Documentary can be distinguished from other forms of non-fiction writing, photography, audio production, or film via its two-tiered historical functions: to produce social or political change and/or to allow an audience to see and feel the world in new and unique ways. Although one could argue that stories in the local paper, instructional tapes, educational films, and family photographs taken on the disposable camera may serve the same function, the documentary can further be distinguished as a unique mode of communication by its depth of research or close relationship to/with the subject(s) and the amount of time spent in the field. Although these features are central to documentary work, there have also been negative characteristics attached to the documentary in public discourse. For example, one dominant misperception about documentary is that it must be dry and scientific. The term “documentary” may conjure up images of an animal’s eating habits or English aristocrats and their exquisite gardens. Although these subjects have been presented in documentaries, the documentary can be much more than this. It can feature engaging stories, interesting characters, intriguing dialogue, and even sound effects. When done well, a documentary is far more engaging than a traditional piece of journalistic reporting or a feature film.

Through practical application and the exploration of cultural reporting and documentary approaches to communication, we will consider questions that surround the interpretation of cultural experience. We will analyze written, audio, video and filmic approaches to documentary in an effort to understand better a significant form of storytelling. Course materials provide important models for cultural studies fieldwork that exemplify the ways in which people struggle to understand and explain the contradictions and instability of contemporary (and historical) cultural life in the United States. We will work from these models to become more skilled at producing our own critical and creative analyses of contemporary life.

There are three central objectives that will guide us through the course: (1) understanding the techniques people use to observe, (2) understanding the aesthetic and structural choices people make to explain what they do, and (3) understanding how challenges and problems continue to reemerge throughout history and the ways in which people attempt to make sense of those challenges and problems.

Required Materials

Jessica Abel and Ira Glass, _Radio: An Illustrated Guide_

David Pogue, _iMovie 3 & iDVD_

The remainder of the course readings are accessible via a password protected web site. You are required to print each day’s reading and bring the article with you to class.

Blank minidisks (74 minutes each) available at the Campus Store, Wal-Mart, Sam Goody, or online (minidisco.com usually has very good prices).

Blank video media: 2-3 60 minute Premium grade Sony mini-dv videotapes OR Sony digital 8 videotapes (this will depend on which departmental video camera your group uses for the video
The tapes can be purchased from the department and you must use Sony brand tapes with the departmental cameras.

Multiple blank CD-Rs and DVDs to store your projects during production and after production. (Note: It is highly recommended that you purchase a portable hard drive with a firewire connection. This will ensure that projects can be saved without having to separate files, will allow you to work at home and in the CCLI if you have a good computer at home, and will be a valuable asset if you continue to work on media projects in future classes or jobs. We can make recommendations about size and brands if you are interested.)

**Course Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of the Place essay (4-6 pages)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Project (5-7 minutes)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Project (5 minutes)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are required to complete the reading assignments before you attend class. This will lead to more fruitful discussion.

**Course Policies**

**Attendance and Active Participation** are expected and required. Excessive absences will result in a lower final grade.

**Promptness** is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class then your grade will be negatively affected.

All assignments are due on assigned days. There will be NO MAKE UPS. Documented illness or documented emergencies are the only exception to this policy. Change in work schedules, personal celebrations (e.g., birthdays), transportation problems, etc. are NOT considered to be legitimate reasons for missing assignment deadlines or class meetings. If you miss a quiz and have documentation for your absence then you will take the quiz on the next date you attend class. (Note: If you will be missing a class because of a religious holiday, let me know in writing at least two weeks before the holiday so we can make arrangements to make up missed work.)

If you have a cellular phone, turn it off. If you have a pager, set it to vibrate or turn it off.

**Assignments**

**Spirit of the Place essay** should be 4-6 double-spaced pages in length. This assignment emphasizes building an interpretation from looking and listening. Your goal is to document a public place. The place might be a tourist attraction, a church, a store, the airport, a restaurant, etc., but it should be a symbolic site for a particular style of life. You need to spend time at the site listening, looking, and talking to people. Observe the varied ways the people act in the space, the physical characteristics of the place, and the ways in which people invest themselves in the place. Pay attention to mannerisms, clothing, and other telling details. Make notes or record snippets of conversation to use as dialogue. (You might also consider taking photographs to help you see the place.) Write an essay about the spirit of the place as reflected in the ways people interact in it. (Note: Our first unit on literary journalism will provide techniques to help you think about ways to look and listen. You might also treat the reading material as a model for how to write about the spirit of a place. With that said, substance is more important than style. If you are more comfortable writing a more academic treatment then you should choose that route.) This project is **due February 5.**
Research process:

1. Select a site
2. Spend time at that site listening to conversations; talking to people; exploring the physical characteristics of the site; and trying to understand why the site is important for people, how people use the place, and how people make meaning of the space.
3. Write a paper that examines the importance of the space. The information you gather during your time at that site will help you flesh out the paper.

