

## Course Syllabus

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### Course Information

**HUAS 6355.501**

**Creating Nonfiction**

**Fall 2017**

**JO 4.708**

**Monday: 7:00 to 9:45**

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### Professor Contact Information

**Betty Wiesepepe**

**972-883-6352**

**[Bet@utdallas.edu](mailto:Bet@utdallas.edu)**

**Office: JO 5.205**

**Office hours: Monday: 4:00 to 5:00 by appointment.**

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### Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

Graduate level standing.

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### Course Description

This class is an investigation in workshop format of a genre of literature known as creative nonfiction, a genre that incorporates traditional forms such as biography, autobiography, story, essay, and journalism. Students enrolled in this class will examine characteristics that define this genre and explore the boundaries that separate it from other forms of creative writing. Class participants will read and analyze nonfiction compositions written by established writers as well as work by student writers. Each student in this class will create three original nonfiction compositions and three peer critiques. Each student will make 1 oral presentation about the work of an established creative nonfiction author and will choose and lead the discussion of a story by that author.

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### Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

1. Through discussion and application, students will demonstrate their knowledge of the creative nonfiction genre and basic creative writing techniques.
  2. Via a variety of assigned exercises, students will demonstrate their ability to assess what materials in their personal experience (events, characters, expertise, fields of interest) make good subjects for creative nonfiction compositions.
  3. Students will create 3 original nonfiction compositions and will submit at least 1 for possible publication.
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### Required Textbooks and Materials

Dinty Moore, *The Truth of the Matter* (2007 edition).

B. Minh Nguyen & Porter Shreve, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction, I & Eye*.

Jerome Stern, *Making Shapely Fiction* (any edition).

William Strunk & E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* (any edition).

Students will also provide photocopies of at least 1 original story or essay to each member of the class for workshop and will turn in 2 copies of each original story and each written

critique. This means that students enrolling in this class should be prepared to incur some photocopying expenses.

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## **Assignments & Academic Calendar**

### **AUGUST 21: INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITING**

**Discuss:** What is creative nonfiction, and how does it differ from fiction and other forms of nonfiction? What forms of writing fall into the creative nonfiction category? How true to the facts of an event does a creative nonfiction essay have to be?

**Read:** Moore: "Preface," "Introduction," & Lott, "Toward a Definition of Creative Nonfiction." Nguyen & Shrive: "Preface," "Introduction" & Joan Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook."

### **AUGUST 28: MATERIAL & VOICE**

**Discuss:** What forms are available to creative nonfiction writers? What basic assumption lies at the heart of these forms? Are any subjects off-limits?

**Read:** Moore, Ch. 1, 2 & 5; Mimi Schwartz, "Memoir? Fiction? Where's the Line?"; Beard, "Out There." Nguyen & Shreve: Kidder, "Making the Truth Believable."

**Assignment Due:** Choose one of the exercises from "Writing Prompts" at the end of Chs. 2 or 5 in the Moore book or develop one of the exercises you began in last week's class (2 to 4 pages).

### **SEPTEMBER 4: SCHOOL HOLIDAY—No Class.**

### **SEPTEMBER 11: WRITING ABOUT YOURSELF (Memoir & Personal Essay)**

**Discuss:** How do the memoir and the personal essay differ? How can a writer express his or her personal vision, experience, opinions without appearing egotistical? What is the role of conflict, ambiguity and contradiction in these forms? What basic assumption lies at the heart of such forms? Are any subjects off-limits?

**Read:** Moore: Ch. 7 & Nye, "Three Pokes of a Thistle." Nguyen & Shreve: Lopate, "On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character."

**Assignment Due:** Choose an exercise from "Writing Prompts" in Moore, Ch. 7 or continue an exercise begun in a previous class.

### **SEPTEMBER 18: AUDIENCE, THEME, & PURPOSE**

**Discuss:** What is your purpose for writing a piece of creative nonfiction? Who is your targeted audience? How important is organization? What are the guidelines we should use when commenting on classmates' stories?

**Read:** Moore: Chs. 3 & 4; Gutkin, "Difficult Decisions" & Williams, "The Clan of the One Breasted Women." Stern: 224-32, 239-40, 110-13, 211-12, 218-19, 143-145.

**Assignment Due:** 2 copies of **FIRST DRAFT OF ESSAY/STORY #1**—one to present to the professor and one to trade in a blind draw with a classmate.

## **SEPTEMBER 25: REVISION & STUDENT CONFERENCES**

**Discuss:** What part does revision play in the creative process? How should we go about the task of revising?

**Read:** Moore, Chs. 6, 8, 10, Drummond, “Alive” & Dillard, “Seeing.”

**In-Class:** Sign up for personal conference with the professor.

**Assignment Due:** 2 copies of **CRITIQUE OF A STUDENT ESSAY/STORY**.

## **OCTOBER 2: NO CLASS (Travel day from TACWT for professor)**

**Read:** Moore: Shields, “Tattoos.”

**Assignment: Work on revising ESSAY/STORY #1**

## **OCTOBER 9: WRITING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE**

**Discuss:** Do all our memoirs have to be about the I? How can we make our characters come to life on the page? How should we go about conducting interviews?

