

## CREATIVE WRITING: INTERMEDIATE NONFICTION WRITING

ENGLISH 301

ALISON DEMING

Wednesday, 12:30 – 3:00 p.m.

Fall 2006

ML 201

This is a course in literary nonfiction writing. Literary nonfiction is a broad and loosely defined genre of writing that includes memoir, personal essay, nature writing, travel writing, science writing, cultural/art criticism, persuasive writing (for social or political impact), and literary journalism. Literary nonfiction draws upon personal experience and memory, as well as on researched material, and it may use techniques from other genres: scene, character, dialogue, narrative development from fiction; and imagery, figurative language and associative development from poetry. I will encourage you to try your hand at different strategies: a narrative essay (tells a story) and a meditative essay (thinks out loud on the page following the drift of the mind), as well as short exercises to develop your craft. I will give you specific editorial suggestions for revising and polishing your essays. I will expect your attention to language, voice and structure to be as keen as your attention to subject matter; it is both *what* you say and *how* you go about saying it that matter in a literary work; with this idea begins the study of the writer's craft.

**Prerequisite: You must have successfully completed one of the following courses to be eligible to take ENG 301: ENG 207, 209, 210 or 306.**

### REQUIREMENTS:

#### *Workshop*

You will each write **one 2 - 3 page essay and two 8 – 12 page workshop essays** this semester. Short writing exercises will not be graded, though I will ask you to hand them in or read them to the class from time to time. The longer essays will be passed in to me and to your classmates for workshop discussion. **Please make 20 copies for distribution on the due dates assigned for your group. Manuscripts must be titled, double-spaced and the pages numbered. Please be sure your name is on the essay.** You will distribute copies of your essay on the due dates; the essay will be discussed on the following week. **If you do not meet the deadline on the schedule, your essay draft will not be discussed in workshop.** Among concerns for workshop discussion will be the intent of the essay, length of the essay, editorial suggestions for revision in terms of language, structure, theme and voice. **One week after your essay has been discussed in class you will hand in a revision to me for grading.**

You will also be responsible for reading the workshop essays of other students and coming to class prepared to offer constructive criticism that will help the writer in the process of revision. In addition to offering commentary in class, please write a one-page response to each essay and return it with comments on the page to the writer. Your comments should address such questions as:

- 1) What is the writer trying to do with the essay?

- 2) What techniques, devices, strategies does he or she employ toward that end?
- 3) How effective are these devices in carrying out the writer's intent?
- 4) What's unclear to you that the writer might clarify in a revision?
- 5) What suggestions can you offer for revision?
- 6) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the essay?

**These commentaries are a course requirement, and I may ask you from time to time to hand them in.**

### *Reading*

Required reading:

Hand-outs will be given in class.

*The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, editors Robert Finch and John Elder, NY: Norton, 2002 (available in the textbook department, UA Bookstore)

The assigned readings are intended to offer you model essays from among the most notable American nonfiction writers, past and present, in order to encourage you to look outward to the world around you for subject matter, to explore how language and literature shape our relationship with nature and how nature shapes our relationship with the inner life. Whatever your goals as a writer may be, the skills of careful field observation, writing with sensory images, reflecting upon the patterns and meaning that arise from study of fundamental biological processes, will serve you well as a developing writer.

### *"STYLE TALKS: Student Presentations"*

Each student will be asked, according to the attached schedule, to make one 5-minute presentation on an essay from *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. You may choose any essay that is not already assigned by me for class reading. The presentation will include a short reading of a notable passage from the author's work and an explication of the elements of style in the work that you admire (e.g., narrative voice, figurative language, diction, use of scene or dialogue, description, thematic force, essay structure). Think of this as an exercise in stylistic appreciation in which you are identifying strategies that you hope to adopt for your own writing.

### *Conferences*

Please come by my office for a conference as often as you need to. I can help you generate ideas, narrow or broaden your focus, locate research materials or improve your writing process. Feel free to email me with questions about your work-in-progress.

