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CRWR 312A.01: Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop

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ENCR 312, Autumn 2021
Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop
Classroom: LA 102
Instructor: Chris Dombrowski
Assistant Director, Creative Writing Program

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs, 1:30-3:30
christopher.dombrowski@mso.umt.edu

A Thousand Pairs of Shoes or No Worthy Problem:

Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop

“Most of us cut a thousand pairs of shoes before the elves begin to sew.” —*Lewis Hyde*

“No worthy problem is ever solved on the plan of its original conception.” —*Einstein*

“An essay is a child of uncertainty.” —*Andre Aciman*

We are privileged to meet once a week for a spell to discuss the practice of nonfiction writing. Creative nonfiction is a term of apparent ambiguity, thank goodness, but our collective aim here is clear: not to extoll some predetermined aesthetic but rather to help each writer in the workshop discover/achieve/honor their own (albeit ever-evolving) artistic aim; and to curate an environment that allows each writer to create their most inspired and envisioned work.

Most weeks, before turning our attention to student prose for critique, we will examine an approach to and element of creative nonfiction. This brief craft study may lead us to a generative “Start,” an exercise that students will engage with outside of class in the hope that the informal writing will feed an upcoming essay. These exercises and assignments are intended to spark our primal inclination toward story, to inspire possibility, and to tease out permission—not to serve as a requirement or rubric for workshop assessment. These will be turned in and checked for completion, or presented aloud, but not formally evaluated.

Students will be expected to produce of new prose each week, and complete **two essays** of substantial length to for workshop, a **two-page imitation**, as well as a final portfolio, which will

consist of a **deep-dive revision**. Learning to read as a writer is pertinent to any growth in the discipline; as such, we will read, in addition to the required texts, a great deal of published writing that will arrive by way of handout or scanned PDF. Perhaps most importantly, your required reading will include student writing produced for this class. (Grading and evaluation criteria below.)

Deep engagement with your fellow students' essays is paramount to the workshop's success. Readers will be expected to provide profuse written comments, after multiple readings, on printed manuscript pages (unless some newfangled digitized deal is preferred); outside of the required texts, printing manuscript pages will be the only "cost" students will incur. It is expected that all class members will contribute to the workshop's safe and rigorous environment (my hope is that we will come to form a "community") and treat work, comments, and opinions with respect and proper privacy.

In addition to rigor, I hope that we can respond to our fellow writers' work with a good dose of innocence, per William Kittredge's definition: "Innocence means responding to life with all our socially-learned blinders off, then being willing to acknowledge our responses, and speak about what we really think, instead of what we're supposed to think."

Beyond class meetings, students are encouraged to schedule individual conferences during office hours. I'm also very happy to accommodate by appointment at another time/day. Finally, my hope is that each student might experience a productive and enriching semester. This is your workshop; comments and suggestions, especially those delivered with kindness, are most welcome.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

****Student Essays****

The Writing Life, Annie Dillard

Art of Memoir, Mary Karr

A Few Very Short Sentences About Writing, Verlyn Klinkenborg

**** You'll also need to purchase a journal/notebook****

ON GRADING:

You will be graded on your active participation in class, your writing exercises, your improvement from draft to revision, and your attendance. **DO NOT MISS MORE THAN TWO (2) CLASSES OR YOUR GRADE WILL BE AFFECTED.**

Think of your overall grade in this class as a pie, a pear-blackberry pie, at that. $\frac{1}{3}$ of this pie is based on your active participation; if you show up well-prepped, ready to comment constructively on the work of your peers, and “better the quality of the workshop,” to amend a phrase by Thoreau, you’ll do just fine. The **second** $\frac{1}{3}$ of this pie is simply based on completing all writing assignments (including student critiques), on time, a phrase which is worth repeating: *on time*. The **final** $\frac{1}{3}$ of the pie is based on your portfolio, which is detailed above; demonstrate improvement, the willingness to experiment with language, and respond to critiques, and, again, you’ll be in good shape.

ON COVID:

Classroom Safety and COVID-19 Protocols

- Mask use is required within the classroom
- Each student is provided with a cleaning kit. The expectation is that students will clean their personal work space when they arrive for class, and before they leave the classroom
- Classrooms may have one-way entrances / exits to minimize crowding
- Avoid congregating outside the classroom before and after class
- Specific seating arrangements will be used to ensure social distancing and support contact tracing efforts
- Class attendance will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom (which requires mask removal)
- Stay home if you feel sick and/or if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms
- Up-to-Date COVID-19 Information from the University of Montana
 - UM Coronavirus Website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus>
 - UM COVID-19 Fall 2020 website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus/fall2020.php>
- Remain vigilant outside the classroom in mitigating the spread of COVID-19!
- We may have to go Zooming, so be prepared to be flexible.

NOTE

No class:

Thursday, November 11 (Veterans’ Day)

Thursday, November 25 (Thanksgiving)

“All flourishing is mutual.” — Robin Wall Kimmerer