

**ENGLISH 401 CREATIVE WRITING: ADVANCED NONFICTION WRITING**  
**ALISON DEMING**  
**Wednesday 1:30 – 4:00 p.m.**

**Fall 2007**  
**Soc Sci 312**

This is a course in literary nonfiction writing. You will be working on essays that draw from personal experience, imagination, and researched material. I expect each writer's attention to language and form (voice, words, structure, development) to be as keen as his or her attention to subject matter. This genre is a broad and loosely defined one that includes diary, memoir, personal essay, travel writing, nature writing, science writing, cultural commentary, and literary journalism. Literary nonfiction uses devices from other genres (e.g., scene, character, dialogue, and narrative development from fiction; imagery, figurative language, juxtaposition, associative development from poetry). I will encourage you to try your hand at several strategies, all of which will use your own experience as a primary laboratory for research. This does not necessarily mean that you yourself and only you will be the subject matter for the essay. You might, for example, write an essay titled "On Space Travel," in which you begin by researching what the Mars rovers named "Spirit" and "Opportunity" have found on the red planet. Then you might move to reflect upon your childhood experience of learning about the planets or playing with toy spaceships, and from these reflections you might discover that the Mars exploration has a meaning to you very different from what NASA hopes to find. Essays are most lively when you are trying to learn something by writing them. The three essays assignments will be:

**Essay 1: Portrait or Reportage**

**Essay 2: Lyric Essay or Collage**

**Essay 3: Meditation or Memoir**

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### *Workshop*

You will each write three 10 – 15 page workshop essays that will be passed in to me and to your classmates for workshop discussion. **Please make 15 copies for distribution on the dues dates assigned for your group. Manuscripts must be titled, double-spaced and pages numbered. Please be sure your name is on the essay.** Among concerns for the workshop discussion will be the intent of the essay, the length and structure of the essay, editorial suggestions on the prose style, and suggestions for revision in terms of language, structure, theme, voice, and opportunities for development. I will give you specific editorial suggestions for revising and polishing your work. **One week after your essay has been discussed in class you will revise it and hand in the revision for grading.**

You will 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 and on the page, you should write a one-page response to each essay, which you will give to the writer. Your comments should address such questions as:

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

- 2) What strategies and devices does he or she employ toward that end?
- 3) How effective are these devices?
- 4) Where do you feel the most energy, authority, emotion in the piece?
- 5) What's unclear to you that the writer might clarify or develop in a revision?
- 6) What suggestions can you offer for revision? What essay in the Lopate anthology offers a teaching example for what the student is trying to do?

### *Reading*

Required reading:

Hand-outs given in class

Phillip Lopate, editor, *The Art of the Personal Essay* (available at UA Bookstore)

### *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 experiment with new forms.

### **GRADING:**

Your grade will be the average of grades you receive on your three revised essays, provided that your attendance and participation are regular. Because this is a workshop, each participant is responsible for becoming a reader, an audience and an 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 suggestions for revision on works put forward for discussion, and listening to the views of others in class. 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, sleeping, reading non-course materials in class, taking or making cell-phone calls, 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." I will award an 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 2 unexcused absences and you will be dropped from the course, unless you have discussed exceptional circumstances with me.

**WORKSHOP PROCEDURE:** Please make sufficient copies (15) of your essay for all members of the class. Copies will be distributed on the due date for your group according to the attached schedule, the essay will be discussed on the following week, and the revision will be due to be handed in for grading the week after it is discussed in class. If your essay is not handed in on the due date, you will forfeit the right to have it discussed in class. You can still hand it in to me for a grade.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE, ENGLISH 401, Fall 2007**

### **August 22**

Introductions. Review course requirements. Hand-out for discussion (narrative voice).

**Assignment:** read in THE ART OF THE PERSONAL ESSAY: “Introduction,” Ivan Turgenev’s “The Execution of Tropmann,” Scott Russell Sanders’ “Under the Influence,” and Natalia Ginzburg’s “He and I.” **For next week, bring in a newspaper editorial or op-ed piece that you admire for its prose style.** (This will be for discussion and need not be handed in.)

### **August 29**

Discuss readings and op-eds. In-class writing assignment.

**Assignment:** read in THE ART OF THE PERSONAL ESSAY: Adrienne Rich, “Split at the Root,” Edward Hoagland’s “The Courage of Turtles.” **Do re-vision of in-class writing for next week.**

### **September 5**

Discuss reading and revised in-class writing.

### **September 12**

Documentary film and discussion

Due: Group 1, Essay 1

### **September 19**

Discuss: Group 1, Essay 1

Due: Group 2, Essay 1

### **September 26**

Discuss: Group 2, Essay 1

Due: Group 3, Essay 1

Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 1

### **October 3**

Discuss: Group 3, Essay 1

Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 1

**Assignment:** read in Lopate anthology: Wendell Berry’s “An Entrance To the Woods,” Sei Shonagon’s “Hateful Things,” Richard Rodriguez’s “Late Victorians.” **For next week, bring in an object from home the form of which interests you.**

### **October 10**

Discuss readings and objects. In-class writing (collage).

Due: Group 1, Essay 2

Due: Revision, Group 3, Essay 1

**October 17**

Discuss: Group 1, Essay 2

Due: Group 2, Essay 2

**October 24**

Discuss: Group 2, Essay 2

Due: Group 3, Essay 2

Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 2

**October 31**

Discuss: Group 3, Essay 2

Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 2

**Assignment:** read in Lopate anthology: George Orwell's "Such, Such Were the Joys," James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son," and Sara Suleri's "Meatless Days." **For next week, bring to class a photograph from your childhood that says something to you about the culture in which you grew up.**

**November 7**

Discuss reading and photos. In-class writing based on photos.

Due: Group 1, Essay 3

Due: Revision, Group 3, Essay 2

**November 14**

Discuss: Group 1, Essay 3

Due: Group 2, Essay 3

**November 21**

Discuss: Group 2, Essay 3

Due: Group 3, Essay 3

Due: Revision, Group 1, Essay 3

**November 28**

Discuss: Group 3, Essay 3

Due: Revision, Group 2, Essay 3

**December 5****Last Day of Class**

Due: Revision, Group 3, Essay 3

Evaluations and student readings.

**ALISON DEMING**

**Office Hours: Wednesday, 11:30 – 1:00PM and Thursday 11 – 12:00PM**

**or by appointment**

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**ML 438**