

ENG 199 – “True Fictions”
MW: 12-1:50
Office Hours MW: 2-4

Brendan O’Kelly
203 CHA
Office 519 PLC

Course Description: Ever since *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) was marketed as “found footage” documenting the last few days of missing—and presumably dead—film students, the horror genre has been dominated by an endless barrage of films pretending to be discovered footage of actual events. These films are so popular that the “found footage” style now appears in a wide range of genres, from cop movies to science-fiction and even romantic comedies. Why are people today so obsessed with fiction that pretends to be real? While the “found footage” trend is now at the height of its popularity, fiction posing as truth is nothing new. This course will trace the development of such fiction, whether written or filmed, from its prominence in 19th century prose to documentary-styled novels, films, and radio programs that span the 20th century. We will conclude with an extended examination of the predominance of “found footage” films in the new millennium that arguably parallel the rise of reality television, YouTube, and the camera phone.

Course Objectives: This course will help you hone your critical analytical and writing skills in relation to literature and film, with an emphasis on close reading both written texts and visual media. You will reflect on how and why we decide on what constitutes reality and, further, how such decisions often result from literary and filmic techniques. In addition, you will improve your ability to think critically about all the forms of media that you encounter in your daily life. You will also participate in and lead class discussion before selecting your own found footage film to present on in the course’s final section. These skills will greatly enhance your success in subsequent college classes.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation:	25%
Leading Class Discussion:	10%
Photography Report:	5%
Analysis Essays:	30%
Found Footage Presentation:	10%
Found Footage Final Essay:	25%

Coursework and Grading

Attendance: I take attendance every class. You are allowed two absences without penalty. Each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade from your final grade (i.e. A to an A-, A- to B+) except in the instance of a documented medical or family emergency. **On a fifth unexcused absence you will automatically fail the course.** If you miss a class, obtain notes from a classmate and review them in detail before contacting me with any specific questions about those notes or the text.

Participation 25% of overall grade: Participation is mandatory. Productive, regular participation in class discussion will benefit your overall grade for the course. You must show respect for the ideas and opinions of other students. Disrespectful or disruptive classroom conduct will be penalized.

Reading and Viewing: Complete all reading assignments before class and bring the assigned reading with you. I strongly encourage you to mark important passages and take notes in your book to prepare for discussion and writing assignments. **Always bring the assigned reading to class.** View assigned films before class. I will provide information for online viewing on Canvas. Films may require online rental.

Required Texts:

Truman Capote, <i>In Cold Blood</i> (1966)	Vintage International: 9780679745587
H.G. Wells, <i>The War of the Worlds</i> (1898)	Signet Classics: 9780451530653

All other assigned reading will be available on Canvas.

Leading Class Discussion: 10% of overall grade: You are each required to bring in a series of questions to lead discussion in class once during the quarter. Check with the other student leading discussion on the same day beforehand to ensure that your questions don't overlap. These questions should address the reading for that day's class and focus on the specifics of the assigned reading or film. That said, any aspect of the readings or films that you find interesting or confusing provides an opportunity for discussion. Your assigned day is your chance to choose the topic of discussion and direct the course of the class. I will pass around a signup sheet on and post it on Canvas. You are responsible for remembering what day you will lead discussion. Submit your questions on Canvas before class, or physically hand them in to me after. A large portion of your participation grade will reflect how well and how often you engage with the discussion questions of other students. **I will model effective discussion questions during the first week of class and provide examples on Canvas.**

Photography Report: 5% of overall grade. We will visit the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art during week 4 to examine some photographs in relation to the essays we read by Bazin and Sontag. You will choose one photograph and write a one page essay on how you think it represents and/or distorts reality. I'll provide more specific suggestions when we discuss Bazin and Sontag.

Analysis Essays: 30% of overall grade. You will write two analysis essays of three pages. I will hand out prompts and guidelines at least two weeks prior to the due date, and we will discuss writing mechanics and work on thesis statements in class. Intro paragraphs are due one week before each essay, and I will provide feedback on these to help direct the progression of your essays.

Find Your Own Found Footage Presentation (10% of overall grade) and Paper (20% of overall grade): For the last week of class, you will choose a found footage genre film and give a 10-15 minutes presentation on it to the class. Your presentation should focus on how the film is representative of the found footage genre and how it resembles or differs from the films and novels we've discussed in class. I will provide a list of films, but with approval, you may select a found footage film that isn't on the list.

In addition, you will write a 3-4 page analysis essay on the film that will be due during finals week. In this essay you will examine how the found footage form of the film relates to its content. I will provide guidelines at least three weeks prior to the due date. You may want to consider how the genre has grown beyond the horror standard set by *The Blair Witch Project* to include police dramas, such as *End of Watch*, space exploration, such as *Europa Report*, and anything else you discover.

