

ENGL F377: Intermediate Creative Writing: Creative Nonfiction



University of Alaska-Fairbanks
Spring Semester, 2017
MWF, Jan. 17-May 9
11:45 – 12:45 PM (3 Credit Hours)
Classroom: DUCK 354

Instructor: Dr. Daryl Farmer
Office: 820 Gruening
Phone: 474-5307
E-Mail: dlfarmer@alaska.edu
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 10:30-11:30 and
Thursday, 4:30-5:30; or by appointment

ENGL F111X; ENGL F211X or ENGL F213X; ENGL 270; or permission of instructor

Course Description

From Catalog: Forms and techniques of fiction. Students' work read and discussed in class and in conference with the instructor. Close study of the techniques of established writers.

In this course we will be writing and reading creative nonfiction. *Creative nonfiction* is a literary genre that can take many forms including memoir, personal essay, travel and nature writing, literary journalism and lyric essays. In short, it is the art of representing the truth as seen through an individual writer's experiences, observations, memories, and thoughts. The class will help you build an understanding of prose craft and technique through a variety of exercises and writing tools and will focus on the development of the "habit" of art, emphasizing exploration and risk taking, in order to push you to write in new and imaginative ways. In the beginning weeks of class, we will focus on generating material, and experimenting with different craft techniques. Finally, this course will emphasize writing as process; it can only take shape through multiple revisions. You will be expected to write at length, read selections from professional writers, and respond to the work of your classmates.

It is important that you to write what is urgent and essential to who you are – to make your essays *personal*, to help you develop your writing *persona*, the character who is you, telling a story. Personal narratives and essays need a pulse, a life beneath the surface. Finding that pulse is the challenge we as writers face.

Student Learning Outcomes

In this class students will:

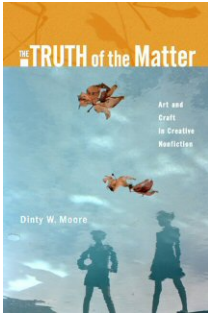
- develop polished texts of their own writing based on applicable skills in invention, process, revision and editing;
- participate in critical peer responses to classmate's writing in both small group and full-class format;
- read and analyze texts written by published writers well known for their contributions to nonfiction writing;
- participate in the production of a class anthology collection of the semester's best work.

Course Goals

By the end of the semester, you will have developed the skills necessary to develop nonfiction project ideas, generate new essays in a variety of forms, revise and edit the texts you create, and respond critically to professional and peer writing. You will also leave with a deeper understanding of the publishing business.

Required Texts

The Truth of the Matter, by Dinty Moore



There will be a variety of handouts throughout the semester. It's a good idea to keep a portfolio or file of some kind to help organize these handouts.

Other Materials

A personal journal

Also: plan to spend up to \$20 for photocopying drafts

Instructional Methods

The class will consist of in-class discussion of assigned reading, writing exercises, craft lectures, and small peer workshop.

As a writer you have to notice everything, from the bars of hotel soap that are suspiciously Saran-wrapped to the sad lack of monkeys on the bed, to the way the Texas light at dusk is like steeping tea, (an image taken from Christian Wiman's "The Limit"). That metaphorical meaning is what separates art from the rest of writing.

-- Jo Ann Beard



Evaluation and Grading

Grading:

Your grade will be broken down as follows:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Points</u>
Writing Exercises (10 @ 1.5 each)	15%	150
Essay 1	15%	150
Essay 2	15%	150
Essay 3	15%	150
Essay 4	15%	150
Final Polished essay	15%	150
<u>Final Public Reading</u>	10%	100
Total	100%	1000

Writing Exercises (15%)

Writing exercises are for the writer what scales are for the musician--a way to practice, and to perfect technique. The exercises assigned for this class will be pulled directly from the writing prompts at the end of the chapters in the Dinty Moore book *The Truth of the Matter*. These prompts will help you to develop a storehouse of ideas and materials for the essays you will be asked to write, and for potential future writing after this class ends.

Essay Projects (4 @ 15% each)

Each student will turn in three polished essays. These projects will be developed and revised and should be clean polished drafts with no grammatical errors. They should also demonstrate some of the elements of writing that we discuss in class. I will grade these using a rubric which evaluates grammar, content, depth, syntax, sentence fluency, etc. You will not be downgraded for taking risks, and it is not a matter of whether I like or dislike the essay. As writing students, you are all competent writers, and it's easy to rest on your laurels and whip off a "good" essay the night before it's due. Don't settle for good. Your biggest challenge as a writer is to make people care about your subject. For them to care, you must.

