2014

318-01 Creative Nonfiction

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Creative Nonfiction: ENGL 318-01 (F14)

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Office Hours:  TR 2:30 (ish) to 3:30 and by appointment.  I’m often around on M, 1 – 3.

Required Text:
   (Possible some readings on e-reserves, also, if we need them.)

__________________________________________________________

**Course Description and Goals**

ENGL 318 offers a critical study of creative nonfiction and instruction in writing in this varied genre. Our analysis of forms such as the personal essay, memoir, travel writing, literary journalism and the lyric essay—to name just some of the sub-genres—will include examination of the various labels that have been applied to such work in recent years as well as ethical issues raised by this blend of factual and creative writing. This is a very writing-intensive course. The creative writing exercises we’ll do in class are also often fun, but only if you like to write! Students should be comfortable with sharing their work and will be encouraged to revise their work for publication.

You will have four main creative nonfiction projects this semester in addition to one analytical paper (which will help you understand how to write creative nonfiction) and some graded short pieces. The papers vary in length according to the needs of your chosen topic and aims, but they are generally in the range of 4-8 pages. You will be required to write brief pieces in or for almost every class meeting, and these creative exercises will often end up becoming part of a project, or at least the inspiration for one. I will not grade the brief assignments, but I will collect some of them periodically to keep you honest.

__________________________________________________________

**Assignments and Grading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Short</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Creative Nonfiction</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Essay/memoir</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing About Place</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Experimental or Lyric Essay</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Report</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything Else (c.p. quizzes, etc.)</td>
<td>100</td>
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1,000 possible points
I use a plus/minus grading scales, as follows:

A 93-100, A- 90-92, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72, D+ 67-69, D 63-66, D- 60-62, F 59 and under. (XU does not have a D- final grade option)

Course Policies

You should succeed in this course if you contribute your voice to discussion, keep up with the reading and writing assignments, respond to your classmates’ ideas and work with respect, and see me whenever you need any guidance with your work. I value collaborative activities and discussion so if you are not willing to participate in the class community you should find another course that better suits your personality and needs.

Attendance is always important in a writing course because most of the class activities cannot be replicated outside of class. I take attendance at the beginning of class, so if you’re late you need to check with me after class to make sure your arrival was noted. I’ll deduct 35 points for each class missed after the third absence. I don’t distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so use your allotted absences wisely. If you have unavoidable commitments having to do with sports or other events sanctioned by the university, let me know as soon as possible. Always check with another student to see what you may have missed before you come to the next class.

Tardiness is sometimes unavoidable, I realize, but consistent tardiness is downright inconsiderate to your classmates. Okay, I admit that it annoys me as well because it disrupts the work of the class. It might also jeopardize your grade since any reading quizzes, which cannot be made-up, will be given at the beginning of class. Please don’t make me count your persistent tardiness (as an absence) when I determine your course grade.

Late assignments will be accepted, but, out of fairness to the students who turned the work in on time, I will penalize your grade by half a letter grade for each calendar day late. Please see me if you are having difficulty with an assignment, preferably well before it’s due so that I can help. Always turn late work into the Faculty Services desk in the Hinkle Hall atrium; it might get overlooked if you put it under my office door. Do not e-mail papers to me unless we have made prior arrangements for you to do so. Also, if you e-mail me and do not get a response within a couple days, assume that I have not received your e-mail.

Peer-feedback workshops will be held for every major project. These workshops require your active participation; on such days you must come to class with a decent rough draft of at least a few pages or your paper grade will be lowered. Remember, you shouldn’t write about anything that you won’t feel comfortable sharing with others in class or that would make others uncomfortable. We’ll talk more about this in class soon.

Paper Format: All work turned in for a grade must be word-processed, double-spaced using standard fonts and font-size, with one inch margins. For each creative project, keep
all your working material (notes, drafts, etc.) and turn in all material with the final paper in a pocket folder. Always keep a copy of the final paper for your own records.

**Plagiarism** in any form is unacceptable and will be punished severely. You must document your use of other people’s ideas or words or you will be guilty of stealing intellectual property. The penalty for plagiarism includes a zero for the assignment and possibly a failing grade for the course. Refer to Xavier’s catalogue for the university policy on plagiarism and other forms of cheating.

