Fall 8-15-2015

ENG 4761-001: Advanced Nonfiction Writing

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ENGLISH 4761: ADVANCED NONFICTION WRITING
FALL 2015
3 CREDIT HOURS

Dr. Charlotte Pence
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Office: 3745 Coleman Hall
Office Hours: MW 12:30-3

Course Information:
MW 4:30-5:45
Section: 001
Room: CH 3159

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

○ Writing Life Stories by Roorbach
○ Best American Essays 2014 by Sullivan
○ A writer's notebook of your choice. (Bring to every class.)
○ Copies of your essays for workshop.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Creative non-fiction blends literary art (fiction and poetry) with the real (personal facts and research), and uses many literary devices such as setting, voice, image, and character development. In this advanced course, students will build on skills learned in a previous creative nonfiction course to produce two essays that emphasize the development of their individual style. 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)

*Students will develop advanced ability and a repertoire of artistic strategies in the writing of literary nonfiction prose.

*Students will deepen their understanding of creative nonfiction and its subgenres through intensive readings of past and contemporary authors.
Students will develop critical reading skills through intensive study of classic and contemporary writings in the genre. Students will write a critical analysis of a classic essay.

Students will confront the various issues inherent in the practice of creative nonfiction, such as the tension between differing prose styles, the stance of personal voice and vision, and the importance of meditative/artistic approaches to experience.

Students will develop interpersonal skills and intellectual rigor through vigorous workshop participation.

THEME

The English Department has recently identified a set of themes that students may choose to explore across multiple courses. In each course, the theme may be explored differently. In this course, we will focus on Genre, Form & Poetics.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Two essays will be submitted to the class for workshop over the course of the semester. These essays must be 3-5 pages, 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 sometimes 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 will collect these notebooks twice during the semester and grade based on completed exercises.

Reading and writing assignments will be our way to learn about the craft of writing. Typically, our readings on Mondays will be about craft with accompanying writing exercises. Wednesdays will be contemporary essays to analyze. 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.

In order for the class to be both challenging and organic, I may sometimes assign new readings and writing assignments. 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.

Finding a community is important for writers, partly because the work itself is often done in isolation. Therefore, participation in one literary event is a requirement of this class. For the event, you will 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: 250-300 words.

**Workshops** will encompass a significant portion of the in-class work that we will do. We will determine ahead of time who goes when. For each workshop, you are required to write editing and revision suggestions on that essay. I will occasionally check to see if everyone has written comments before we begin. If you have not written down substantial notes, you will receive a zero for that day’s work. (This zero will fall under the quiz grades.)

If you are being workshopped, you will need to bring copies for every person in the class the class day before you are workshopped. No emailed workshop essays will be allowed. I will place extra copies in the box outside my door in case someone happens to be absent the day an essay is passed out. A quiz grade of zero will be given if that essay is not picked up by 2:30 on the day of class.

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.

**A final revised essay of five to ten 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 two-to-three 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 Dave Eggers or Zadie Smith? What sentence, for example, was your model? It’s this type of influence that I am interested in: specific craft moves rather than explanations of a literary kinship.

“…Truth in nonfiction involves more than accuracy, sincerity, documentation, or verifiability.”

---John Jeremiah Sullivan

**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 lower your final grade by fifteen points. Seven absences or more 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” unless it is an EIU event (such as athletics). 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, from that essay’s grade. (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 and you will receive a zero for that essay.

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, 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.

“...intimacy of voice and universality of significance—go to the heart of the personal essay tradition.”

--Brenda Miller
**Grading**

First essay draft 15%
Second essay draft 15%
Craft Analysis 5%
Writer’s Notebook Pre-Midterm 10%
Writer’s Notebook Post-Midterm 5%
Pop-Quizzes 15%
Attendance at one literary event 5%
Class Participation 15%
Final Revised Essay 15%

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 have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible. 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 may 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.