Final Reading (10%)

Over the final 2-3 class periods, we will convene to listen to each of you present your best work. This will be in lieu of a final exam, and will be the culmination of what I am sure will be a great semester!

Grade will be based on following scale:

93-100 – A
90-92 – A-
87-89 – B+
83-86 – B
80-82 – B-
73-79 – C+
70-72 – C-
60-69 – D
59 and below – F

"You must construct a narrative so compelling that readers will want to keep reading."

"You can never forget the storyteller's ancient rules of maintaining tension and momentum—rules you've known in your bones since you were a child listening to bedtime stories."

"You can also never forget that you are the protagonist in your story. Not the hero; most writers are uncomfortable with that idea—they weren't trying to be a hero and they don't feel like a hero. But you are the central actor in your story, and you must give yourself a plot."

—William Zinsser

Writing Workshop

Workshop Process

Please note that workshop pieces are due the class period before the workshop. On the class period before the workshop, all work will be distributed for the rest of us to take home, read and write our peer responses. If you would like for me to make copies of your work to distribute, I am happy to do so, but you must get the piece to me **NO LATER THAN 3:00 PM** on the day before it is due.

A Note on Workshop Etiquette

There's no way around it, workshops sting. Peers are discussing work that you have struggled over, and sometimes their responses are less than complimentary. Listen, learn, and keep an open mind. Discard those comments that are of no use to you. But remember that your classmates have been asked to respond to your work, and are merely trying to be helpful. On the other side, this is an open forum, where all should feel free to offer critiques that are honest. Less than honest evaluations don't help the writer. However, work to coat the language you use in ways that remain constructive, and are dictated always by how you feel you can most help the author of the work. Inappropriate or mean-spiritedness will not be tolerated. Please keep in mind that in nonfiction, we are not only discussing writing, but actual lives.

UAF Sponsored Readings (or, otherwise put: EXTRA CREDIT)

Please plan to attend as many of the UAF readings this semester as you can. I will give extra credit, in the equivalent point value of one exercise each (1.5%), for attending up to two of these events. This is a great opportunity to hobnob with actual living writers and enter into the literary community here at UAF. Here is a website with the schedule for the Midnight Sun Visiting Writers Series:

<http://www.alaska.edu/english/midnight-sun-visiting-wri/>

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

I conduct an active writer-centered classroom. Your **attendance** and participation is an integral part of the course. **Each absence after three will automatically lower your final grade by 5%** unless we have discussed the absences and agreed on an alternative arrangement. (Alternate arrangements include attending outside literary events and/or additional writing assignments. Such arrangement must be initiated by the student). I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. The point is not to punish or forgive: the point is that when a student is out of class, that student is missing the learning that goes on there, and is not contributing to the learning of others. Absence is never an excuse for coming to class unprepared—it is *your* responsibility to find out what was missed, including handouts and/or changes to this syllabus.

In addition, I (and I imagine many of you) find late arrivals disruptive. Please make every effort to be on time. **Participation** means coming to class prepared, having completed and read all assignments, and contributing informed thoughts, ideas and critiques.

Plagiarism

Examples of plagiarism are: 1) submitting work as one's own that is at least partly the work of another; 2) submitting work that has been obtained from an Internet or other source; 3) incorporating words or ideas of another author without citing author as source. **If you willfully commit plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, you will fail the assignment. A second offense will result in a failing grade in the class.**

Draft Workshops

Writing quality essays is a process—you should plan on writing at least two drafts per essay. During draft workshops days, come to class prepared with **4 copies** of your rough draft. In groups of 4 or so, you will read through these drafts and receive and give feedback. This process will help you strengthen your argument and delve deeper into your topic, as well as help you to identify grammatical and syntax errors. **Please remember to bring draft copies on assigned draft workshop days.**

ETC.

- All assignments should be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, with MLA style heading. Also, insert last name and page number in upper right hand corner in a header, beginning with page two (2). **Papers must be handed in as hard copy on the day that they are due. I do not accept e-mailed assignments, unless pre-approved.**
- Please staple all multi-page assignments.
- Please make sure that cell phones and all electronic devices are turned off at all times during class.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center, located on the 8th floor of Gruening, provides a valuable (yet free!) service to UAF students. The center provides tutors who are available to go over your papers in detail. These tutors are generally graduate students who are well trained in helping students with all aspects of the writing process. Sometimes these tutors are better able to provide help and feedback than even your professors. And it's not just for remedial writers—even the most experienced writers know that sometimes an outside reader can help identify and overcome stumbling blocks. The Writing Center can be reached at 474-5314. Hours are:

- 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Monday – Thursday,
- 7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. Monday - Thursday
- 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Friday
- 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Sunday

Disability Services

Please contact me if you are having any difficulties with the material due to a documented disability. If you have special needs and have not done so, please contact the Office of Disabilities Services (208 Whitaker Building) at 474-5655. I'm more than willing to accommodate you in a reasonable manner to help you succeed in this course.

