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CRWR 512.01: Nonfiction Workshop

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CRWR 512—Nonfiction Workshop, Sec. 1, Autumn 2021

Course Information

Monday 6-8:50p

LA 210 [or Casa Blunt, 1901 ½ S. 4th St. W.]

Contact Information

Prof. Judy Blunt

LA 112; email for appointment

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Course Description

This semester, our nonfiction class will study the art and craft of nonfiction, both as readers and as writers. The workshop is our primary focus in this class, and to that end students will write at least 40 pages of nonfiction, at least three pieces of which will be offered for review in workshop. No more than 20 pages per workshop, please. One of the essays must be significantly revised or expanded by the end of the course. Present all work in standard format, with a title and page numbers.

Our workshop format is that of a community of writers working to give the most useful feedback on the fundamental issues of memory, meaning and method in writing from the first-person point of view. The focus of the workshop will be to assist in revision with an eye toward creating publishable works. Writers scheduled for workshop are responsible for emailing their submissions to everyone 5 days before your workshop date. There are no exceptions to this rule, so plan ahead. Readers have a choice of printing out and marking up the manuscripts to return to the author after workshop, or using an online editing program to make inline comments and emailing it to the author. In addition, you'll be writing a page of overall comments and questions, your general response to the work and suggestions for revision. This is completed BEFORE workshop, as it becomes the basis for your class contribution. If we're meeting face to face, bring two copies to class. The writer will keep one copy and I will keep the other. If we're working remotely, email copies to both the writer and me directly after class. Constructive criticism of the story, its diction, organization, development and voice are welcome, but individuals are responsible for fully editing and proofreading work so we are not forced to sideline issues of content and style for those of grammar, syntax and spelling.

Course Outcomes

- The study and mastery of nonfiction craft and technique
- Professional editorial response to peer manuscripts
- Compilation of 40 pages of new nonfiction work
- Thorough revision of one of your workshop submissions

Required Reading

Self directed study: In addition to your writing this semester, select four nonfiction books for a self-directed reading project. You can explore a genre, an author, a theme or a topic—but there should be a cohesive idea behind your choices and the project should speak to your own interests or goals. You'll be asked to give a thumbnail synopsis of your project and the four books at our second class. An annotated bibliography of the books is due with your final portfolio.

Outside readings as assigned: Because our workshop is small this semester, we have some time to play. At least once during the semester, on a schedule we shall devise, I will ask you to submit a reading packet [15-25 pages] to the class for discussion during regular workshop. This should be material that engaged you, surprised you, made you think, or made you fall in love with an author. It can be a writer we've all heard of or someone new on the scene, stand alone essay or an excerpt from a longer work. Crunching genres? Bring it on. Outrageous or funny or simply delightful use of language? Let's have it. Poor example of narrative that still got published? We'll puzzle it through. Just no academic treatises or traditional journalism. Excellent examples abound, I'm sure, but this is creative nonfiction and that's what's on the menu.

Attendance

Attendance and participation: There is no way to make up a missed class. More than two absences and you may be asked to drop the course. Attendance—whether tardy or absent—will affect your grade, as it's a significant part of your class participation. If you know you will be absent for one or more classes, meet with me well in advance to make arrangements. All students, both the shy and the bold, are required to participate in our class discussion. If you're shy, make a determined effort. If you're bold, limit yourself to give others room to jump in.

Grading

At our final class meeting, I'll collect your portfolios, which shall include your revised essay, annotated bibliography—and any new materials you submit to meet the page requirement. This is a selective graduate course. Attendance issues aside, high grades will be earned by all students who complete assignments on time; who pull their weight in workshop with respectful, honest, well-reasoned written and spoken comments; whose contribution to classroom discussions shows thought and preparation; and who turn in a final portfolio that reflects a mastery of nonfiction writing, craft and style.

Other Information

Plagiarism is defined in the [UM Student Conduct Code](#) as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. In this course it will result in a failing grade. Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. As the semester progresses, we, as a class, may agree to alter or amend this syllabus/schedule to suit our changing needs. In-person classes may change to ZOOM classes as necessary, with no change of attendance and participation requirements.