

English 273: Introduction to Creative NonFiction**Time & Place: T-TH 11:30 to 1:00 Gruening 304 Instructor : David Crouse****Email dcrouse1@alaska.edu Phone 907-687-7755****Office Hours T-TH 2:00 to 3:30 and by appointment****Course Description**

Forms and techniques of nonfiction writing in memoir and the personal essay for beginning students; discussion of students' work in class and in individual conferences. Prerequisites English F111X or permission of instructor.

Course Overview

Think of this class as a writing laboratory, a place to experiment and refine your work. The practice of creative nonfiction is an opportunity to explore the self in a way that fiction and even poetry cannot. This exploration is not a narcissistic one. The issues we will discuss in this course—the interplay between memory and imagination, the manner in which our pasts shape our present selves, the importance of stories in our self-definition and in the definition of our culture—are essential to the human condition. I hope that exploring them through your own writing and through our discussions will be rewarding and occasionally revelatory.

Course Objectives & Goals

1. We may make changes in this syllabus as time passes, but the objectives should give you a sense of our goals as a class. By semester's end you should have:
2. Completed two (2) full essay drafts and a number of writing exercises, including a mini photo-object "experimental" essay.
3. Contributed a minimum of 10 entries to your personal writing journal.
4. Revised all your drafts into polished essays and included them in your final portfolio with a short 3 page paper explaining your revision strategies.
5. Critiqued your fellow writers' work in both written and oral form.
6. Discussed a selection of outside readings in both small and large groups and discovered ways in which the techniques used in these essays might be appropriated for your own work and made your own.
7. Questioned and refined your own writing style, your own aesthetic sense.
8. Attempted new approaches in your own essays and in the small writing exercises.

Required Texts

The Situation & The Story. Gornick; Winter: Notes on Montana. Bass; The Business of Memory. Baxter; Just Breathe Normally. Shumaker; Brothers & Keepers. Wideman; When You Are Engulfed in Flames. Sedaris

Attendance Policy

All students are allowed three (3) skip days over the course of the semester. You may use these days if you are ill, tired, or have assignments for other classes to complete. Four or more missed classes will result in your final grade being lowered by one letter; Five or more will result in you being dropped or receiving a failing grade. If exceptional circumstances occur during the semester (extended illness, death in the family) please see me as soon as possible and we will try to work something out.

Requirements

Draft of 1st essay due Tuesday February 17th 10% toward final grade

Draft of 2nd essay due Tuesday March 24th 20% toward final grade

Final portfolio Due May 6th 30% toward final grade

Class participation & involvement including your journal 20% toward final grade

Occasional short writing exercises assigned as necessary 20% toward final grade

Final Portfolio

Your final portfolio should include: (1) finished versions of all the work you have been writing all semester (2) any drafts of these essays so that I can see the progress of your work (3) a short artistic statement (3 pages) giving an objective overview of your reasoning behind your revisions and a sense of your future artistic goals. If you have any questions about what to include in your portfolio please see me before the final due date.

Class Participation

All students are required to participate in class discussions, show clear signs that they have read and understood the course material, and dispense useable advice to the other writers in the class. It is a matter of standing policy for me not to force anyone to participate and/or to admonish anyone for not having done the reading; however, you are being evaluated for these aspects of the course each time we have a discussion.

Classroom Journal

Keeping a journal is an important part of this course, and as such it counts as a portion of your class participation grade. At the end of the semester I will review your journals to ensure you have completed at least 10 1-page entries. I will not evaluate the journal entries themselves, or even read them too deeply, but I will check them on a pass/fail basis. If you have not completed at least 10 entries then your class participation grade for the course will be reduced by a full letter.

Workshop Policy

Be sure that your essay is page numbered, typed in a readable double-spaced font, and that the first page contains your full name, the name of the class, my name, and the name of the piece. Please title all pieces submitted to the workshop, even if it's just a working title. I expect every member of the workshop to treat every other member with respect. This entails reading the stories under discussion with a sensitive and thorough eye, working hard at offering constructive criticism, and making sure one's own essays are as polished as possible before submitting them to workshop.

Grading Policy

Papers and writing exercises will be evaluated on the following criteria:

A = 100% - 90% An honor grade. Demonstrates originality, independence, a thorough mastery of the subject; completing more work than is generally required. Demonstrates a deep understanding, presented with exceptional clarity & artfulness.

B = 89% - 80% Better than the average. Above the average expectation. It may lack the originality of an 'A' paper but is very competent and imaginative.

C = 79% - 70% Average. The student grasps the essential information; material is complete but demonstrates some sentence level and/or organizational issues.

D = 69% - 60% Below average. Contains distinct sentence level issues and/or organizational issues. Lacks originality of structure and/or concept. Ideas are unformed. Does not incorporate classroom craft discussions.

F = below 60 % Does not meet the minimum standards for a college essay. May be incomplete or late. Does not fit the requirements for the assignment. Demonstrates little understanding of classroom craft discussions.

Statement of Support Services

Rural Student Services (RSS) is an academic advising department with over 35 years of experience in working with students from all over the state of Alaska. They are here to assist you and can be reached at: P.O. Box 756320, Fairbanks, AK 99775-6320 1-888-478-1452 (Toll Free within Alaska) or (907) 474-7871 Email fyrrs@uaf.edu.