A Final Note



Carl Hiassen writes: “If you work as a reporter long enough and you end up sitting in a prison cell listening to someone tell his story, it will dawn on you that he's in this situation for committing a truly gruesome and heinous act, and yet you're having a fairly normal conversation, as if you were sitting with him in Starbucks. You realize that there are glimmers of humanity in even the most ghastly of characters. It's important to have that if you're going to tell realistic stories.”

Writing is, at its best, an act of empathy. By examining the world through our words we engage more deeply, and develop skills that will help us understand others and take us deeper into our own hearts in ways that will benefit us far beyond what we publish, or what accolades we are awarded. Thanks for being here. Enjoy it!

**ENG F377 Class Schedule
Spring, 2017
Farmer**

Schedule:

You will be expected to have completed the reading/ assignments prior to the dates indicated. If you don't read the material before class, it will be difficult to have meaningful discussions. On days when reading is assigned, bring your text so that you will be able to follow what is being discussed.

Date	Reading Assignment	Assignment Due
Week 1		
F Jan 16	Introductions, Eggers essay	
Week 2		
WHAT IS NONFICTION?		
M Jan 19	Alaska Civil Rights Day – No Classes	
W Jan 21	Moore, Chapter 1 and Lott essay (p. 279)	
F Jan 23	Mock Workshop	
Week 3		
THE ISSUE OF TRUTH		
M Jan 26	Moore, Chapter 2	
W Jan 28	Schwartz and Drummond	Moore, p. 17-18, #'s 1&3 essays
F Jan 30	Draft Workshop	
Week 4		
DETAIL AND DESCRIPTION		
M Feb 2	Moore, Chapter 3	ESSAY #1 Due
W Feb 4	Sanders and Kincaid	p. 28, 1&2
F Feb 6	In-Class Writing Practice	
Week 5		
CHARACTERIZATION AND SCENE		
M Feb 9	Moore, Chapter 4	
W Feb 11	Tan and Grealy	p. 40, #1 or 2 p. 41, #1 or 2
F Feb 13		

Week 6	VOICE AND POINT OF VIEW		
M Feb 16		Moore, Chapter 5	
W Feb 18		Gerard and Lott (p. 207)	p. 52-53, Choose 2 from 1-3
F Feb 20	Individual Conferences		
Week 7	DISCOVERY		
M Feb 23		Moore, Chapter 6	ESSAY #2 Due
W Feb 25		Beard and Williams	Moore, p. 62, #1 & #2
F Feb 27	In Class Writing Practice		
Week 8	MEMOIR		
M March 2		Moore, Chapter 7	
W March 4		Sedaris and Hoagland	Moore, p. 72-73 Choose 2 from 1-3
F March 6	Draft Workshop		
Week 9	LITERARY JOURNALISM		
M March 9		Moore, Chapter 8	
W March 11		Gutkind and Iyer	Moore, p. 82-83, #1 & 2
F March 13			
March 14-22	No Classes		
Spring Break			
Week 10	PERSONAL ESSAY		
M March 23		Moore, Chapter 9	
W March 25	Individual Conference	Nye and Cofer	p. 91-92, #1 & #2
F March 27	Individual Conference		
Week 11	REVISION		
M March 30		Moore, Chapter 10	Essay #3 Due
W April 1	Collage	Shields and Baldwin	

F April 3	In-Class Writing Practice		
Week 12	FLASH NONFICTION		
M April 6		Hollars essay (handout)	Collage exercise
W April 8		Flash Essays (handouts)	
F April 10			
Week 13	LYRIC ESSAYS		
M April 13		Doyle (handout)	Flash exercise
W April 15		Biss (handout)	
F April 17			
Week 14	HUMOR		
M April 20			
W April 22	Revision	Humor essays (handouts)	
F April 24	Spring Fest - No classes		
Week 15	PUBLISHING		
M April 27	How to submit		ESSAY #4 Due Bring 4 copies of all 4 essays
W April 29	Choosing final essays for publication		
F May 1	Final Edits for class publication		
Week 16	FINAL		
M May 4	Final Edits for class publication		Final Polished Draft Due, via email by 5:00 PM
Th May 7	FINAL CLASS 10:15- 12:15 Public Readings		

Please note: This schedule is subject to change.