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ENG 2001-001: Creative Writing, Creative Non-Fiction

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ENGLISH 2001: CREATIVE WRITING, CREATIVE NON-FICTION
SPRING 2015

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and W 12-1, 3:15-4:15, 5:45-6:45
and by appointment.

Course Information:
MW: 4:30-5:45
Room: CH 3150
Section 001
3 Credit Hours

“One of the ploys of the great personal essayists
is to take a seemingly trivial or everyday subject
and then bring interest to it.”
—Philip Lopate

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- **Tell it Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction* by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola
- **In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction* edited by Lee Gutkind
- **Brevity*, an online literary journal: <http://brevitymag.com>
- *Several handouts from D2L that you must print and bring to class on assigned dates. I suggest a binder to collect and contain them.
- *A writer's notebook that you bring to class each day for our in-class writing exercises and our assigned writing exercises.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this introductory-level course, students will read and write three of the main types of creative non-fiction: the personal essay, the lyric essay, and the digital/video essay. Creative non-fiction blends literary art (fiction and poetry) with the real (facts and research), and uses many literary devices such as setting, voice, image, and character development. Since part of the writing process is the revision process, workshop will play a fundamental role in our course. The class will spend half its time workshopping student essays and half its time analyzing published essays.

COURSE OBJECTIVES (AS DESCRIBED IN THE COURSE PROPOSAL)

- a.** Students will develop skills of craft analysis by discussing, reading and writing creative nonfiction.
- b.** Students will produce and revise original creative writing in the nonfiction genre.
- c.** Students will learn to read, discuss, and identify their creative work in the context of a tradition in creative nonfiction.
- d.** Students will hone their ability to critique creative

nonfiction in a creative writing workshop. **e.** Students will participate effectively in a reading of their creative nonfiction produced for this course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Three essays will be submitted to the class for workshop over the course of the semester. These essays must be typed, use standard one-inch margins and 12-point font. A revised essay will be submitted for the final exam.

A writer's notebook is key to the writing process and a requirement for this course. All of the writing exercises will stretch your creativity and help you practice craft elements that can be used for later essays. We will also write in class together, so always bring the notebook to class. Most writers I know carry a notebook with them at all times to record images, bits of dialogue, essay ideas, etc., so this is a good habit to acquire. I encourage all of you to try to write at least ten minutes a day in this notebook since a writer is simply one who writes often. I will collect these notebooks twice during the semester and grade based on completed exercises and regular entries.

Reading and writing assignments will be our way to learn about the craft of writing. In order for the class to be both challenging and organic, I will assign many of our readings and writing assignments on a weekly basis. So, check in with your D2L email regularly and be aware that it is your responsibility to keep up with the assignments not only listed in the syllabus but on D2L as well.

To ensure careful and comprehensive reading, I will often give **reading quizzes** over the assigned work. Think of the assigned reading as an opportunity to find models for your own work and to engage with the literary community outside of this classroom.

Finding a community is important for writers, partly because the work itself is often done in isolation. Therefore, **participation in three literary events** is a central part of this class. The three literary events are Lions in Winter literary festival, the English Studies Conference, and one reading. For each event, you will also submit a **response** the first class day after you attend. Use the response as a way to practice your creative non-fiction skills. Set the scene and quickly summarize what occurred. For most of the response, focus on what was significant to you. Be sure to include vivid details, dialogue, and one dramatized scene. Word count: 250-350 words.

Workshops will encompass half of the in-class work that we will do. We will determine ahead of time who goes when, rotating the class so that the same people don't have to go first or last every time, for example. For each workshop, you are required to write editing and revision suggestions on that essay. If you are being workshoped, you will need to bring copies for every person in the class. No emailed workshop essays will be allowed. Please see the format requirements under "three essays."

We will discuss proper workshop etiquette in class, but the general guideline is to braid together honesty, specificity, and kindness since one without the others will not serve the writer. Also keep in mind that essays for workshops should have undergone at least two to

three drafts before bringing them to us for suggestions. Not everything you write will be wonderful and not everything you write will be horrible. These are the extremes. What is more likely is that you will write essays that are somewhere in between—and we will help each other move the essays in the direction the essay wants to be moved.

