ENGL 309: Creative Nonfiction Fall 2019: Forbes 2070C

Dr. Joanna Eleftheriou Office: McMurran 227

Office Hours: Wed. 1 – 3 & Thurs 2 – 5 joanna.eleftheriou@cnu.edu

**ENGL 309: Creative Nonfiction**

*Can the writer isolate and vivify all in experience that most deeply engages our intellects and our hearts?*

*Get to work. Your work is to keep cranking the flywheel that turns the gears that spin the belt in the engine of belief that keeps you and your desk in midair.*

—Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*

**Catalogue Description:** Through analysis and practice, students will craft works of creative nonfiction that may include memoir, personal essay, reported narrative, nature writing, magazine story and multimedia texts. Writing projects will incorporate techniques from fiction, poetry, journalism, documentation and qualitative research to focus on language, structure, and audience reception. Readings emphasize analysis of polished writing and revision growing from peer review and writing workshops. Partially satisfies the Writing Intensive requirement.

**Course description**: English 309 is a creative writing course that introduces creative nonfiction genres to student writers. Those genres will include, for this section, memoir, literary journalism, essay, and nature writing. Together, we will read range of contemporary creative nonfiction writers and build up a vocabulary for talking about the strategies creative nonfiction writers use to achieve their effects. Students will learn and practice strategies for brainstorming, researching, generating, and editing nonfiction of their own. During the semester, students will have opportunities to try out various methods of creative **research**, use sources, and experiment with different styles. Thus, they will gradually discover which they find most effective and compelling. They will then apply their discoveries to a the development and revision of a powerful, polished work of nonfiction.

**Objectives**:

* study a variety of examples of nonfiction in order to understand the genre and the craft
* acquire a working vocabulary and critical/analytical skills for giving useful feedback
* develop the ability to identify artistic and technical elements in a piece of nonfiction
* listen with sensitivity and awareness to the exchange of work and ideas
* submit work in a timely fashion, following prescribed class or workshop formats;
* develop the mindset of a creative writer— including discipline, precision, seriousness in the approach to craft and form, as well as imaginative risk, spontaneity and playfulness.

**Necessary Materials**: *The Truth of the Matter* by Dinty Moore. Other readings on Scholar.

**Grading:**

Short Workshop 15%

Long Workshop 25%

Experiments (10 x 2%) 20%

Critiques 10%

Revision & Presentation 10%

Artist’s Statement 10%

Participation 10%

**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

**two essays**: One brief (1200-1500 w) essay and one conventional length (2500-3000 w) essay. The draft submitted for workshop earns the grade. You may build on the experiments. Since this is a nonfiction course, everything you submit must match the definition of nonfiction in *Truth.* You will earn points for writing that demonstrates rigorous research and that demonstrates sophistication, inventiveness, coherence, and complexity as explained in *Truth.* Your own original work is required.

**Experiments**: these responses to writing prompts offer an opportunity to experiment with new writing strategies. Write 300 words *or more*. By trying out various new directions inspired by readings, students can break free of their default styles and topics and venture beyond what is habitual and familiar. Credit is earned according to how inventive, imaginative, and effective the response is.

**Late experiments and essays** lose fifty percent. Turn in all late essays and experiments on the last day of class. You may have the lateness penalty waived if you follow these directions: 1) find an event on or off campus that relates to literature or otherwise augments your understanding of the course 2) email Dr. E the event information with a 100-word explanation of why the event should count, and an request for authorization 3) if you get authorization, **GO TO THE EVENT** (4) write 100 words about what you learned at the event (5) **print out** (a) my email authorizing the extra credit event (b) your 100 words about the event (c) the number of the experiment or name of the essay (short/long) being made up. Turn in this printout along with any late work on the last day of class. You may also go to the writing center. Write the date of the missed work and 100 words about your session. One literary event/writing center session forgives lateness the penalty for an experiment. **Three events/writing center sessions forgives lateness for a workshop essay.**

**critiques**: You will be required to write comments for your peers’ essays before workshop. The critiques must follow directions, be at least a page long, and demonstrate what you have learned about the craft of nonfiction from class and *The Truth of the Matter*. Refer to the textbook and **apply** the craft knowledge you gain in class to the drafts you critique. Write four critiques for the short workshop and six for the long workshop, total ten. Writing extras can make up low critique grades.

**Revision & presentation**: After receiving your peers’ and your professor’s feedback, you must re-envision your project. You must rethink *what you’re really writing about* and what your work is really suggesting. You must collect further information. You must reconsider *every image you’ve employed* and make them more inventive and coherent. Interrogate each decision you’ve made about structure and radically reorganize your work. If you decide to return to the original arrangement, you must explain why. You may revise either the short or long workshop, and you may expand any essay up to 5,000 words. During the final exam time, you’ll give a revisionpresentationto the class. You’ll speak for five minutes and explain how you applied principles learned in class to improve your work. You should cite *Truth* or class handouts and explain how they informed your decisions. Explain what further research you conducted and how you wove that research smoothly into the revision. If you wish to make a video instead of presenting, submit it before the exam. Lateness costs fifty points.

