

Fall 2015

ENGL 6154

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UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

English 6154-601
Graduate Nonfiction Workshop
3.0 semester hours
LA 296
Fall 2015

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The day I am no more than a writer, I will cease to write.
--Albert Camus

My idea of a writer: someone interested in everything. . . . I think narrative is what lasts.
--Susan Sontag

I think, especially in nonfiction writing, it's demanded that women unburden ourselves, that we splay ourselves open and let you see our bloody guts. But to what end? I'll show you some of my bloody guts, but there's going to be, I hope, when I'm at my best, a larger sense of purpose to the writing. You have to look both inward and outward.
--Roxane Gay

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A graduate workshop in nonfiction writing.

COURSE GOALS

1. Experimentation with techniques involved in writing literary nonfiction.
2. Refinement of skills involving ideas, research, shape, language, example, detail, and nuance.
3. Refinement of critical and teaching skills through self-selection and presentation of a work of nonfiction of each participant's choice.
4. Refinement of an individual vision and voice within a community of writers.

REQUIREMENTS DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE COURSE GOALS

1. Participants will draft three works of nonfiction—and substantially revise one of these—as well as draft a work of brief nonfiction and do occasional in-class freewriting from prompts.
2. Participants will incorporate research and reporting in one or more of these works.
3. Participants will type ample, mindful critiques and line edit peers' drafts and give and receive constructive oral criticism in workshop discussions.
4. Each participant will select, teach, and profess a work of nonfiction to the workshop.

PARTICIPANT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Participants will become more skillful creative writers.
2. Participants will become more resourceful reporters and literary journalists.
3. Participants will become better constructive critics of their own writing and the writing of their peers.
4. Participants will become more knowledgeable of the genre and sub-genres of literary nonfiction and its subgenres and more astute readers of diverse work in the field.

READINGS

1. A broad selection of nonfiction readings and writing resources posted on Moodle.
2. Moore, Dinty W., Ed. *Brevity: A Journal of Concise Nonfiction*. Online.
3. Published work assigned each week by faculty and participants.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Assignments: Three works of nonfiction and a significant revision of one of these, approximately 25-30 pages total. I'll be happy to discuss prospective essay—or excerpt—topics, but participants are free to decide what their subjects and approach will be as well as the lengths of individual works—so long as the overall approximate page total is met. Early in the semester, participants also will be asked to draft a work of brief nonfiction (about two and a half pages, 750 words or less).

Research: At least one of the three works (NF 1, 2, or 3) should incorporate some kind of research. That is, the writer should gain and share knowledge in the process of writing the work, learning something she or he didn't know beforehand, something necessary to the completion of the work, preferably something that causes the writer's gaze to track outward toward some aspect of the world beyond her or him. The research can be formal, involving print and/or electronic resources, or more physical in nature, involving field observation and practical investigation, legwork, interviewing, and so on. Ideally, this work should be primarily about a subject—some distinctive aspect of or issue in contemporary New Orleans or the larger world, for instance—even though the point of view of the piece may well be first person. **Note:** Participants in the nonfiction concentration who have met this research requirement in a previous nonfiction workshop are, if they wish, excused from meeting it in this workshop—while any participant inclined to write only researched nonfiction is encouraged to experiment by writing at least one work in which research isn't central. Participants are free to write exclusively researched nonfiction if they wish, however.

Workshop vibe and protocol: The overall goal for this workshop is to be a supportive, helpful environment in which each participant feels safe and free to share work with full confidence that it will be received non-judgmentally and with an open mind and due respect. The aim of our written and oral criticism is judiciously to critique the writing and not the writer. To that end, during discussion of a draft, we will be strict in not addressing the writer and in confining our comments to the work on the page. If erring can't be entirely avoided—how can it not be since we're all flawed and small in some way?—I urge that we err on the side of generosity as opposed to its opposite.

Critiques: Because participants' writing peers are expected to depend on their honest (though tactful), constructive commentary and participation, it is important that all of us be well prepared for critiques and that we write specific responses to others' works in progress. These typed critiques need be no more than a double-spaced page in length and should be submitted in two copies—one for the writer whose draft is critiqued and one for me. Participants should return to the writer their notated, line-edited hard copies of the writer's draft after we've discussed it in workshop.

Participation: Other appropriate participation includes attending regularly and punctually and having all assigned drafts and critiques completed before class. Pertinent and courteous participation in oral discussion also is an expected part of each participant's work in the course.

Class Format: Primarily discussion. We will be critical resources for each other in the process of strengthening everyone's writing, and everyone is expected to participate in discussions. We will analyze the purposes, ideas, research, and artistry of works by workshop participants and give brief attention to works by professional authors chosen by participants and faculty.

Presentations: Once during the semester, each of you will make a short presentation on, profess, and lead discussion of a relatively short work (or works) representative of a subgenre of nonfiction of your choice. Related to this work, you also will give the group a writing prompt for in-class writing to follow.

In-class writing: I hope that we will have time toward the end of some of our meetings to write together in class in response to optional prompts that I or the person presenting that evening will offer.

Attendance and punctuality: Participants are expected to be consistently present and on time in order to benefit their writing peers and to contribute positively to the learning atmosphere in the workshop. Workshop discussions cannot be recreated or "made up." Except in rare special instances, absences and lateness are unacceptable, not least because they prevent participants from fulfilling their responsibilities to their fellow writers in the group. Therefore, unexcused absences and lateness will adversely affect a participant's grade. Please contact me, preferably well beforehand, about any circumstance that will cause you to be tardy or absent.

Conferences: I'm always very interested in talking with you. Please stop by during office hours or make an appointment any time you'd like to discuss your work or anything else pertinent to your participation in the workshop.

Evaluation:

- **Participation and critiques (10%)**
- **Brief nonfiction (10%)**
- **Presentation (10%)**
- **Drafts of nonfiction 1, 2, and 3 (60%)**
- **Revision (10%)**

Accommodations: It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to <http://www.ods.uno.edu>.

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic

dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at <http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu>.

ENGL 6154 CALENDAR, SUBMISSION SCHEDULE AND DUE DATES—F2015

Note: Participants are expected to photocopy (as opposed to e-mail) their submissions and distribute these hard copies to the other participants during the class that meets the week before the class in which their submission will receive workshop critique and discussion.

- Aug. 25 Introductions. Syllabus and calendar.
Brief nonfiction: samples to be emailed beforehand.
Readings—Randy
In-class writing
- Sept. 1 NF 1 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Background readings about NF: samples to be emailed beforehand.
Reading—
In-class writing
- 8 NF 1 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Reading—
In-class writing
- 15 NF 1 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Reading—
In-class writing
- 22 NF 1 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Reading—
In-class writing
- 29 NF 1 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Reading—
In-class writing
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- Oct. 6 NF 2 workshop: Three drafts—

Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.

- 13 NF 2 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Reading—
In-class writing
- 20 NF 2 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Reading—
In-class writing
- 27 NF 2 workshop: Three drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
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- Nov. 3 NF 3 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Reading—
In-class writing
- 10 NF 3 workshop: Three drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
- 17 NF 3 workshop: Three drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
- 24 NF 3 workshop: Two drafts—
Annotated drafts and two copies of critiques due.
Readings (2)—
-

- Dec. 1 Revision workshop: Five revisions—
Evaluations.
- 8 Revision workshop: Five revisions—
Refreshments.

