Creative Nonfiction

ENGLISH 91
SHANNON PUAHL
FALL 2013
ROOM TBA

Course Description and Objectives

This course will explore the myriad ways in which writers of nonfiction have used language to examine the world, to move readers, and to make compelling arguments.

We will begin by reading a selection of essays spanning more than a hundred years, and using those essays as models for our own writing. We will read for content, but more importantly we will study figurative language, character and setting development, and dramatic structure. We’ll also practice close-reading techniques with writing in mind. I want students to see writing as an act, not as a product. To that end, we will conduct workshops in which ideas and critiques are thoughtfully offered. Then, part of your final grade will rely on a revision of the longer work you produce in class. I believe it is through revision that students begin to imagine a world outside our classroom, a reader who is not simply a teacher or member of their class. Our goal is to make ourselves known to others, to communicate what we have seen, felt, and believed.

WHY?
Students come to writing classes with many different concerns, backgrounds, and talents. But even those who will not go on to make writing a career learn essential things in writing courses. To facilitate communication of the highest order is, I believe, to engage with others, to empathize deeply. To me, in the best writing of any kind there is a palpable gratitude for the possibilities of language. Our goals in this course will focus on clarity, revision, and style, in the service of quality writing and communication with others.

In This Syllabus

| Course Logistics | 2 |
| Course Requirements | 2 |
| Grading Scale | 3 |
| Weekly Readings | 3 |

Required Texts:
- Lee Gutkind Keep It Real: Everything You Need to Know About Researching and Writing Nonfiction (@ the Stanford bookstore)
- Course Reader (available @ CopyAmerica, 344 S. California Avenue, Palo Alto, CA  94306 650.566.0344)

“My library is an archive of longings.”

- Susan Sontag
Course Requirements

Class Participation (30%) This includes attendance, punctuality and involvement in class discussions, as well as a presentation on one of the assigned essays.

Absences: Attendance is required and essential to your experience of the course. Individual workshops are especially affected by absences and are impossible to recreate. If you have a legitimate reason to be absent, please arrange this in advance; otherwise unexcused absence will reduce your overall grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. Chronic absences will affect your grade significantly.

Essay Presentation: In the first half of the quarter, you will lead a 30-minute discussion on one of the essays I’ve assigned. I will model this the first few class meetings, and am available to help you plan your discussion. Handouts, in-class writing exercises and other ways of involving the class are very much welcomed.

Writing and Blog (40%) This includes all writing exercises you’ve completed in class and for homework, one 10-20 page essay, and a revision of that essay.

About the blog: We’ll be posting some of the work for class on our class blog, including annotations on the published essays we read and responses to department readings. I’ll ask that you post a short comment on our class blog about each essay we read in class. We’ll also produce and respond to some short writing assignments.

The blog content will be entirely private to our class. We’ll use Lore.com, a simple and functional site for academic coursework. If you haven’t used it before, check it out!

Written critiques (15%) One of the most valuable elements of a writing class is the opportunity to have your work seriously critiqued both by your instructor and your peers. It will be as beneficial to your nonfiction to think critically and generously about your classmates’ work as it will be to have your own writing discussed. It isn’t necessary to write pages and pages of comments to your classmates, but make sure your letter is carefully thought-out and both critical and kind. It’s important to remember that we won’t be discussing polished essays but early drafts; we’ll be talking about the process of writing and all of the narrative possibilities inherent in each piece.

Attendance at Readings (15%) Attendance at three readings in the Creative Writing program is required. A list of readings this quarter can be found at http://creativewriting.stanford.edu and http://events.stanford.edu.

Make-Up Work If you miss a class, or cannot make three readings, please read an author interview on either The Paris Review’s website, as part of their Art of Nonfiction series theparisreview.org/interviews, or on the Identity Theory website identitytheory.com/interviews, and write a two-paragraph analysis of it, due in our final class.

Course Logics

Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University’s statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. That they will not give or receive aid in examinations, that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading.
2. That they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. That the faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refusing from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonorable mentioned above. The faculty will also, as far as practicable, avoid policies that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. That the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

Accommodation

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

Due Dates

Failure to turn in work on assigned dates will result in a half letter grade for each day submitted late. For more information on how to make up missed courses or readings, please see “Make-up Work” below.

There is no extra credit offered in this course.

If you anticipate not being able to meet a deadline, in some cases extensions may be granted in advance. These must be agreed upon by the professor at least 48 hours before the assignment is due. It is your responsibility to plan accordingly.

Instructor: Shannon Pufahl
Office: Margaret Jacks Hall
Email: spufahl@stanford.edu
Office hours TBD
**Grading Scale**

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing and Blog</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Critique</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readings Attendance</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>0-59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M - Sep 23</td>
<td>Who put the ‘non’ in nonfiction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>W - Sep 25</td>
<td>A Most Popular Genre: Selections from NPR and Harper’s Magazine, given in class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3  | M - Sep 30 | 1) David Sedaris “Twelve Moments in the Life of an Artist” and “You Can’t Kill the Rooster”  
                              2) James Thurber “Sex Ex Machina”                   |
| 4  | W - Oct 2  | 1) Annie Dillard “Total Eclipse” and excerpt from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*  
                              2) Joan Didion “John Wayne: A Love Song” and “On Morality”  
                              3) Zitkala-Ša “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” |
| 5  | M - Oct 7  | 1) Caitlin Moran “I am in Love!” from *How to Be a Woman*                  
                              2) Mary Roach “How to Know if You’re Dead” from *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*  
                              3) Lauren Redniss from her graphic biography *Radioactive: Marie & Pierre Curie: A Tale of Love and Fallout* (distributed in class) |
| 6  | W - Oct 9  | 1) Kathy Acker “Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body”       
                              2) Susan Sontag “Notes on Camp”                                       
                              3) Zora Neale Hurston “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”                 |
| 7  | M - Oct 14 | 1) Marilynne Robinson “Wilderness”                                        
                              2) C.S. Lewis from *Mere Christianity*                                
                              3) James Baldwin “Notes of a Native Son”                              |
| 8  | W - Oct 16 | 1) Bruce Chatwin from *In Patagonia*                                      
                              2) John Berger from *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*       
                              3) Mary Ruefle “On Sentimentality”                                     |
| 9  | M - Oct 21 | 1) Aleksander Hemon from *The Book of My Lives*                           
                              2) Susan Orlean from *The Orchid Thief*                              
                              3) Sherman Alexie “Superman and Me”                                   |
| 10 | W - Oct 23 | 1) E.B. White on Dogs                                                    
                              2) Mary Oliver “Emerson: An Introduction”                             
                              3) Richard Rodriguez “To the Border”                                  |

Oct 28 - Nov 20 \hspace{1cm} 2 workshops each class

18 M - Dec 10 \hspace{1cm} Revisions

19 W - Dec 12 \hspace{1cm} Course Wrap-up

**On Writing:**

E. B. White

“There are as many kinds of essays as there are human attitudes or poses, as many essay flavors as there are Howard Johnson ice creams. The essayist arises in the morning and, if he has work to do, selects his garb from an unusually extensive wardrobe: he can pull on any sort of shirt, be any sort of person, according to his mood or his subject matter—philosopher, scold, jester, raconteur, confidant, pundit, devil’s advocate, enthusiast. I like the essay, have always liked it, and even as a child was at work, attempting to inflict my young thoughts and experiences on others by putting them on paper”

Patricia Hampl

“It still comes as a shock to realize that I don’t write about what I know; I write in order to find out what I know.”

Galileo

“All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.”

Joan Didion

“We are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not […] We forget all too soon the things we thought we’d never forget.”