**Classroom Etiquette:** Out of courtesy to your classmates and to me, please turn off cell phones while in class. Needless to say, you shouldn’t be texting during class or using any other media devices that prevent you from fully participating in the class. **This one thing annoys me pretty much more than anything else** so I am instituting a no mercy policy for it. You get one “mean look” the first time I see or suspect you of texting, an oral admonishment the second time, and then a signed drop slip the third time. Got it? I’m not fooling. I’ve stated such a policy last year and then saw people sneak texting anyway; some of you were in those courses. You know who you are. And one final pet peeve in the manners department: when I (or any other professor) respond to your e-mail, please acknowledge that response, even with just an “okay” or “thanks.” I realize that responding is out of style these days, but please humor the faculty.

**About your topics:** Although much creative nonfiction is personal or autobiographical, your course assignments are not an appropriate venue for sensitive or extremely personal disclosures. To be blunt, I have difficulty assessing writing on such subjects. In a past section, I didn’t make this topic restriction clear enough and received many papers concerning suicide attempts, alcohol abuse and date rape. Creative Nonfiction isn’t journal writing or confessional writing.

**Please do not write about your past or present love life.** The best creative nonfiction that I have read by students most often focuses on something that does not seem obviously significant—that doesn’t announce itself immediately as a “big moment.” Life experiences such as romantic encounters, relationship break-ups, grandma’s funeral, a high school graduation or prom, and other similar events are certainly important moments in people’s lives, but they are difficult to write about in an original way—and others can be uncomfortable reading about these topics. Far more effective writing comes from the small moments that a writer has to make significant and interesting. If you have any concerns about the suitability of your topics, please come and see me to discuss them.

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**Reading and Assignment Schedule:** All reading assignments are from *To Tell the Truth* unless otherwise noted. **RD=rough draft due. FD=final draft due. RDG=Reading**

- **8/26** Introduction to the course.
- **8/28** Ch. 1, An Intro. to Storytelling, pp. 1-10 and readings by Bernstein and Lopate. Due: Practice #1, pp. 33-34.
- **9/2** Ch. 2, Distinguishing Among Forms, pp. 36-46. Also Ch. 1 RDGs, pp. 20-33.
Read Ch. 3, Developing a Writing Practice, pp. 47-56. Also pp. 57-68: Godwin, Ackerman, Didion.

Due: #1, p. 79. Ch. 3 readings: pp. 68-79. We’ll look at some “shorts” in class.

**RD due: the Short.** Ch. 4, The Story Takes Shape, pp. 82-90, and also the Short on p. 112.

Focus on analyzing creative nonfiction. **FD due: the Short.**

Focus on personal essay/memoir. Read pp. 92-110, essays by Hampl and Blais.

Ch. 5, Writing in Scenes, pp. 119-32, and Gutkind, pp. 134-42.


Working on scene. **RD due: Analysis of CNF.**

**FD due** of analysis. Read Lubrano essay, pp. 171-75.

**RD of scene due.** Ch. 6, When Characters Are Real People, pp. 156-63.

No class—Fall Holiday

**FD of Scene due.** Read essays by Singer, pp. 165-71, and Chernin, 238-43.

Ch. 7, Narrative Persona, pp. 191-98. Experimenting with style and voice.


Focus on writing about place (travel, nature, literary journalism). Rdg. tba.

Ch. 9, Bringing Research to the Process, 252-60. Also Pearson, 261-64.

Working with researched place writing. Also Stewart, 264-80.

No class: research, writing, conferencing time.

**RD due:** writing about place.

Catch up day. Looking ahead to presentations and final project.

**FD due:** writing about place. Guest speaker?

Market reports.

Market reports.

Focus on experimental forms: the lyric, the segmented, the hermit crab essays. Readings tba, some from text and likely some examples on e-reserves.

No class—Thanksgiving

In class work on experimental form. Course evaluations.

**RD due:** experimental form. Course wrap up.

Final Exam meeting: TH, Dec. 18. Scheduled for 8:30 – 10:20. Uh, no. We’ll likely say 9:15 or so. **FD due:** experimental form. Sharing and celebrating your work.