**Read:** Moore: Ch. 4 & 9 & Hemley, “Reading History to my Mother.”

**In-Class:** Practice workshop of assigned essay.

**Assignment Due:** One copy of **FINAL DRAFT ESSAY/STORY #1**.

## **OCTOBER 16: WRITING ABOUT PLACE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

**Read:** Nguyen & Shreve: 81-82 & 281-82. Story or essay selected by student presenter.

**In-class:** Workshop of student essays; student presentations.

**Assignment Due:** **BEGIN ESSAY/STORY #2**.

## **OCTOBER 23: ALTERNATIVE NONFICTION FORMS**

**Read:** Story or essay selected by student presenter.

**Discuss:** Forms of Lyric Essay, Braided Essay, Short Short Essay.

**In-Class:** Workshop of student essays.

**Assignment:** 2 copies of **FIRST DRAFT OF ESSAY/STORY #2**.

## **OCTOBER 30: WRITING ABOUT CREATIVITY, ART & SPORTS**

**Read:** Nguyen & Shreve: 143-44. Story or essay selected by student presenter.

**Discuss:** How does a writer use the work of another artist in an original piece of writing without being sued? How does one become an arts reviewer?

**In-Class:** Workshop of student essays; student presentation.

**Assignment Due:** Two copies of a **CRITIQUE OF STUDENT ESSAY/STORY #2**.

## **NOVEMBER 6: WRITING ABOUT HISTORY, NATURE AND SCIENCE**

**Discuss:** How important is research? How much material can be quoted without permission?

**In-Class:** Workshop of student stories; Student presentation.

**Read:** Nguyen & Shreve, pg. 143-44. Story or essay selected by student presenter.

**Assignment Due:** **BEGIN ESSAY/STORY #3**.

## **NOVEMBER 13: WRITING WITH HUMOR**

**Read:** Story or essay selected by a student presenter.

**In-Class:** Workshop of student essays; Student presentation.

**Assignment:** 2 copies of **CRITIQUE OF ESSAY/STORY #3.**

## **NOVEMBER 20: FALL BREAK—NO CLASSES**

## **NOVEMBER 27: METHODS AND MARKETS**

**Discuss:** How important is a title? How do we go about submitting work for publication? What markets are available to creative nonfiction writers? What procedures should we follow?

**Read;** Story or essay selected by student presenter.

**In-Class:** Workshop of student essays; Student presentation.

**Assignment:** Research possible publication venue.

## **DECEMBER 4: WORKSHOP OF STUDENT STORIES**

**Discuss:** How can we sustain and encourage our desire to write after this class is over? How can we use what we have learned in this class in our future teaching professions?

**In- Class:** Workshop of student essays.

**Assignment:** **FINAL DRAFT OF ESSAY/STORY #2 OR ESSAY/STORY #3.**

**DECEMBER 8: In place of a final exam, each student will submit one creative nonfiction piece for publication and will present proof of submission to the professor on this date**

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## **Grading Policy**

Grades will be based upon: attendance, classroom citizenship, and participation in workshop sessions—20%; Written Critiques—30%; Original stories/essays—30%; Oral presentation—20%. Students receive grades only on the final drafts of stories/ essays, but failure to perform exercises or to turn in first drafts will result in the grade of the final draft being lowered one full letter grade.

## **Course & Instructor Policies**

Students will be expected to read and be prepared to discuss all assigned readings and to complete all assigned writing exercises. Failure to perform assignments will have a negative effect upon the student's class participation grade.

During the course of the semester, each student will write 3 nonfiction stories/essays and will revise 2. Students will also write a 2 to 3 page critique` of another student's story/essay on 3 separate occasions. **NOTE: Compositions written prior to this class may not be submitted to fulfill the requirements of this course.**

All written assignments, including exercises, must be typed, double spaced and legible. Work submitted after the due date will be accepted, but the grade on the assignment will be lowered one full letter grade, and the professor will not make editorial comments.

**NOTE: The professor will not accept handwritten work or work submitted by email.**

Class attendance and participation in discussions and workshop sessions are mandatory.

Attendance will be checked each week, and a student who misses more than 3 classes should not expect to receive a passing grade in the course.

**NOTE: No make-up work will be assigned, no extra credit projects will be offered, and no absences will be excused except those mandated by the administration of this university. No exams will be given in this workshop class.**

In lieu of a final exam, each student will select one of the 3 original stories produced in this class to submit to a journal for possible publication.

**NOTE: Descriptions and timelines in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.**

**UTD syllabus-policies may be accessed at: <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>, including recent information about campus carry and the sharing of confidential information.**

Be aware that, per university policy, faculty members are now required to report information about sexual misconduct to the UT Dallas Title IX Coordinator. This means that any incident or information a professor has about such an incident must be reported to the Title IX Coordinator along with the name of the students involved. Students who wish to have confidential discussions of incidents related to sexual harassment or sexual misconduct should contact the Student Counseling Center (972-883-2527) the Women's Center (972-883-8255) a health care provider in the Student Health Center (972-883-2747), a clergyperson of the student's choice, or an off-campus resource. Students who are sexually assaulted, harassed or victims of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, or stalking are encouraged to report these incidents directly to the UT Dallas Police (972-883-2222) or to the Title IX Coordinator (972-883-2218).

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