In the syllabus, I use the abbreviation WLS for Writing Life Stories and BAE for Best American Essays.

## Week One

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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 8/24</td>
<td>Introduction to class.</td>
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| Wednesday 8/26 | **Reading due:** Introduction (pp. 3-9) and half of Getting Started (pp. 10-22) from WLS. Plus, the foreword in BAE.  
 **Writing due in Notebook:** Write down something that you learned in a previous CNF course that you’d like to share with the class.  
 **Discussion:** Review of CNF fundamentals. |

## Week Two

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| Monday 8/31  | **Reading due:** First half of memory chapter from WLS, pp. 25-33  
 **Writing due in Notebook:** Ex. 5: First Lines pp. 23-24 and Ex. 1 Mapmaking p. 28.  
 **More reading:** “The Final Day in Rome” by Culver in BAE. |
| Wednesday 9/2 | **Reading due:** “Strange Beads” by Brenner in BAE.  
 **Workshop** |

## Week Three

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 9/7</td>
<td><strong>NO CLASS: LABOR DAY HOLIDAY</strong></td>
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| Wednesday 9/9 | **Reading due:** “The Man at the River” by Eggers in BAE.  
 **Writing due in Notebook:** Ex. 2: Map Story, p. 32. Please write an essay of at least 3 notebook pages. This is a private first draft, so no need to worry about workshopping this unless you’d want to revise and do so later.  
 **Workshop** |

## Week Four

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| Monday 9/14  | **Reading due:** Scenemaking chapter pp. 44-52 in WLS. And a short history on creative nonfiction: “The Essayfication of Everything.” (Link on D2L)  
 **Writing due:** Ex. 2 on p. 53 in WLS.  
 **Workshop** |
| Wednesday 9/16 | **Reading due:** Hermit crab example (“Son of Mr. Green Jeans”) and collage example “Kissing” found on D2L. Be sure to print both.  
 **Workshop** |
Week Five
Monday 9/21: **Reading due:** Big Ideas chapter pp. 65-74 in WLS. (No need to do the exercises unless an exercise appeals to you.)
**Writing due in Notebook:** Ex. 12, p. 85 from WLS.
**Workshop**

READING TONIGHT!: Wyn Cooper & Matt Minicucci, 7 p.m. @ Doudna’s Recital Hall

Wednesday 9/23: **Reading due:** “Sliver of Sky” by Lopez in BAE.
**Workshop**

9/23-9/21: **Pygmalion Literary Festival** in Urbana-Champaign
Adrian Matejka, Ladan Osman, Jamie Brunton, Marcus Wicker and More! Check out the full line-up here:
I highly encourage you to attend a reading at this festival.

Week Six
Monday 9/28: **Reading due:** Characters and Character chapter pp. 87-98 in WLS.
**Writing due in Notebook:** Ex. 1 OR 2 on p. 93 in WLS.
**Workshop**

Wednesday 9/30: **Reading due:** “Someone Else” by Offutt in BAE.
**Workshop**

Week Seven
Monday 10/5: **Reading due:** Continue Characters and Character chapter pp. 100-119 in WLS.
**Writing due in Notebook:** Ex. 9 on p. 104 in WLS. Do a list of traits (at least 10) for three different people that you know.
**Another good one (optional):** Ex. 12 on p. 111.
**Workshop**

Wednesday 10/7: **Reading due:** “Joy” by Smith in BAE.
**Craft Analysis due:** Ex. 9 on p. 133 in WLS. In one document, turn in your original passage, the rewritten passage, and a paragraph explaining what you learned from this exercise. 3 pages max. Submit to D2L.