Our required craft analysis will help us to gain a better understanding of contemporary literary journals. Everyone will explore *Brevity* magazine's website (<http://brevitymag.com>) to find one short-short piece (under 750 words) that exemplifies strong voice. Write a one-page response that points out the craft elements that made for this voice. Then, do a direct emulation (also under 750 words) of this piece. Post both the craft analysis and your imitation on D2L as well as printing out a copy for me.

A final revised essay of four to seven pages will be submitted for the **final exam**. The majority of the final essay's grade stems from the seriousness of revision. Be sure to include both your final draft and the version that I handed back to you with my comments. Please note: it is your responsibility to keep your work throughout the semester.

In addition to the above material, also include a one-to-two page critical introduction on what you wanted to revise, why, and how you went about the process with this essay. Also, mention at least three specific examples from other essays that we read that influenced your decisions. For example, did you decide that you wanted to include research in way similar to Terry Tempest Williams or Julija Sukys? What sentence, for example, was your model? It's this type of influence that I am interested in: more specific craft moves than broad literary kinship.

*“Oh, but by now you are tired of all this looking,
and you want to reach your destination....”*

—Jamaica Kincaid

Participation is critical in this course. The time we spend together is our opportunity to expand our views on what is creative non-fiction, to build a writer's community, and to learn the craft behind the art. In *Mystery and Manners*, fiction writer Flannery O'Connor reflects on the value of writers interacting with one another. She says that unless the writer “has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication, and communication suggests talking inside a community.” At the end of the semester when I reflect on your participation, I will consider not only how often you contributed to class discussions, but the quality of those comments. I will also consider your seriousness with in-class writing assignments in the participation grade as well.

One of the more challenging aspects to writers is being able to shut off the world in order to write. Therefore, we will practice mindfulness in class. Text messaging (even once) and other distractions such as checking email in class (again, even once) will result in a failing participation grade for the semester. Since cultivating a supportive and challenging writers' community is critical to our growth as writers, participation counts as 20% of your grade.

Attendance, punctuality, and meeting deadlines are all part of the writing life. There are days you may not want to write, but writers write—when they feel inspired or not. Coming to class is part of your obligation to your creativity and to your writing community. To help build a writers' community, the course depends upon everyone's participation and attendance. Therefore, missing four courses will lower your final grade by five points. Five absences will lower your final grade by ten points. Six absences will result in failure of the course. To allow adequate time for class discussion and in-class writing, arrive on time. Being late twice (or leaving early twice) will be considered an absence. Be aware that there is no such thing as an “excused absence.” Finally, if you arrive without the day’s reading printed out or in book-form in front of you, you will be counted as absent.

If you miss your scheduled workshop, twenty-five points will be deducted, no exceptions. (I will also determine if you can make-up this workshop. Usually, I do not allow for it.) If you fail to bring printed copies on the day your essay is due, twenty-five points will be deducted, no exceptions. If you do not turn in the late essay by the next class day, the work will not be accepted.

Other work such as the daily pop quizzes and writing exercises are not accepted late or allowed to be made up.

The reason for this strict policy on late work is to help build discipline as writers. Procrastination can be the creative killer to writers, so I am trying to take the option of “later” off the table.

Finally, **a note on content, confidentiality, and collegiality.** In this class, we will be exploring personal material. Sometimes the material will be humorous, perhaps sometimes sly, sometimes quite dark. In order to write effectively, everyone needs to feel respected and supported. I abide by the principle that what one reads in the workshop, stays in the workshop. While I encourage all of us to write on any subject, however difficult, I ask that you do so without gratuitous violence, graphic sexual content, or hate speech toward any group of people. While it will at times be necessary of a particular project to explore violence, bigotry, and sex, for example, we will do so in professional ways that respects our audience. If I feel like any work is not appropriate for the class, I will remove it from the workshop docket.

