absences or lack of participation may result in No Credit awarded for the course. More details can be reviewed in [University Policy on Student Attendance](#).

Incomplete Policy:

An incomplete 'INC' status indicates that a student has not completed all course requirements in the expected timeframe, as established in the course syllabus. An instructor may award an incomplete at their discretion. Incompletes are issued only when the student's work to date in the course has been satisfactory, and a limited amount of work remains for the student to complete the course requirements. Incomplete deadlines are negotiated with the instructor and can be up until the end of the following term. If unfinished work is not submitted by this negotiated deadline and/or is not satisfactory, the student will receive a No Credit for the learning activity. Students should be aware that an Incomplete may negatively impact their [Satisfactory Academic Progress](#). More details can be found in [University Policy](#).

Extra Credit Policy:

No extra credit is available for this course.

Audio- or Video-recording of Classes:

Your instructor may identify times when recording a class session may have educational or academic value. In these cases, the recordings will be used and shared by your instructor in accordance with the [Guidelines for Lecture Capture and Audio/Video Recording](#). The Guidelines provide information about when it is necessary for faculty to obtain permission to use and/or share class recordings. Students will be asked to provide their verbal consent to have the sessions recorded. Faculty may not share or transfer the recordings to third parties outside the class without students' written consent. Students who receive copies of recorded classes may use the recordings for their own personal educational purposes only for the duration of the course. Students may not share or transfer the recordings to third parties outside the class under any circumstances.

Narrative Assessment & Letter Grade Equivalents:

Antioch policy provides that student work is evaluated on a credit/no credit basis. Instructors write a narrative assessment at term's end to document the nature, quality and means of documentation of your achievement of course learning objectives. These narrative assessments become a part of your permanent academic record. Narrative assessments reflect Antioch's philosophy and pedagogy that emphasize individualized student learning.

The University also recognizes that some students need letter grade information in order to be reimbursed for tuition by employers, to apply for some grants or scholarships, or for admission to certain graduate programs. With this in mind, in addition to these narrative descriptions of student learning, faculty assign letter grade equivalents for all undergraduate learning activities that are archived for use if students need them. This "grade equivalent" is an assessment of the entirety of your course participation and demonstrated learnings determined at the end of the term. These grade equivalents by default remain hidden unless the student requests to see them. Students may submit a form through the [Registrar's Office](#) requesting that the grade be made visible on the narrative evaluation. Whether or not a student chooses to request this, LGEs will be archived for future use if needed. (Grade equivalents never appear on the student's transcript.) Note that "grade point average (GPA) equivalents" can be calculated by the Registrar at any time. Please consult [Antioch University's policy on Grade Equivalency](#)

Letter Grade Equivalent	GPA Points	Description
A	4.0	Work overall is exemplary, highly creative, original, or significant; excellent understanding of key ideas, as demonstrated through explanations and applications supplied in written assignments, discussions, and other

		forums; work is theoretically sophisticated and displays mastery of course methods, techniques, and skills.
AB	3.5	Work accomplishes a level between the descriptions corresponding with A and B
B	3.0	Work overall is solid, comprehensive, and/or well written but does not stand out; student solidly fulfilled the course requirements and integrated the course material in an effective manner; demonstrates above average understanding of concepts.
BC	2.5	Work accomplishes a level between the descriptions corresponding with B and C
C	2.0	Work overall shows average but not outstanding comprehension of concepts; written work was adequate in content and writing style; student fulfilled course requirements, and integrated course material as required.
D	1.0	Work overall is written or executed at a below-average level; displays weak comprehension of concepts and theories.
F	0	Student has not submitted the required assignments, participated adequately in the course, or in other ways failed to meet the requirements for engagement in the course; displays no satisfactory comprehension of concepts and theories.

Technology and Communication Protocol:

All students must have access to computer technology including internet access to successfully complete their coursework. All students need to be able to access the Sakai class management/learning platform. Additionally, students are required to check their Antioch-assigned email accounts regularly (at least weekly) and are responsible for being aware of information posted as official class announcements and through their programs. To comply with students' record confidentiality and security requirements, official e-mail communication with Antioch, including e-mail between students and instructors, should originate from and be conducted within the Antioch University e-mail system.

Students who need technological assistance can contact the 24-hour HelpDesk (1-866-662-0056, <http://helpdesk.antioch.edu>) and those who need training can email the undergraduate librarian, Asa Wilder (awilder1@antioch.edu) for assistance.

Students in this class will use Zoom technology for synchronous meetings and the Sakai learning management system to upload their written assignments and find other class resources.

Library Services and Research Support:

The Antioch library is here to serve you throughout your academic career. To search the library catalog, use research databases, and find additional online resources, please visit the [AU Library web page](#). The Library also teaches workshops throughout the year that are designed to help you in your research. Students may make an appointment with a librarian for individual research help. Please contact the undergraduate librarian Asa Wilder (awilder1@antioch.edu)

or your campus librarian for assistance with research and for information literacy instruction. [Here is Asa's calendar link](#) to make an appointment.