Writing Guidelines: Papers must be double spaced and in 12 point standard font with one inch margins and minimal, single spaced headers (i.e. name, date, course title or number). As the English department's learning objectives state, essays must be focused and in clear, grammatically correct prose. Proofread your essays several times before submission. Citations should follow MLA format. Submit all writing assignments to Canvas in either DOC or PDF formats. Canvas does not process Pages or ODT files. It is your responsibility to ensure that your essay has been uploaded correctly before the deadline. If you submit an essay in an incorrect format, you will not receive comments on it. *Late papers will be marked down one-third of a letter grade per day, including weekends (E.g., from A to A-, B+ to B, etc.). I will not accept late final papers.*

Academic Integrity:

All work must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Handbook. Do not turn in work prepared for other classes. Document all sources consulted, including websites and other Internet content. Plagiarism will result in failure for the course and additional sanctions as determined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards:

<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards.aspx>

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

In compliance with UO policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu> to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Recommended Study Habits and University Resources:

University accreditation standards require at least 2 hours of work outside of class for each credit earned. This means that you are expected to dedicate ~8 hours/week of *outside of class* work. This will usually mean reading the assigned texts, but will also include time spent completing assignments, writing papers, and working on larger projects.

Numerous campus resources are available which you should avail yourself of if you desire assistance with academic or extra-academic issues. For a full list, please see the Canvas document “University Resources”; I will also discuss relevant resources throughout the quarter.

The English Department’s assessment procedure is built around six desired learning outcomes:

- 1) read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
- 2) draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
- 3) perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
- 4) write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
- 5) employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
- 6) employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay’s thesis.

WARNING: Readings and viewings may contain explicit depictions of sex, violence, adult themes, coarse language, and material that some might find offensive. If you think that this might be a problem for you, please come talk to me about whether we can find a solution, or if this is the best class for you.

Course Schedule (additional critical readings may be added to the syllabus on Canvas):**Week 1: Found Fiction**

- 1/4: Introduction
- 1/6: Edgar Allan Poe: “MS. Found in a Bottle” (1833)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman: “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)
Background information on the epistolary novel: excerpt from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897)

Week 2 and 3: Fictional History and News

- 1/11: H.G. Wells: *The War of the Worlds* (1898)
- 1/13: Wells: *The War of the Worlds*
- 1/18: No class, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- 1/20: Finish Wells, *The War of the World* **Intro paragraph for Analysis Essay 1 Due**
Orson Welles: *The War of the Worlds* (radio drama, 1938)
Watch in class: “News on the March” clip from Welles’ *Citizen Kane* (1941)

Week 4: Documentary Film Noir

- 1/25: Anthony Mann and Alfred L. Werker: *He Walked By Night* (1948)
André Bazin: “The Ontology of the Photographic Image

Selections from Susan Sontag: *On Photography*
Borde and Chaumeton: "Towards a Definition of Film Noir"
1/27: **Photography Analysis at JSMA** **Analysis Essay 1 Due**

Week 5 and 6: Docufiction

2/1: Truman Capote: *In Cold Blood* (1966) **Photography Report Due**
2/3: Capote: *In Cold Blood*
2/8: Capote: *In Cold Blood*
2/10: Capote: *In Cold Blood* **Intro Paragraph of Analysis Essay 2 Due**

Week 7: Pseudodocumentary

2/15: Peter Watkins: *The War Game* (1965) **Analysis Essay 2 due beginning of week 7**
2/17: Watkins: *Punishment Park* (1971)
Additional reading on Watkins and Pseudodocumentary on Canvas.

Week 8: The Found Footage Horror Film

2/22: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez: *The Blair Witch Project* (1999)
Marketing materials for *Blair Witch* including original website and "Heather's Journal"
Additional reading on found footage and *Blair Witch* phenomenon on Canvas.
2:24: Myrick and Sánchez: *The Blair Witch Project* **Signup for Found Footage Presentation**

Week 9: History, "Immersionist" Journalism, and Found Footage Horror

2/29: Ti West: *The Sacrament* (2014)
Excerpts from *The Jonestown Death Tape (FBI No. Q 042) (November 18, 1978)*
3/2: View one *Vice* documentary of your choice for comparison with *The Sacrament*:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/vice> Or the *Vice* series on HBO Go or HBO Now.
Additional reading on Canvas.

Week 10: Find Your Own Found Footage

3/7: Student presentations on a contemporary found footage film of your choice.
3/9: Presentations Continue

Examples (among countless) include:

David Ayers: *End of Watch* (2012)
Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza: *REC* (2007) and sequels
Neil Blomkamp: *District 9* (2009)
Belvaux, Bonzel, and Poelvoorde: *Man Bites Dog* (1993)
Sebastián Cordero: *Europa Report* (2013)
Ruggero Deodato: *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980)
John Erick Dowdle: *Quarantine* (2008)
Levan Gabriadze: *Unfriended* (2015)
Barry Levinson: *The Bay* (2012)
Olatunde Osunsanmi: *The Fourth Kind* (2009)
André Øvredal: *Trollhunter* (2010)
Oren Peli: *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and sequels
Zak Penn: *Incident at Loch Ness* (2004)
Matt Reeves: *Cloverfield* (2008)
Adam Robitel: *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (2014)
George A. Romero: *Diary of the Dead* (2008)
Daniel Stamm: *The Last Exorcism* (2010)
West, Swanberg, et al. *V/H/S* (2012) or *V/H/S 2* (2013)