**Participation:** Your success in the course depends on your careful reading and thinking about assigned work. Thisgrade also depends on engagement with your classmates’ ideas. Both quantity and quality matter. To achieve maximum participation points, attend every class, listen closely to your peers, and show an accurate and deep understanding of other points of view. No one earns participation points while absent, texting, or asleep. Raise your hand—even if you’re shy. Remember that *I want to hear what you’re thinking*. And I want the class to hear you, too.

**Artist’s Statement**: This is a 1000-word essay about who you are as a nonfiction writer.

CLASS SCHEDULE

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| *Date*  | *Reading Due* | *Writing Due* | *In-class Activities* |
| Tues. Aug 27  |  |  | Introductions, Syllabus |
| Thurs Aug 29 What is creative nonfiction? | *Truth* Part 1 (3-20), Gutkind (167-173), Dillard (140-142) and Schwartz (286-291).  | **Exp 1** answer Prompt 3 *Truth* 18. A list of topics you might research. | Discuss the reading.Read experiments aloud and practice critique. |
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| Tues Sep 3Kernel of truth. | *Truth* Ch. 3 (21-28), Kincaid (200-206), Sanders (224-228). | **Exp 2** Prompt 2 *Truth* Chapter 3. | Introduce *Brevity* and explain talk about the role of literary journals. |
| Thurs Sep 5 Flash Essays | “The Brief Essay” Section of the *Truth* anthology. **Any five** essays from *Brevity* or *Hippocampus* (the flash section). | **Exp** **3** Write down the titles of five essays & a note about how they convey meaning. Write a flash essay. | Analyze student choices from *Brevity****.*** What are the special demands of the brief essay? Students read their flash essays aloud. |
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| Tues Sep 10Memoir | *Truth* Ch. 7: “The Memoir Essay.” 65-73, “Notes of a Native Son” (*Truth* 111-126) and “Sparrow Needy” (Sch) | **Experiment 4**Prompt 1 *or* 2 *Truth* 73.  | Learn how memoirists research the context of their experience, identify their own flaws & connect personal experience to a larger meaning. |
| Thurs Sep 12 Memoir | *Truth* 252-262, “Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan and “The Body of a Poor Girl” by Sarah Smarsh (Scholar—via Amazon) | Sign up for a short workshop by today.  | Practice interviewing each other in preparation for interviewing a family member. |
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| Tues Sep 17 Literary Journalism | *Truth* Ch. 8: 74-83, “Where Worlds Collide” by Pico Iyer *Truth* 189-199 |  | Show how Iyer turns *observation* into *literary work.* Plan students’ literary journalism expeditions.  |
| Thurs Sep 19 | “Moby Duck” by Donovan Hohn (Scholar) |  | . |
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| Tues Sep 24 | *Truth* Ch. 6: “Discovery” | Work on drafts. | Working toward discovery |
| **Wed Sep 25** | **\*\*Group 1 & 2: Upload Short Workshop to Scholar by 11:59pm\*\*** |

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| Thurs Sep 26 | “Out There” by Jo Ann Beard and “The Knife” by Selzer (*Truth* 127-242) | **Experiment 5**Your literary journalism piece | Analytical discussion of the reading and of drafts students are working on. |
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| Tues Oct 1 | All essays from Group 1 | Critiques | Workshop Group 1 |
| **Wed Oct 9** | **\*\*Group 3, 4, 5, 6: Upload Short Workshop to Scholar by 11:59pm\*\*** |
| Thurs Oct 3 | All essays from Group 2 | Critiques | Workshop Group 2 |
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| Tues Oct 8 | “Three Pokes of a Thistle” by Nye, “Buckeye” by Sanders, “The Drama Bug” by Sedaris *Truth* 220-235 | Analytical discussion of the reading and of drafts students are working on. |
| Thurs Oct 10 | Essays from your group  | Critiques | Workshop Groups 3-6 |
| **Tues Oct 15 FALL RECESS: NO CLASS** |
| Thurs Oct 17Nature Writing | “Living Like Weasels” by Dillard & “The Courage of Turtles” by Hoagland *Truth* 140-188.  | **Experiment 6:** Research your own backyard | Discuss strategies for writing about nature. |
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| Tues Oct 22 | “What They Don’t Tell You About Hurricanes” by Philip Gerard and “The Clan of One-Breasted Women” by Williams *Truth* 151-262  | Discuss the way human dominance over nature complicates nature writing. |
| Thurs Oct 24 | “The Future of Environmental Essay” in *Terrain* |  |  |
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| Tues Oct 29 | Any essay in *Orion* (links on Scholar) | **Exp 7:** Write your own micro-nature-essay in light of what you read for today. |
| Thurs Oct 31 | *Truth* Ch 4. | **Exp 8:** Write a character sketch of any two characters in your long workshop.  |
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| Tues Nov 5 | *Truth* Ch 5. | **Exp 9:** any prompt in the chapter |
| **Wed Nov 6** | **\*\*Groups 7 & 8 upload Long Workshop to Scholar by 11:59pm\*\*** |
| Thurs Nov 7 | Visit from career counseling |
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| Tues Nov 12 | Essays from group 7 |  | Workshop Group 7 |
| **Wed Nov 13** | **\*\*Groups 9, 10, 11, 12 upload Long Workshop to Scholar by 11:59pm\*\*** |
| Thurs Nov 14 | Essays from group 8 |  | Workshop Group 8 |
| Tues Nov 19 | Essays from group 9 |  | Workshop Group 9 |
| Thurs Nov 21 | Essays from your group |  | Workshop groups 10-12 |
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| Tues Nov 26 | Revision Handout (Sch) | **Experiment 10:** how your writing developed during the class | Discuss Revision Plans |
| **THANKSGIVING RECESS: NO CLASS** |
| Tues Dec 3 |  |  |  |
| Thurs Dec 5 |  | **LATE WORK.** Revision videos**.** | Watch revision videos and presentations. |
| **Tuesday, December 10th 11:00am: Revisions & Artist Statements DUE** |