The Writing Center is a student-staffed, student-oriented service of the English Department. It is located at 801 Gruening Bldg., P.O. Box 755720 Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-5720 Phone: (907) 474-5314 Fax: 1-800-478-5246. The UAF Writing Center and Computer Lab offers free writing tutoring to any student in any subject via telephone and fax or over the Internet.

Statement of Disability Services

In coordination with the UAF Office of Disabilities Services, reasonable accommodation will be provided for qualified students with disabilities. Please meet with me during the first week of class and we will make the necessary accommodations. Disability services can be reached at 474-5655. Their website is located at <http://www.uaf.edu/disability/index.html>.

First Class

Discussion of Syllabus and “Road Trips” from When You Are Engulfed in Flames

Week 1

January 27th

For Discussion: Vivian Gornick’s The Situation and the Story (pp. 1 – 85) and “Tell Me a Story” by Michael Ryan from The Business of Memory (pp. 132 – 140). Also, “Dream, Memory, Story, and the Recovery of Narrative” by Karen Brennan from The Business of Memory (pp. 46-61).

Writing Exercise 1 Due: 3-4 page scene in which you describe an image from your childhood, then discuss the importance of that image in the scope of your whole life. Be sure to describe the image as vividly as possible.

January 29th

Visiting nonfiction writer Frank Soos will sit in on the course for a short reading and question & answer period. He will discuss the intersection between creative nonfiction and fiction technique, scene building, and the fashioning of character.

Week 2

February 3rd

For discussion: Vivian Gornick’s The Situation & The Story (pp. 89-156) and “Shame and Forgetting in the Information Age” by Charles Baxter from The Business of Memory (pp. 141 – 157)

Exercise 2 Due: Write a minimum of two pages about a memory you find difficult to recall. Resort to expressions like “I don’t know” or “maybe” if your memory fails. The memory should be at least five years old. Next do some research on that time period. What happened on that day in history? Generate at least a page of hard facts and details that “orbit” your memory and be prepared to share these with the class.

February 5th

For Discussion: “Don’t Look” by Victoria Morrow from The Business of Memory

Exercise 3 Due: Mini photo object essay. Please bring at least six objects or photographs to class and be ready to share them with your classmates. Each object should be accompanied by a typed half page of text explaining the significance of the object or photo in your life. Try to make each text fragment as self contained and interesting as possible.

February 10th

For Discussion: Winter: Notes from Montana by Rick Bass

Exercise 4 Due: Write a 3-4 page meditation on some kind of weather. At what point does the weather begin to stand for something else? Be sure to make the descriptions as vivid as possible.

February 12th

For Discussion: Winter: Notes from Montana by Rick Bass continued

Week 4**February 17th**

For Discussion: "Other People's Secrets" by Patricia Hampl from The Business of Memory (pp. 116-131) and "Town and Country" from When You are Engulfed in Flames by David Sedaris (pp. 166-175)

Exercise 5 Due: Write 3-4 pages about someone else's story. Consider their perspective on that story and how you've shaped that story in your telling.

February 19th

Class canceled for student conferences. See the sign up sheet.

Week 5**February 24th & 26th**

Workshop of student essays. Please bring written commentary to class and be prepared to critique the essays submitted by your classmates. This discussion will take the entirety of our class sessions.

Week 6**March 3rd & March 5th**

Workshop of student essays.

Week 7**March 10th & March 12th**

Spring Break.

Week 8

March 17th & 19th

Workshop of student essays.

Week 9

March 24th

Due for Discussion Peggy Shumaker's Just Breathe Normally with various in class writing exercises.

March 26th

Due for Discussion Peggy Shumaker's Just Breathe Normally with various in class writing exercises.

Each student should bring a list of at least 5 questions they would like to ask Peggy Shumaker on March 31st.

Week 10

March 31st

Peggy Shumaker will visit our course in order to discuss Just Breathe Normally. Please bring your lists of questions for the question/answer period.

April 2nd

Workshop of student essays

Writing Exercise 6 Due: Please write a 3-4 page written response in which you describe your opinions about Peggy Shumaker's recent classroom visit. What did you find especially helpful about the visit? Are there lessons from this visit you may incorporate into your own writing?

Week 11

April 7th

Workshop of student essays

April 9th

Workshop of student essays

Week 12

April 14th

Workshop of student essays

April 16th

Workshop of student essays

Week 13

April 21st

Discussion of Brothers & Keepers by John Edgar Wideman Part 1: Visits (pp. 1 -54)

April 23rd

Discussion of Brothers & Keepers by John Edgar Wideman Part 2: Our Time (pp. 55-166)

Week 14

April 28th

Discussion of Brothers & Keepers by John Edgar Wideman Part 3: Doing Time (pp. 167 – 242)

April 30th

Revision workshop. Everybody should bring 5 copies of a revision of one essay they have completed this semester and be prepared to share it with other members of the class.

Week 15

Class Sessions TBA. We will decide as a class how to use this time. Final portfolios are due on May 6th by 5:00 in my hand or in my mailbox. No late portfolios will be accepted.