*“Oh, but by now you are tired of all this looking,
and you want to reach your destination....”*
—Jamaica Kincaid

GRADING

Assignments are proportioned as follows:

The Personal Essay draft:	100 points
The Lyric Essay draft:	100 points
The Video Essay draft:	100 points
Writer’s Notebook Pre-Midterm:	50 points

Writer's Notebook Post-Midterm:	50 points
Pop-Quizzes:	150 points
Assignment from <i>Brevity</i> journal:	50 points
Analysis of attended events:	100 points
<i>Lions in Winter</i> =50 points	
<i>English Studies Conference</i> =25 points	
<i>Adam Clay reading</i> =25 points	
Class Participation:	200 points
Final Exam/Final Essay	100 points

Grading scale is as follows:

A = 90-100 B = 80-89 C = 70-79 D = 60-69 F = 0-59

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic integrity

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be dealt with according to university policy, which can be found on the Office of Judicial Affairs pages. First offense will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs and **will result in a grade of F** for this class. I think we all know what plagiarism is by now: the willful “appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work” (from *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*). In sum, do your job, which means do your own work.

Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583.

The Student Success Center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

COURSE SYLLABUS

**Please note that the following syllabus may be altered and that additional assignments will appear on D2L. I will email to your D2L account when I post these assignments. **Be sure to check both the syllabus and your D2L email for each class.*

Monday 1/12 Introduction to class and syllabus review.
In-class reading: Interview with Lynda Barry on the creative mind:
<http://www.ttbook.org/book/lynda-barry-writing-unthinkable>

Focus on the Personal Essay

Wednesday 1/14 **Reading due:** “Introduction: Where to Begin” from *TIS*, pp. xii-xvi;
Work due: Type up a passage from a book or magazine or blog (or something else) that to you seems to fit into the category of creative nonfiction (1 paragraph or so). After typing up the passage, write a paragraph that explains *why* you chose this passage, what it means to you, where you first encountered it, and what makes it strong or memorable. **Make 19 copies of this 1 page document to share.**
Discussion: What is creative nonfiction?
Assign Essay #1: The Personal Essay

Monday 1/19: NO CLASS: MLK OBSERVED

Wednesday 1/21 **Reading due:** “The Body of Memory: Unearthing Your Materials” from *TIS*, pp. 3-12 and Terry Tempest Williams’s “Prayer Dogs” from *IF*, pp. 92-108
Writing due: In your notebook, do exercise #1 from *TIS*, p. 12.

Monday 1/26 **Reading due:** “The Tradition of the Personal essay” from *TIS*, pp. 89-106 and Ryan Van Meter’s “First” available here:
http://www.gettysburgreview.com/selections/past_selections/details.dot?inode=cd246da4-60a8-45f2-862c-1ca80845a242&pageTitle=First&crumbTitle=First&author=Ryan%20Van%20Meter&story=true

Work due: underline any passages from Van Meter’s essay that stand out to you, either in positive or negative ways.

Writing due: In your writer’s notebook, do “Sound” exercise #1 on p. 15 of *TIS*. One notebook page of writing.

Wednesday 1/28 **Reading due:** Excerpt from Lions in Winter’s visiting creative nonfiction writer Julija Sukys available on D2L plus her essay on research
<http://julijasukys.com/?p=4052>
“Sharing Your Work: The Writing Group and Workshop” from *TIS*, pp.193-204.

Work due: Considering Lee Gutkind's belief that creative nonfiction requires the five R's (Real life, Reflection, Research, Reading, and 'Riting), do some research for your essay. In your notebook, write at least one paragraph on how your research will be brought into your essay. In other words, research first and then tell me what you found and how you think you'll incorporate it.

- Monday 2/2 Workshop
Reading due: "The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form" from *TIS*, pp. 163-177
ME: Do a couple of these exercises to the essays in front of us?
- Wednesday 2/4 Workshop
- Monday 2/9 Workshop
- Wednesday 2/11 Workshop
- Monday 2/16 Workshop
Work due: *Brevity* magazine assignment. See syllabus.