Sites that are off limits for this assignment: your house, your friend’s house, a dorm room.

Pop quizzes will be short answer and will allow me to gauge how well you understand the arguments made in the readings. Unlike your papers and class discussion, where I am interested in your opinions about the issues and the strength of the writer’s argument(s), the quizzes are designed for you to state the author’s argument only. In other words, I am not striving to understand what you think about the issues; rather, I am interested in how well you understand the construction of the author’s argument. If we do not understand what s/he’s saying then our critique of her/his work will not be properly grounded.

The Audio Project will be 5-7 minutes in length. You can work in groups of two or three or on your own. We will discuss this project when we begin the unit on audio.

The Video Project will be 5 minutes in length. You are encouraged to work in groups of three. We will discuss this project when we begin the unit on film.

Written Assignment Requirements
All papers should be typed, double spaced, and use a consistent style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.). Use one-inch margins and 12-point font. Further details on written assignments can be found in a syllabus addendum on writing academic papers.

Plagiarism becomes tempting when students feel pressured. Remember, when in doubt quote. If you are quoting somebody directly then you need to list the information within quotation marks and cite a page number. If you are paraphrasing then you need to cite the person and a page number but do not need to list the information within quotation marks. Never copy and paste entire documents into your paper and do not quote others to the point where your ideas become indistinguishable from your source’s ideas. There is no reason to plagiarize. Plagiarized papers will be sent to the Dean of Student Affairs.

Grade Scale
90-100 A 78-79 BC 60-67 D
88-89 AB 70-77 C 60-59 F
80-87 B 68-69 CD
## Tentative Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>READING ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 1/13 | Course Introduction  
Read the following for the Spirit of the Place Essay:  
Susan Orlean, “The Congo Sound”  
Anastasia Rubis, “Cheers, With Coffee”  
Adam Green, “Mystery Mobile” |

### DOING DOCUMENTARY WORK: AN OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>READING ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 1/15 | Robert Coles, “Introduction”  
In Class Screening/Listening:  
Stefan Nadleman, *Terminal Bar*  
Scott Carrier, “Running After Antelope” |
| 1/20 | Robert Coles, “The Work” |

### LITERARY JOURNALISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
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</table>
| 1/22 | Tom Wolfe, “The Feature Game”  
1/27  | Tom Wolfe, “Like a Novel” & “Seizing the Power” |
| 1/29 | Required: Gay Talese, “Of Things Unnoticed”  
Recommended: Steve Kurutz, “Not Quite Nudes Descending a Staircase”  
2/3  | Joan Didion, “Getting the Vegas Willies”  
David Eggers, “Hitchhiker’s Cuba”  
**Spirit of the Place Essay Due**  
2/5  | Winter Carnival |

### AUDIO DOCUMENTARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
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</table>
| 2/10 | Jessica Abel and Ira Glass, *Radio: An Illustrated Guide*  
2/12 | Hildegard Westerkamp, “Soundwalking”  
2/17 | Excerpts from *Sound Reporting*  
Meet in CCLI to work on sound editing  
2/19 | *Nieman Reports* excerpts from The Documentary and Journalism (pp. 6-21)  
2/24 | Robin White, “Getting Good Ambient Sound”  
Robin White, “How to Mic a Field Interview”  
Chris Woolf, “Things That Go Wump”  
2/26 | Radio Diaries, *Teen Reporter Handbook*  
3/2-3/4 | **Spring Break**  
3/9  | David Smith, “Special Sonic Effects for the Theater”  
3/11 | Production Day  
3/16 | **Audio Presentations** |
Audio Presentations

DOCUMENTARY FILM AND VIDEO

3/23-4/29

5/4  Film Screening

Attendance/class participation  10%  ____ (pts.) X .10 = ______
Spirit of the Place Essay  15%  ____ (pts.) X .15 = ______
Audio Project  25%  ____ (pts.) X .25 = ______
Video Project  25%  ____ (pts.) X .25 = ______
Quizzes  25%  ____ (pts.) X .25 = ______

Final Grade= ______________