Writing Support at Antioch University:

Much of your learning is writing-intensive, and as an undergraduate, you will write in a variety of genres, from critical reflections to more formal research papers. All students are encouraged to seek writing support offered by their home campus or the campus offering the courses in which they are enrolled. Each campus provides free one-on-one writing support to students that can be accessed through the [Writing Support webpage](#). Students are welcome to get support at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to polishing drafts. Students can schedule appointments but all centers also offer drop-in hours as well as [workshops](#) and resources for successful writing. All students also have access to the **[Virtual Writing Center \(VWC\)](#)**, which offers AU students high quality peer-based feedback on their writing within 48 hours. The VWC is both a submission site and resource center with electronic resources and videos on writing issues. Live conversations with peer e-tutors may also be arranged by emailing vwc@antioch.edu.

The AULA Teaching and Learning Center offers free writing and math support provided by professional writing and math specialists. Currently, all tutoring sessions are held via zoom or over the phone. Students can schedule an appointment [directly online](#) or by visiting the [TLC webpage](#). The webpage also provides links to upcoming [workshops](#) and [writing and math resources](#).

Reasonable Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

Antioch University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 2008, as amended. Students with disabilities may contact the Disability Support Services office to initiate the process and request accommodations that will enable them to have an equal opportunity to benefit from and participate in the institution's programs and services. Students are encouraged to do this as early in the term as possible, since reasonable accommodations are not retroactive. The Disability Support Services office is available to address questions regarding reasonable accommodations at any point in the term.

For more information or to contact your DSS Coordinator visit the [Disability Support Services page](#)

Review the [DSS policy](#) for more detailed information.

WellConnect Resource:

Antioch offers access to WellConnect, a service that supports students facing mental health, legal, and/or financial issues. WellConnect is a resource and referral program to assist with the daily challenges many students encounter. This program is free of charge and 100% confidential

to AU students located in the U.S.A. & its Territories. For more information, please call the WellConnect phone line 866-640-4777. They will help you in a confidential manner 24/7/365.

Antioch University Policies

Antioch University is committed to building a vibrant and inclusive educational environment that promotes learning and the free exchange of ideas. Our academic and learning communities are based upon the expectation that their members uphold the shared goal of academic excellence through honesty, integrity, and pride in one's own academic efforts and respectful treatment of the academic efforts of others.

All students are expected to comply with Antioch University policies, including the Title IX Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Policy and the Student Conduct Policy. To access academic, student, and other university policies [visit the university catalog](#). Students can also access policies related to student rights and responsibilities through the [Antioch Repository](#).

Student Conduct Policy:

As a community of learners, this institution is committed to a social justice perspective that encourages student agency and engagement. Respectful conduct is expected of students on the campus—and in the virtual learning environment—at all times, both in and outside of class. The standards for student conduct in this class are to be respectful to each other at all times, to focus constructive criticism toward statements and ideas, not the person, to listen to others attentively, and with an open, receiving mind, and to participate fully with the understanding that student participation is an essential component of the course learning experience.

Disruptive, disrespectful, or inappropriate behaviors may lead to removal from a class or learning activity, notations on your narrative evaluation, or other potential consequences in accordance with [Antioch's Student Conduct Policy](#). An ongoing pattern of concerning behavior (for example, in more than one course) may impact your ability to continue in this program.

Academic Integrity Statement:

At Antioch University we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility, and respect. Students are expected to represent themselves in an honest manner, presenting their academic work in a way that reflects their own capacities and efforts, presenting their identity honestly in all academic work, and seeking guidance from instructors on how to appropriately incorporate learning or evidence of that learning from one course to another. Academic integrity is also expected of students in all interactions with the university, including participation in courses and other formal educational activities, interactions and relationships between students and university personnel, as well as in the use of all university educational resources. Students are expected to uphold the tenets of academic integrity, and may not engage in conduct that is in violation of these tenets, which includes plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the representation of someone else's writing, graphics, research, or ideas as one's own. Paraphrasing an author's ideas or quoting even limited portions of the work of others without proper citation are considered plagiarism, as is cutting and pasting materials from the Internet into one's academic papers. Extreme forms of plagiarism include submitting a paper written by another person or from a commercial source, and/or any AI or software-generated paper. It also includes turning in a paper comprising selections from other sources without appropriate acknowledgement of those sources. Plagiarism is a violation of the principle of intellectual integrity and inquiry and, as such, is taken seriously when it occurs. Violations may subject you to academic and/or administrative sanctions. If there is any question about the nature of plagiarism, students are encouraged to meet with their advisors or course instructors for clarification or referral to resources. (See [University policy for more information.](#))

Sexual Harassment Policy:

The Undergraduate Studies Division is firmly committed to each student's dignity and to eliminating all forms of sex discrimination and harassment of students. No student should have her or his learning experience at AU contaminated by the experience of being treated as a sexual object by an instructor or any other employee. We strongly urge any student who believes that an Antioch employee has crossed the line to speak to your advisor, to the program chair, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, or the Director of Human Resources about your concerns.

Antioch University's policy "Title IX, Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Violence" provides definitions of prohibited and inappropriate behaviors, the process for reporting and investigating complaints, and the sanctions levied against those employees or students found to be in violation of these policies. This policy can be found in the [Antioch University Resource Archive](#). Additionally, please consult [Antioch University's policy on dual relationships](#).