

Module code: MOD000336	Version: 3 Date Amended: 20/Jan/2025
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1. Module Title
Documentary Film Theory

2a. Module Leader
Jules O'Dwyer

2b. School
Cambridge School of the Creative Industries

2c. Faculty
Faculty of Arts, Humanities, Education and Social Sciences

3a. Level
5

3b. Module Type
Standard (fine graded)

4a. Credits
15

4b. Study Hours
150

5. Restrictions			
Type	Module Code	Module Name	Condition
Pre-requisites:	None		
Co-requisites:	None		
Exclusions:	None		
Courses to which this module is restricted:	None		

LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

6a. Module Description

The module introduces you to many of the critical discussions and debates surrounding the historical, technological, aesthetic and socio-political developments of the documentary approach to film and video-making. As well as paying full regard to the key trends and film-makers to have contributed to the history of this important genre, the module responds to the renewed public interest in documentary film and its crossover into the mainstream with the most up to date commercial and critical hits.

You will focus on the nature, specificity and evolution of the documentary form, and its relationship to cinematic realism. There is an address to the historical and theoretical contexts of the study of documentary film, as well as an engagement with topical debates regarding the relationship between reality and representation, documentary ethics, and the role of cross-cultural documentary and ethnographic film.

You will discuss the different modes of address in documentary film-making, the role of the documentary film-maker, and the relationship between film-maker and subject(s). Current and future modes of distribution and exhibition for the documentary film are explored, including an address to specialist festivals devoted to documentaries. Throughout the module there are opportunities for critical analysis of key film texts.

6b. Outline Content

- Documentary history and development
- Key theoretical approaches, focusing on the relationship between reality and representation in documentary
- Modes of address and style
- Ethics and representation, focusing on an address to the 'claim of truth' that documentaries often put forward
- Cross-cultural documentary-making and ethnographic films
- Authorship - subjective film-making contrasted with objective-reporting; debates surrounding direct cinema and cinema vérité
- Trends - the rise of 'cinema' documentaries in the face of TV docusoap/docudrama
- Distribution, exhibition and festivals

6c. Key Texts/Literature

The reading list to support this module is available at: <https://readinglists.aru.ac.uk/>

6d. Specialist Learning Resources

Seminar rooms with VCR and DVD screening facilities.

7. Learning Outcomes (threshold standards)		
No.	Type	On successful completion of this module the student will be expected to be able to:
1	Knowledge and Understanding	Demonstrate, through expository essay writing, an understanding of a range of key theoretical approaches to the study of documentary film.
2	Intellectual, practical, affective and transferrable skills	Explore and critically evaluate a range of debates central to the development of documentary film theory.
3	Intellectual, practical, affective and transferrable skills	Illustrate awareness of the relationship between the intellectual issues and debates surrounding documentary film-making and the production of documentary film.
4	Intellectual, practical, affective and transferrable skills	Practice and develop reflexive study, research and writing skills and competence in the production of critical essays and theoretical and filmic analysis.

8a. Module Occurrence to which this MDF Refers				
Year	Occurrence	Period	Location	Mode of Delivery
2026/7	ZZF	Template For Face To Face Learning Delivery		Face to Face

8b. Learning Activities for the above Module Occurrence			
Learning Activities	Hours	Learning Outcomes	Details of Duration, frequency and other comments
Lectures	12	1-4	2hr session per week combining lecture and seminar/workshop.
Other teacher managed learning	12	1-4	2hr session per week combining lecture and seminar/workshop.
Student managed learning	126	1-4	Hours to include independent research and viewing.
TOTAL:	150		

9. Assessment for the above Module Occurrence					
Assessment No.	Assessment Method	Learning Outcomes	Weighting (%)	Fine Grade or Pass/Fail	Qualifying Mark (%)
010	Coursework	1-4	70 (%)	Fine Grade	30 (%)
Final essay 2000 words					
Assessment No.	Assessment Method	Learning Outcomes	Weighting (%)	Fine Grade or Pass/Fail	Qualifying Mark (%)
011	Coursework	1-4	30 (%)	Fine Grade	30 (%)
Midterm Assignment 1000 words					

In order to pass this module, students are required to achieve an overall mark of 40% (for modules at levels 3, 4, 5 and 6) or 50% (for modules at level 7*).

In addition, students are required to:

- (a) achieve the qualifying mark for each element of fine graded assessment as specified above
- (b) pass any pass/fail elements

[* the pass mark of 50% applies for all module occurrences from the academic year 2024/25 – see Section 3a of this MDF to check the level of the module and Section 8a of this MDF to check the academic year]