This is Spinal Tap
Waiting for Guffman
Woody Allen’s Zelig
and more...

The Mockumentary Film

Sample Syllabus
Porter 80J

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The documentary film has been a staple of film studies curriculum for decades. Its evolving form has generated interesting conversations about mediation and subjectivity inherent in all cinematic reflections of history—no matter how transparent a film claims to be. The mockumentary film grows out of the documentary tradition, often satirizing its formal conventions. Instead of pretending to capture reality, the mockumentary blatantly distorts in an effort to comment on the historical world, but also to critique attempts to capture “reality” in a singular, essential way. The mockumentary consequently provides the film viewer with a unique yet parallel terrain in which to explore the nature of documentary film and its problematic claims of factual representation.

In this course, class participants will come to understand these issues by viewing mockumentaries, as well as clips of documentary film correlates. Theoretical readings will center on movements in documentary film, especially concerning issues of representation and subjectivity. The class will get at the range of styles and approaches in documentary (e.g. cinema verité, the ethnographic film, the personal narrative) in part by looking at their mockumentary equivalents. Supplementary readings will address the context and content of the mockumentary films screened.
In addition to regular attendance/participation and timely preparation of assigned readings, class participants will take two tests on the primary text *Faking It*, the articles in the course reader, and the films screened. Participants will also complete a final project: a mockumentary video or a script for a mockumentary along with an artist’s statement describing the project’s intentions/goals/thematic concerns.

**Grades**

Course requirements include regular attendance and focused participation in all components of the class. Participatory activities include speaking in class discussion or in small group breakout sessions, leading discussions on readings, and taking notes on the films. I expect you to come to class on time. Although I would like you to come to all 10 class meetings, I understand that illness, emergencies, etc. may preclude perfect attendance. You should know, however, that attendance at 8 of 10 full classes is required to earn credit. This policy recognizes that much of the substance of the course occurs in our class discussions. There will be no make-up tests in this class.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- 20% attendance/participation
- 25% first test
- 30% second test
- 25% mockumentary project

**Workload**: during the academic year, a ten-week 5-unit course requires approximately 10-15 hours/week of work, including time spent in the classroom. When compressed into a five-week summer school session, a five-unit class should require double that amount of time. This class meets for an average of 7 hours/week and carries regular reading assignments; in my estimation, the work for the class is likely to fall near the lower boundary of hours per week for most students.

**Film Texts** (see Schedule)

**Readings:**

*Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality*  
by Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight

Course *Reader*  

*The book and reader are available at the Bay Tree Bookstore on campus.*
Sample Schedule (Subject to Revision)
The Mockumentary Film
Porter 80J, Summer 2013
TuTh 6-9:30 PM
Ten Classes: July 30-August 29

Tuesday July 30 Stretching the Contemporary Documentary
Illustrations of documentary film modes (clips)
Halving the Bones (1:10, Ruth Ozeki Lounsbury) VT5615
Buy text(s) ASAP (reading assignment due Thursday).

Thursday August 1 Mockumenting the Creative Process, Part I: Staged Theatrics
Prepare Faking It pp. 1-40, 125-7
Prepare Reader 1, 9-25, 37-43, 69-72
Waiting for Guffman (1:24, Christopher Guest) DVD657
http://members.tripod.com/~cityofblaine/guffman.html
Documentary/fiction film correlates: Looking for Richard VID779,
Running Fence DVD 2295 v.1,The Music Man DVD643, All That Jazz VID237

Tuesday August 6 Mockumenting the Creative Process, Part II: Faux Rockumentary
Prepare Faking It pp. 42-99, 119-125
Prepare Reader pp. 3-7, 45-68
Final project exercise due: write a brief treatment (i.e. a 350-500 word plot summary) for
an original mockumentary film, making clear the documentary “codes and conventions”
you will employ to distinguish it from a fiction film.
This is Spinal Tap (1:22, Rob Reiner) DVD967
http://www.spinaltapfan.com/
Documentary film correlates: Don’t Look Back DVD748, Gimme Shelter DVD1861, The Last
Waltz DVD1581.

Thursday August 8 More Mockumentary/Ersatz Newsreel
Prepare Faking It pp. 100-114, 131-4
Prepare Reader pp. 27-30, 73-90
Zelig (1:19, Woody Allen) VID 47
Mockumentary/fiction film correlates: Hard Core Logo DVD1619, Fear of a Black Hat, Take
the Money and Run DVD3427, Husbands and Wives VT3159

Tuesday August 13 Mockumenting the Cinematic Process, Part I: Invented Ethnography
Prepare Reader pp. 31-5, 91-2, 139-54 (“Intro.” and “Mockumentary Discourse”)
Faking It pp. 115-19, 144-150
TEST #1 on Readings/Films
Forgotten Silver (:52, Peter Jackson) DVD1075
Babakiueria (:28, Don Featherstone) VT5994
Documentary film correlate: Cliff Mummies of the Andes VT9400, VT9391
Thursday August 15 Mockumenting the Cinematic Process, Part II: Verité Lies
**Prepare Reader pp. 97-122**
Final project exercise due: develop an annotated storyboard consisting of 7-15 images (with captions) for an original mockumentary film. Crude drawings/stick figures are acceptable. **The point is to conceptualize a story as a series of visual images.**
Real Life (1:39, Albert Brooks) VT 2817
Documentary film correlate: *An American Family* (Craig Gilbert, 1973)

Tuesday August 20 Political Mockuments I
**Final project: detailed script treatment or video shooting script (see assignment).**
**BRING 3 COPIES**
Bob Roberts (1:41, Tim Robbins) VID 575
No Lies (:16, Mitchell Block) VT9884
Documentary/mockumentary correlates: Man with a Plan, War Room DVD5789, Don’t Look Back DVD748

Thursday August 22 Political Mockuments II (Hybrid Mocks/Fiction Films/Docudrama)
**Prepare Reader pp. 127-30, Faking It pp. 140-3**
A Day Without A Mexican (the short, :30, Arau/Arizmendi) VT 5920
Watermelon Woman (1:19, Cheryl Dunye) DVD1458
Hybrid mockumentary/fiction film correlate: Special Bulletin VT5844

Tuesday August 27 Edges of the Mockumentary
**Finish Faking It pp. 160-6, 181-9**
**Prepare Reader pp. 131-8**
**TEST #2 on Readings/Films**
Final projects: readings or performances of script excerpts (for those writing scripts as their final projects)
David Holzman’s Diary (1:14, Jim McBride) VT3373/VID 1138
Coming Apart (excerpts, Milton Moses Ginzberg) DVD777
Documentary/mockumentary correlate: Sherman’s March (Ross McElwee) VT1824

Thursday August 29 Recursive Doc/Mock
Final projects: screening of your mockumentary DVDs
**Turn in final projects: your Artist’s Statement (as detailed in the assignment!) and either a DVD copy or your final script (for those writing scripts as their final projects).**