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CRWR 412.01: Advanced Nonfiction Workshop

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CRWR 412—ADVANCED NONFICTION WORKSHOP

Spring 2020 ~ LA 138 ~ W 3-5:50p ~ Professor Judy Blunt

Office: LA 112 ~ Hours: M/T/R 11-1; W by apt. ~ bluntj@mso.umt.edu

In CRWR 412, students study the art and craft of nonfiction, as readers, reviewers and writers. Writing prompts in the first weeks of class will set the tone for this course, with a goal of creating a body of new essay starts. Professional essays that exemplify the creative nonfiction genre, its many narrative styles and essay forms, will be assigned for review and discussion. Also, as time and technology allow we will study documentary as text, both for discussion and as a trigger for response essays. Any of these in-class works may be developed and polished for submission to workshop.

Our workshop format is that of a community of writers working to give the most useful feedback on the fundamental issues of memory, meaning and method in writing from the first-person point of view. I encourage all forms of nonfiction, from literary journalism to memoir, from profile to personal essay. I simply require you to write from a first person point of view. In nonfiction workshop we assume the author of each essay is writing from personal experience or observation, and take this into account in our discussion. We also assume writers who address sensitive topics or very personal events in their nonfiction are emotionally prepared to discuss the work objectively. If you have any questions or concerns about the appropriateness of an essay topic or your ability to present it in workshop, please arrange to see me before you submit it. I am a proponent of free speech, and have a high level of tolerance for any well-formed argument or opinion—even if I don't agree with it. But there are some ground rules. In class, even controversial opinions must be both offered and countered respectfully. I will not tolerate hate speech or writing that attacks, denigrates or degrades other persons or groups of people.

1. The focus of the workshop is to assist in revision with an eye toward creating publishable works. Push yourself as both a reader and a writer.
2. Writers scheduled to workshop must email everyone their essays by 5 p.m. Friday, the week before class. There are no exceptions so plan your writing time with this deadline in mind. If miss the deadline and are dropped from workshop, it will not be rescheduled.
3. If you submit a manuscript and then miss your own workshop it will not be rescheduled either. Don't miss your own workshop.
4. Classmates will provide both line edits and written comments [a minimum of one page, single-spaced and signed]. Marked manuscripts and comments are returned at the time of the workshop. Bring one copy of the comments for the writer and one for me.
5. We will maintain a supportive tone, but I encourage constructive criticism of the story, its diction, organization, narrative development and voice.
6. You should be submitting essays or excerpts that are as polished as you can make them on your own; you are responsible for fully editing and proofreading tests so we are not forced to sideline issues of content and style for those of grammar, syntax and spelling.
7. Put attention and effort into the workshop draft; at this level, your first drafts should effectively employ fairly sophisticated elements of craft, style and technique.
8. I expect to see all work formatted for professional submission: double spaced, 1-inch margins, titled, page numbered, legibly printed in standard 12 pt. font.
9. If the piece is an excerpt of a longer work, note that information on the front page—otherwise, make no disclaimers to your readers.
10. If you need to exchange workshop days, find someone who will accommodate the trade, then see me before class so we can all adjust our schedules together.

Attendance: We'll be writing, workshopping, discussing reading assignments and viewing documentaries during our class time. This interactive studio format makes it impossible to repeat or make up a missed class. If you know you will miss a class in the course of our semester, please see me in advance to discuss substitute assignments. Students who miss two classes are on notice—they are required to schedule an appointment with me to discuss the effect this will have on their grades. Students with three or more absences will be asked to drop or accept a failing grade. If you unexpectedly miss a class, you responsible for contacting classmates, gathering the scheduled assignments and essays, and coming to class prepared to discuss them.

Tardiness: Students who arrive late either interrupt a film or lesson in progress, or they force classmates to wait for them to arrive before work can begin. I find chronic tardiness to be especially disrespectful and discourteous. I will give two warnings, after which your late arrivals will be counted as absences. The attendance policy applies to these as well, so be conscious at the outset of your commitment to this course and your fellow writers.

Participation: All students are required to participate in class discussion and workshop. If you're shy or reluctant to speak up, you're still required to participate in discussion and workshop. Your best solution will be to prepare your questions, points of interest and comments ahead of time, so you don't feel pressured. Thoughtful comments reflect your preparation for class, a sign that you've read the work, thought about it, and have some ideas to discuss. Participation includes attendance and attention to detail—keeping track of assignments, printing out reading and workshop materials, providing written response to peers' work, turning in good workshop drafts in correct format, on time, on time, on time. Participation is ½ of your grade for the class, so great writing assignments with little or no participation or a poor record of attendance will still result in a poor final grade.

Grades: Your final portfolio makes up the other half of your grade. The final portfolio is 20 pages of your best REVISED nonfiction work, due in my mailbox [LA 129] by end of day Tuesday, May 10. Please meet with me if you want to discuss your progress as the semester continues. In short, attendance/participation issues aside, high grades will be earned by all students who:

1. demonstrate a broad understanding of the creative nonfiction genre, its narrative styles and essay formats;
2. read and respond as required to professional examples of nonfiction in various formats and subgenres;
3. write and submit a minimum of 30 pages of nonfiction in the course of the semester;
4. submit original work for three workshops on time;
5. exhibit a high level of sophistication in the critique of peer work;
6. study revision technique and apply these techniques to essay drafts;
7. overcome any persistent problems with grammar, punctuation, syntax and diction;
8. submit a final portfolio of 20 pages of revised work that displays advanced skill levels as assessed by the instructor.

COVID may require us to move to an online format in accordance with changing University policy or to accommodate high numbers of quarantined or ill students. You must be prepared with appropriate devices and wifi to Zoom classes with both microphone and camera. In this and other ways we may alter or amend this syllabus to fit our changing needs as the class progresses.

Plagiarism: As senior-level students of English and creative writing, you have seen this disclaimer dozens of times. Not surprisingly, in creative nonfiction presenting another person's work as your own, or failing to document correctly the use of another's words in your work, will result in an "F" for the course, and the violation will be handed up to the proper UM authorities. Always ask if you have any confusion at all about documenting sources or quoting from published sources.

Disability: This course requires an ability to read and respond to written works, to listen and to join in class discussion, and to form original written works with the ultimate goal of publication. See me after class or during office hours if you require disability accommodation to make these things possible. Regarding dogs in class: A service animal is a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. Only licensed service animals are allowed in class.