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CRWR 212A.01: Introduction to Nonfiction Workshop

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Introduction to Creative Writing: Nonfiction

Instructor: Laura Blake
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appointment

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Class: T/R 11:00-12:20; FOR 206
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“Nonfiction is in the facts. Creative nonfiction is in the telling.” –Phil Gerard

Course Description

Creative nonfiction is a capacious and ever-evolving category that describes a range of genres: personal essay, literary journalism, nature writing, lyric essay and many more. In all of its forms, creative nonfiction asks us to apply the craft of storytelling to the raw material of life. In doing so, we can uncover complex, often unexpected, meanings in the stories that matter to us most, and we can share these stories in a way that makes them matter to our readers too.

This semester we'll study the fundamentals of creative nonfiction in order to develop strategies for writing compelling and meaningful work. We'll read some great nonfiction and analyze how different writers use narrative, tone, style, diction, point of view, research, reportage and structure. You'll try out these techniques yourselves through a series of studio classes, informal exercises and major projects. You'll draft, workshop and revise your own nonfiction works. And together we'll cultivate a writing practice that you can draw on throughout your life.

Course Outcomes

- Acquire foundational skills in reading, discussing and writing nonfiction.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to nonfiction.
- Practice the art of writing and revising nonfiction.
- Learn to critique the quality of one's work and that of peers.

Course Texts

Texts for this class will include craft readings, canonical and contemporary works of nonfiction, sample essays by other college writers and, of course, work by your peers.

There are no required books for this class. Instead, readings for the upcoming week will be uploaded to Moodle every Thursday. I expect you to print all readings and to arrive each class with ideas, questions, comments, and passages you want to explore. Laptops, tablets and phones are not allowed in class. Think of the cost of printing as the cost of your books for this class.

Other Requirements

- Working folder
- Notebook and pen or pencil for in-class writing

Course Requirements

Major Projects

Over the course of the semester you will write three major projects, at least one of which will be significantly revised, and a final reflection. I will give you a detailed assignment sheet as we begin each of these assignments.

- Memory Glimpse Project (4-6 pages)
- Personal Essay with a Public Point (5-7 pages)
- Portrait of a Person or Place (5-7 pages)
- Final Reflection (2-3 pages)

Short Exercises

You'll engage in directed short writing exercises at home and during most classes. These exercises are designed to alleviate any "writer's block" and to inspire you to experiment with some of the strategies we discover in our readings. Short exercises might stand alone, or they can serve as starting points for longer projects. We'll frequently share these aloud in class.

Final Revision and Reflection

At the end of the semester, you'll turn in a revision of one of your major projects alongside your original version with my comments, and a reflection on your writing this semester. You are welcome to revise as many pieces as you like, but only one major revision is required.

Unless otherwise specified, all written work should be:

- Typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins on all sides
- Times New Roman, 12 pt. font
- Page-numbered and stapled if multiple pages

Hand-written or emailed work is not acceptable.

Participation

This class depends upon your enthusiastic participation. Participation includes doing your reading, coming to class, speaking in discussion, listening actively, sharing your writing and engaging in small group work and writing exercises. Participation looks different for everyone, but I expect you to stretch your comfort zone. Collaboration, public speaking, listening, responding and sharing your work are essential skills for college and beyond.

Workshop

Throughout the semester, we will share work and offer feedback in small group and full class workshops. I'll provide more details as the semester progresses. The best nonfiction often emerges from our vulnerabilities—whether that vulnerability takes the form of personal disclosure or of stylistic risk. With that in

mind, we'll cultivate a classroom community of mutual curiosity, generosity, support and respect. The goal of a workshop is never to judge a writer or their work, but rather to offer an outside perspective and make constructive suggestions that will help your peers realize the potential of their pieces. Workshopping one another's work is also one of the best ways to grow as a writer and learn to solve problems in your own writing. It should go without saying, but do not discuss another student's personal work outside of class.

Course Policies

Grading Policy

- Final Revision and Reflection: 30%
- Major Projects: 30%
- Participation, Short Assignments and Workshop letters: 40%

Throughout the semester, I will use comments and a check system to give you a sense of your progress in the class.

- Check signifies solid progress towards writing goals
- Check minus indicates need for significant further work
- U stands for unsatisfactory work.

I use a check system because I think it is more compatible with the writing process than giving letter grades. Writing is a nonlinear process. When you bring your messy, daring first drafts to class, the last thing I want you to be thinking about is a grade. If your final grade is in any kind of jeopardy, I will let you know. Feel free to meet with me at any point to discuss your progress in the class.

At the end of the semester, students enrolled in Creative Writing are graded by the traditional letter grade A, B, C, D, F or are given NC for no credit. The NC grade does not affect grade point average. It is reserved for students who have worked unusually hard, attended class regularly and completed all assignments but whose skills are not at a passing level at the end of the semester.

Attendance

Workshop can't operate without people. Writing can't happen without an audience. Community can't be created without consistency. Come to class—it'll be fun.

After three unexcused absences, your grade will begin to drop by a letter grade with each subsequent missed class. Under this timeline, six unexcused absences result in a failing grade. If you are sick or unable to come to class for a serious reason, **please** contact me. If you miss class, *you are responsible* for obtaining any handouts, notes or assignments.

Late Work

Work needs to be typed, printed, and in class with you to be considered "on time." If you need an extension, please talk with me before the due date. Given the workshop model, it is imperative to have your major projects in on time so

your peers can read them and respond to them. Unless we've come to an agreement beforehand, late or handwritten work does not receive credit.

Students with Disabilities

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me privately after class or in my office and be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. We will work together with your DSS Coordinator to establish appropriate accommodations.

Plagiarism

The University of Montana Student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as "representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own." If you have any questions about using sources ethically, please bring them to class. Plagiarism is against University Policy and can result in failure or expulsion. Don't do it—it's not who you are, and it's never worth it.

*Syllabus is subject to change