### **GRADING**

Your grade will be the average of grades you receive on your two revised essays, provided that your attendance and participation are regular. Since this is a workshop, each participant is responsible for becoming a reader, audience and editor for each other participant in the class. I expect you to take this responsibility seriously and to treat your colleagues in the class with respect, offering detailed and constructive suggestions on

works put forward for discussion. If your attendance and participation fall, so will your grade. Violations of the Student Code of Conduct and Code of Academic Integrity will not be tolerated. Arriving late, leaving early, eating, sleeping, reading non-course materials, taking or making cell phone calls, or carrying on conversations that disrupt class discussion are unacceptable. I will consider rude, ridiculing, insulting or abusive comments on student work to be disruptive classroom behavior, and such behavior will be addressed according to university policy. You are expected to behave in a professional and respectful manner, especially towards people with whom you disagree. I will hold myself to these same standards.

Plagiarism is a serious offence and will result in your failing the course. Plagiarism means “intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own work.” It is wonderful and necessary to be influenced by other writers, but always acknowledge on the page when you are borrowing from another writer.

I will award “Incompletes” only under very exceptional circumstances and then only when all but a minor portion of the course work has been completed.

#### **ABSENCES**

Attendance is mandatory. More than 2 unexcused absences and you will be dropped from the course, unless you have discussed exceptional circumstances with me.

**OFFICE HOURS**  
**ML 438**

**Email: [aldeming@aol.com](mailto:aldeming@aol.com)**

**Wednesday, 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**  
**Thursday, 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**or by appointment**  
**626-0799**

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**English 301**  
**Alison Deming**

**Fall 2006**

**August 23.** Introductions. Review syllabus and course requirements. Discuss Joan Didion's essay "At The Dam" and Virginia Woolf's "Death of a Moth."

**READING ASSIGNMENT:**

Read essays in text: George Caitlin, "Letters and Notes on the Manner, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians . . ."; Ellen Meloy, "The Flora and Fauna of Las Vegas"; N. Scott Momaday, "The Way to Rainy Mountain"; Barbara Kingsolver, "High Tide in Tucson."

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:**

Write a 2- 3 page essay modeled on "At the Dam" that describes a place and reflects upon why that place is important to you.

**August 30.** Discuss readings and writing assignment. Craft lecture on nonfiction writing (narrative and meditative essays).

**READING ASSIGNMENT:** Read essays in text: Peter Matthiessen, from "The Tree Where Man was Born"; "Gary Snyder, "Ancient Forests of the Far West"; Maxine Hong Kingston, "A City Person Encountering Nature"; Annie Dillard, "Total Eclipse."

**September 6.** Discuss readings.

**Style Talks:** 5-minute presentations by Group 4

Due: Group 1, Essay 1

**September 13.** Discuss: Group 1, Essay 1

Due: Group 2, Essay 1

**September 20.** Discuss: Group 2, Essay 1

Due: Group 3, Essay 1

Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 1

**September 27.** Discuss: Group 3, Essay 1

Due: Group 4, Essay 1

Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 1

**October 4.** Discuss: Group 4, Essay 1

Due: Revision, Group 3, Essay 1

**READING ASSIGNMENT:** Read essays in text: Scott Russell Sanders, "Buckeye"; Terry Tempest Williams, "The Clan of the One-Breasted Women"; Vicki Hearne "Calling Animals by Name"; Evelyn White, "Black Women and the Wilderness."

**October 11.** Discuss Readings.

**Style Talks:** 5-minute presentations by Group 3

Due: Revision, Group 4, Essay 1

**October 18. Classroom Presentation: Visitor.** In-class writing assignment.

**STYLE TALKS:** 5-minute presentations by Group 2.

Due: Group 1, Essay 2

**October 25.** Discuss: Group 1, Essay 2

Due: Group 2, Essay 2.

**November 1.** Discuss: Group 2, Essay 2.

Due: Group 3, Essay 2

Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 2

**November 8.** Discuss: Group 3, Essay 2

Due: Group 4, Essay 2

Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 2

**November 15.** Discuss: Group 4, Essay 2

Due: Revision: Group 3, Essay 2

**November 22. HAPPY THANKSGIVING. No class.**

**November 29.** Due: Revision, Group 4, Essay 2

**Style Talks:** 5-minute presentations by Group 1.

**December 6. LAST CLASS**

Student readings

Course summary and evaluation