Mid-Term and Reflection on the Semester
Week Eight
Monday 10/12: **Reading due:** Stage Presence chapter pp. 120-131 and 134-136.
**Writing due in Notebook:** Ex. 1 on p. 121 and ex. 2 on p. 127 in WLS. Do ex. 2 after the first exercise and after the assigned reading.
**Workshop**
**Guest Lecture by theater professor & voice coach:** Anne Thibault
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| Wednesday 10/14 | **Writer's Notebook due**  
**Workshop (2 essays)** |
| **Week Nine** | **Monday 10/19**:  
_IN LIEU OF CLASS, ATTEND THE READING TONIGHT WITH SANDY LONGHORN._  
**Reading due**: Read one of the essays I posted on D2L that is not assigned for class.  
**Writing due in Notebook**: Exercise 3 on p. 58 of WLS. Instead of using what Roebach is calling the “cracking-open exercise,” take your working draft and do the exercise he explains. This won’t be able to be done in your notebook. That’s okay. Simply record three of the main changes you make in your writer’s journal. |
| Wednesday 10/21: | **Reading due**: “How to Make a Slave” by Walker in BAE.  
**Workshop**  
(Note: For your attended reading, you will need to submit a response the first class day after the reading.) |
| **Week Ten** | **Monday 10/26**:  
**Reading due**: Research chapter (all) pp. 137-157 in WLS.  
**Writing due in Notebook**: Do either exercise 1, 4, 5, or 12 for your current essay. Briefly summarize what happened in your notebook.  
**Workshop** |
| Wednesday 10/28: | **Reading due**: “Little X” by Tallent in BAE.  
**Workshop** |
| **Week Eleven** | **Monday 11/2**:  
**Reading due**: Metaphor & Meaning chapter (pp. 158-178) in WLS.  
**Writing due in Notebook**: One exercise of your choice from that chapter.  
**Workshop** |
| Wednesday 11/4: | **Viewing due**: John Bresland’s “Ode to Everything” with Eula Biss  
**Workshop** (2 essays) |
| **Week Twelve** | **Monday 11/9**:  
**Reading due**: Saying It Right chapter (pp. 179-202).  
**Writing due in Notebook**: Exercise 8 on p. 199. Do this exercise with a working draft. In your notebook, briefly record the success (or failure) of the exercise.  
**Workshop** (2 essays) |
| Wednesday 11/11: | **Workshop** (2 essays) |
**Week Thirteen**

**Monday 11/16:**
*Workshop* (2 essays)

**Writing due in Notebook:** One exercise of your choice from WLS. If it’s an exercise that you can’t easily do in your notebook (like a revision of a scene, for example), briefly explain what you did in your notebook.

**Wednesday 11/18:**
*Reading due:* “Thanksgiving in Mongolia” by Levy in BAE.

*Workshop* (2 essays)

Note: Richard Blanco has an excellent essay on Thanksgiving that I posted to D2L. It’s too long to assign, but you might enjoy reading it.

**Focus: Read for pleasure and eat real food**

**Week Fourteen**

**Monday 11/23:**
NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

**Wednesday 11/25:**
NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

**Week Fifteen**

**Monday 11/30:**
*Workshop* (2 essays)

**Writing due in Notebook:** One exercise of your choice from WLS. If it’s an exercise that you can’t easily do in your notebook (like a revision of a scene, for example), briefly explain what you did in your notebook.

**Wednesday 12/2:**
*Workshop* (2 essays)

Discussion: Submitting to journals

**Focus: Revision**

**Week Sixteen**

**Monday 12/7**
*Small Group Workshop:* Bring 3 copies of a revised page (or two) that you need help on.

*Writer’s Notebook due*

**Wednesday 12/9**
*Class Reading! Location: TBA*

Everyone must attend, but all of you need not read. If you are not interested in reading, you may submit an essay for publication. We can talk about this in class. The goal of this day is to move our work into the literary community.

**Final Exam:**

*One revised essay plus a critical introduction are due at this time:________________*

If you would like the graded essay mailed to you over the break, please provide a SASE 9x14 envelope. You’ll need about $4.00 in postage. Otherwise, you may pick up your portfolios once the spring semester begins.