**University Policies**

**Disabilities:** In order for a student to receive an accommodation for a disability, that disability must be on record in the Office of Student Affairs, 3rd Floor, David Student Union (DSU). If you believe that you have a disability, please contact Jacquelyn Barnes, Student Disability Support Specialist in Student Affairs (594-7160) to discuss your needs. Students with documented disabilities are to *notify the instructor at least seven days prior to the point at which they require an accommodation* (the first day of class is recommended), in private, if accommodation is needed. The instructor will provide students with disabilities with all reasonable accommodations, *but students are not exempted from fulfilling the normal requirements of the course*. Work completed before the student notifies the instructor of his/her disability may be counted toward the final grade at the sole discretion of the instructor.

**Academic Support**: The **Center for Academic Success** offers free tutoring assistance for Christopher Newport students in several academic areas. Staff in the center offer *individual assistance* and/or workshops on various study strategies to help you perform your best in your courses. The center also houses the Alice F. Randall Writing Center. *Writing consultants can help you at any stage of the writing process,* from invention, to development of ideas, to polishing a final draft*.* The Center is *not a proofreading service*, but consultants can help you *to recognize and find grammar and punctuation errors in your work* as well as provide assistance with global tasks. Go as early in the writing process as you can and go often. You may visit the Center for Academic Success to request a tutor, meet with a consultant, pick up a schedule of workshops, or make an appointment to talk one-on-one with a University Fellow for Student Success. The Center is located in Christopher Newport Hall, 1st floor #123.

**Success**: I want you to succeed in this course and at Christopher Newport. I encourage you to come *see me during office hours or to schedule an appointment to discuss course content or to answer questions you have*. If I become concerned about your course performance, attendance, engagement, or well-being, I will speak with you first. I may *submit a referral* through our Captains Care Program. The referral will be received by the Center for Academic Success and other departments (Counseling Services, Office of Student Engagement). If you are an athlete, the Athletic Academic Support Coordinator will be notified. Someone will contact you to help determine what will help you succeed. Remember that this is a means for me to support you and help foster your success at Christopher Newport.

**Other Notes**

**Leading your own learning** means *you* decide how much learning happens in any course you take. You decide whether to scrape by, doing the bare minimum, or to take learning seriously and maximize the knowledge and skills you acquire. I expect students at CNU to do the latter, and maximize the learning that happens while fulfilling the requirements for this class. For example, this class offers opportunities to expand your vocabulary. Take these seriously and rather than hoping to learn by osmosis, write down unknown words. Ask for help if you don’t understand the dictionary definition. If there are grammatical principles you find hard, ask me or a Writing Center consultant. Make use of this chance to emerge from CNU confident in your ability to express your ideas.

**Communication** is important. You may send questions or concerns by email. If I don’t respond within 48 hours, I have either (a) missed your message (b) thought it was non-urgent and could quickly be answered in class or (c) found it inappropriate in content or tone (for example, I don’t respond to e-mails that address me as “u” or ignore the existence of apostrophes). In case (a), please resend your e-mail; in case (b), wait, and in (c), please revise and resend. If you were absent, please consult a fellow student about what you missed prior to emailing me. Also, come to office hours.

**Original Work.** All course work for this class must be original. specifically for this course. A paper created in other courses or for other purposes is considered plagiarism.

**Time spent on homework**. CNU estimates that full-time students should average fifteen hours in class and about twenty-five hours of study outside class. This means about five hours for each class. If you spend more than five hours per week on the reading for this class, come to me or go to the Center for Academic Success in order to find ways to complete the work more efficiently.

Please note that the rubrics reserve the **A** grade for *exceptional* work which *exceeds* the standards and expectations of this course. Completing **an assignment correctly and on time** guarantees only a C. To figure out your grade, you can enter or estimate your grades on the grades worksheet below.

Exp 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 2 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 3 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 4 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 5 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 6 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 7 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 8 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 9 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exp 10 \_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.02 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Crit 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.01 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Short workshop \_\_\_\_\_ x 0.15 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Long workshop\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.25 =\_\_\_\_\_

Revision & Pres\_\_\_\_\_ x 0.1= \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Participation \_\_\_\_\_ x 0.1 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Artist’s Statement \_\_\_ x 0.1 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**SUM: + \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**