

ADVANCED NONFICTION WRITING

ENGLISH 501
Wednesday, 3:00 – 5:30 p.m.
Harvill 413

SPRING 2007
Alison Deming

This is a course in Literary Nonfiction Writing—essays or longer works based on personal experience, imaginative reflection and researched material. I use the word “literary” to indicate that I expect each writer’s attention to language and form (structure, development, voice) to be as keen as his or her attention to subject matter and theme. Essays may fall into the category of memoir, personal essay, lyric essay, travel writing, nature writing, science writing, literary journalism or art/cultural criticism. Or your work may defy or combine such categories. I will encourage you to do what you do best and to develop the craft that will expand the possibilities for your work. I will give you specific editorial suggestions for revising and polishing your essays, as well as for working towards a thesis-length manuscript. The workshop this semester will have a thematic focus on culture, featuring readings that define culture and explore the process of its evolution and influence. The goal is to explore how cultural perspective can enlarge the individual narrative voice and formal strategies of the nonfiction writer.

REQUIREMENTS:

Workshop

You will write and have discussed in workshop three essays, each having a focus on an aspect of culture addressed in readings I’ll distribute in class. The first essay will address culture as expressed in the arts or popular culture; the second essay, culture as a shared set of social values (e.g., ethnic, national, gender, religious, or family heritage; your choice here—the goal is to explore culture as a shared set of norms and meanings); and the third essay will address an interrelationship between nature and culture (the influence of nature upon human culture, and/or the influence of human culture upon nature). For those of you engaged in an ongoing project, I invite you to adapt each of these three approaches to your works-in-progress, hopefully opening up new dimensions in familiar material. Please feel free to discuss with me how this might apply to your work. In general, the length of each essay should be 12 – 20 pages. You may combine several short pieces (collage or lyric essay) to achieve this page total. Due dates and procedures for workshop essays follow on the next page. Please see me for a conference or contact me by email whenever you wish.

Revisions

One week after your essay has been discussed in class, you will hand in a revision for grading. I will not accept late work, unless you have made prior arrangements with me.

GRADING

You will receive the “K” for the semester, signifying that you are working on an ongoing project. “K” will convert to a letter grade given by your advisor when you complete your final project. I will give grades on your three essay revisions. Since this is a workshop, each participant is responsible for becoming a reader, audience and editor for each other

participant. I expect you to take this responsibility seriously and to treat your colleagues in the class with respect, offering detailed and constructive suggestions for revision on works put forward for discussion. In addition to offering commentary in class, please write a one-page written response to each essay citing its strengths and weaknesses, and making comments on the page, to be returned to the writer. Your critical and creative capacities as a writer will grow in direct proportion to your capacities as a reader and editor.

Plagiarism is a serious offence and will result in your failing the course. Cite your sources and influences, whenever possible, within the flow of the essay. You can resort to footnotes, if needed, but generally a creative piece will not require them.

I will award the grade of "I" (Incomplete) 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 two unexcused absences and you will be dropped from the course, unless you have discussed exceptional circumstances with me.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURE:

Please make sufficient copies (14) of your essay for all members of the class. Put your name at the top of the essay. Manuscripts should be titled, double-spaced and **pages numbered**. You will distribute copies of your essays on the due dates for your group, according to the attached schedule. The essay will be discussed on the following week, and the revision will be due for grading one week after that. **If you do not meet the due date for turning in the essay, it will NOT be discussed in workshop.**

**COURSE SCHEDULE
ENGLISH 501**

**Alison Deming
Spring 2007**

- January 10 Introductions. Review course requirements.
Reading packet on culture.
- January 17 Discuss reading assignment
Due: Group 1, Essay 1
- January 24 Discuss: Group 1, Essay 1
Due: Group 2, Essay 1
- January 31 Discuss: Group 2, Essay 1
Due: Group 3, Essay 1
Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 1
- February 7 Discuss: Group 3, Essay 1
Due: Group 4, Essay 1
Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 1
- February 14: Discuss: Group 4, Essay 1
Due: Revision, Group 3, Essay 1
Due: Group 1, Essay 2
- February 21 Discuss: Group 1, Essay 2
Due: Revision, Group 4, Essay 1
- February 28 Documentary film (AHD--& possibly others from class--will be at AWP)
Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 2
Due: Group 2, Essay 2
- March 7 Discuss: Group 2, Essay 2
Due: Group 3, Essay 2
- March 14 SPRING BREAK
- March 21 Discuss: Group 3, Essay 2
Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 2
Due: Group 4, Essay 2
- March 28 Discuss: Group 4, Essay 2
Due: Group 1: Essay 3
Due: Revision, Group 3, Essay 2

- April 4 Discuss: Group 1, Essay 3
 Due: Group 2, Essay 3
 Due: Revision, Group 4, Essay 2
- April 11 Discuss: Group 2, Essay 3
 Due: Group 3, Essay 3
 Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 3
- April 18 Discuss: Group 3, Essay 3
 Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 3
 Due: Group 4, Essay 3
- April 25 Discuss: Group 4, Essay 3
 Due: Revision, Group 3, Essay 3
- May 2 Due: Revision, Group 4, Essay 3
 Last class. Summary and Evaluation.

OFFICE HOURS:

ML 462, Tuesday 1 – 4 p.m., Wednesday 12 – 2 p.m., Thursday 3 – 5 p.m.

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