Focus on the Lyric Essay

- Wednesday 2/18 **Reading due:** "Playing with Form: The Lyric Essay and Mixed Media" from *TIS*, pp. 107-126 and "Glaciology" by Lia Purpura found at:
<http://www.bu.edu/agni/essays/print/2004/60-purpura.html>
Assignment for the Lyric Essay: Choose one of the strategies at the end of "Playing with Form," pp. 123-126. Final essay must be 3-5 pages.
- Monday 2/23 **Reading due:** Brenda Miller "A Braided Heart: Shaping the Lyric Essay" from *TIS*, pp. 234-244 and Anthony Farrington's "Kissing" on D2L
- Wednesday 2/25 **Reading due:** Essay on the haibun on D2L and Anne Carson's "The Glass Essay" on D2L
Discussion: Finding the right image.
- Monday 3/2 **Work due:** Haibun (Bring enough copies to share with the class.)
- Wednesday 3/4 Workshop
Reading due: Dinty Moore's "The Son of Mr. Green Jeans" on D2L.

Participation grades will be entered as this is mid-term season. They are not permanent and are meant to provide feedback on your class performance at this time.

- Monday 3/9 Workshop
- Wednesday 3/11 Workshop
Reading due: Annie Dillard's "Notes for Young Writers" from IF, pp. xi-xix
- Monday 3/16 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK
- Wednesday 3/18 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK
- Monday 3/23 Workshop
Reading due: TBA
ME: Maybe excerpt from Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* on D2L

Focus on the Video Essay

- Wednesday 3/25 **Reading/Viewing due:**
<http://www.triquarterly.org/essay/on-the-form-of-video-essay>
Read the essay on Triquarterly's site about what is a video essay. Then watch Dinty Moore's "History":
<http://www.triquarterly.org/issues/issue-141/history>
and John Bresland's "Future Ex Buys Pajamas":
<http://bresland.com/audio.html>
- Monday 3/30 Discussion: Merging text with image
Instagram Essays
Reading due: <http://www.jonathandfitzgerald.com/instagram-essay-presentation/>
Work due: Create your own Instagram essay. We will create an instagram account specifically for this class and share our instagram essay.
- Wednesday 4/1 Bring your laptops or check one out.
Tutorial on how to create a digital essay.
Assign Essay #
- Monday 4/6 **Viewings due:** John Bresland's "Ode to Everything" with Eula Biss
<http://player.vimeo.com/video/11609524?title=0&byline=0&portrait=0>
and Steven Chin's "Grandpa":
<http://www.triquarterly.org/issues/issue-141/grandpa>

Wednesday 4/8	In lieu of class, attend the English Studies Conference on Friday
Friday 4/10	Attend at least one panel at the English Studies Conference. Write a two paragraph report on what you attended. In the first paragraph, describe the event. In the second paragraph, discuss what you learned about presenting material to a group. Turn this report in on 4/15.
Monday 4/13	In lieu of class, attend the poetry reading at 6:00 at the Dudley House.
Wednesday 4/15	Workshop
Monday 4/20	Workshop Reading due: TBA
Wednesday 4/22	Workshop
Monday 4/27	Workshop Course Evaluations
Wednesday 4/29	Workshop



“What nobody tells you as an artist is that every project starts at the beginning. Not just the blank page, the empty stage, but that you have to re-establish your credentials and your quality every time.”

Text by Allison K Williams
Dancing Elephants by Heinrich Kley

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE OUR READING AND WRITING

By: Dinty Moore

1. What is “creative” about “creative nonfiction?”
2. When does the “creative” part become fiction?
3. What are the ethical considerations writers must take into account?
4. What writerly techniques are most effective in this genre?
5. How do writers effectively structure pieces in this genre?
6. How do we characterize a strong “voice” in this genre?
7. How do we overcome inhibition while writing in this genre?
8. What about writing other people’s stories? Who “owns” the story?
9. How does a writer gain access to memory? How can this memory be represented both accurately and aesthetically?
10. How do writers incorporate research in creative nonfiction?
11. Why are personal stories interesting to others? What makes them “universal?”