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Advanced Creative Writing: Nonfiction

Course Description

This course explores the increasingly popular forms of creative nonfiction writing. Texts from professional writers will focus class discussion around the questions arising from a genre which makes claims for “truth” through the use of traditionally “fictional” and “poetical” techniques. Students’ own essays will, no doubt, intensify this discussion as students make practical decisions about how to use the dramatic and expository techniques of fiction (characterization, scene construction, voice, dialogue, and point of view, among others) and poetry in their own nonfiction essays.

Because this form is so new – to students and the general reading public alike – there will be extensive reading this semester. It is a fool’s game to try to write something one has not studied. Students should also expect to produce writing both during and outside of class, presenting both for review by me and students’ peers. In short, this course will be a great deal of work, and students should be prepared to put in a considerable amount of time. That said, to become familiar with a new form is an exciting prospect.

Course Goal

Through analysis and intensive practice, the goals this semester are to familiarize students with the various forms of creative nonfiction – autobiography, memoir, literary journalism, and the cultural and literary essays. Throughout the semester, analysis of professional writing will be interspersed with workshop evaluation of student writing.

Course Organization

The semester will be split into two components. The first component is familiarization with the form, discussions of craft, generative writing, and short essays (2-4 pages) submitted to small-group workshops; the second component is a large-group workshop and revision of a longer essay (5-9 pages) developed from one of your shorter essays.

At the end of the semester, students will turn in a portfolio consisting of revised drafts (i.e. significantly revised drafts) of 2 short pieces, a final draft of their workshopped long pieces, and analyses of their own writing this semester.

Required Texts and Materials

Written Texts (available at Off Campus Bookstore on Smith Street [861-6270])

- *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction.* Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola.

Materials

- A **bound** notebook devoted solely to this class (i.e. not a five-subject notebook in which you also write your biology notes)
- Copies of manuscripts for all students (4 copies for small group; 15 copies for large group)
- Manilla envelope to turn in final portfolio (an SASE is required for return of final portfolios)

Course Requirements and Grading

- ↘ 25% Short Essay Assignments
- ↘ 5% Long Essay Conference
- ↘ 25% Final Portfolio
 - 2 Short essays significantly revised
 - 1 Long essay significantly revised
 - Analysis of own writing
- ↘ 25% - Workshop Participation
- ↘ 20% Class Participation (including attendance, completion of all readings and written assignments, and in-class discussion)

Note that the final portfolio will be graded holistically. What this means is that each piece of the portfolio will not be graded individually but rather that I will assume the portfolio as a whole to be a representation of a student's work throughout the semester. Thus I will bring different expectations to the various pieces of the portfolio. I will however expect the entries to show sincere effort to grapple with the specific assignments. Likewise, I will look to the final drafts not only for evidence of revision based on workshop feedback, but I will assess whether the student's writing shows both understanding of and proficiency in the various techniques of craft covered during the semester.

Attendance

This course is what is often called a studio course. This means that a large portion of your work in the class takes place during class periods. Thus attendance is crucial and **therefore attendance is mandatory and is part of your grade.**

Further, this semester is particularly short. Thus it is crucial that you attend all classes to complete the course. However, you are allowed *two absences* before your grade is affected. After two absences, your grade will be negatively affected (except in extreme circumstances discussed directly with me in as timely a manner as possible). Beginning with the third absence, the final semester grade will be lowered five percentage points. This means if you have earned a B (85%) in the course and have three absences, your final grade will be B- (80%); if you have earned that same B but have four absences, you will receive a C+ in the course. If you miss more than four classes, you cannot pass the course. Note that college policy reserves the "W" (withdrawal) for emergency situations only (i.e. emergency surgery, etc.), and therefor

you should expect to receive the grade you earn in the course. Also, I cannot issue an incomplete for a workshop class as the workshop process is the major learning component of the class, and one cannot workshop outside of class.

NOTE: Late arrivals will be noted as well. If you come into class more than fifteen minutes late you will be counted as absent. It is your responsibility to inform me at the end of class if you have arrived after attendance has been taken.

Participation

Because the writing workshop is a collaborative space, the successful creative writing course depends on participation. You will be reading each other's work, and therefore you **MUST** participate, for in taking this class you have entered into a pact with your fellow students that you will share what you know in thoughtful and productive ways and that they will, in turn, share with you.

Additionally, all assigned work must be completed by class time on the days they are due. **The week before your longer work is under review by the class, you should come with enough copies for the entire class, *or you must post your essay on our WebCT site for downloading by your classmates NO LATER THAN NOON THE SATURDAY BEFORE CLASS.*** Conversely, if you are reviewing someone else's work, your analysis of the work should be completed before the class meets. And while it may be difficult for those who are not naturally garrulous to talk in class, you must communicate your thoughts during discussions. Thus if you repeatedly come to class unprepared or rarely participate in a meaningful way in class, your final grade will suffer.

Manuscript Form

All work, long and short essays should be typewritten, **double-spaced** in a 10-12 point size font, on clean, white paper. Please use at least a one-inch margin on all sides and photocopy on only one side of the page, so there is room to make notations on the manuscript. I will not make sentence-level comments on any assignment turned in with less the double spacing. The only exception to this is the journal entries, which may be handwritten.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism, or the deliberate representation of the writing and/or work of another as your own, is a serious breach of college policy and is unacceptable to the academic and creative communities. When you draw upon the ideas or language of other people, you need to clearly indicate your sources. Whenever you quote, summarize, or paraphrase another source, you must acknowledge your indebtedness to that source and give it credit. **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCE WILL plagiarism IN ANY FORM BE TOLERATED.** If you have any questions about whether or not you might be plagiarizing, ask me. Should you be caught plagiarizing, expect at the very least a failure of the assignment and at the most expulsion from the college.