

ENL 405: SPECIAL TOPICS IN CREATIVE WRITING - RESEARCH FOR CREATIVE NONFICTION

Professor's Information

Professor Silas Hansen

Email: schansen@bsu.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays
10am-1pm or by appointment

Office: Robert Bell 242

Course Information

Meeting Time: TR 3:30-4:45

Location: Robert Bell 105

Required Materials

Text Books:

- Kerry Howley, *Thrown*
- Eula Biss, *Notes from No Man's Land*
- Jesmyn Ward, *Men We Reaped*
- Sonya Huber, *The Backwards Research Guide for Writers*

Other:

- Consistent access to a computer program that saves as .doc or .docx
- A [dropbox.com](https://www.dropbox.com) or drive.google.com account to back up your work

Course Description

This class will focus on the use of research in creative nonfiction: the purpose it serves, the various research methods creative nonfiction writers employ, the ways one can incorporate research into literary work, etc. We will read a great deal of published work that utilizes research, practice numerous research methods and writing styles through short exercises, and then focus in on a single project for workshop.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Identify opportunities for further research in both your own writing and the writing of others.
2. Craft research questions about topics that interest you.
3. Utilize a variety of sources to answer your research questions.
4. Craft a successful, engaging essay that incorporates research to achieve its goals.

Assignments and Grading

Reading Responses - 10%

Writing/Research Journal - 10%

Research Proposal - 5%

Workshop Submission - 15%

Peer Review/Workshop Responses - 10%

Participation/Professionalism - 20%

Final Portfolio - 30%

Reading Responses 10%

For each individual work of literature you are assigned, you will write a brief (200 words) response. These responses are due to the Blackboard drop box *before* the start of the class in which the essay/book/chapter will be discussed. **Late Reading Responses will earn no credit. There are no exceptions.**

For more information, please see the Reading Response Prompt on Blackboard.

Writing/Research Journal 10%

We will begin and/or end each class with a writing exercise, and I will often give you a “research assignment”—to identify a subject you’re interested in, draft some research questions, or look for specific kinds of sources or sources to answer specific questions.

Each of these exercises should be saved to your Writing/Research Journal (a single, neatly organized word document), which I will collect three times. You will also often share your Journals with your classmates and receive written and verbal feedback.

Late submissions will lose one full letter grade for each day they are late.

Exercise Feedback/Critiques 5%

You will occasionally provide verbal and written feedback on your classmates’ writing exercises, which will be turned in for credit.

You will also write a critique of each of your classmates’ workshop submissions. These critique letters should be approximately 200-300 words and are due in class on the day the writer’s work is discussed.

Late critique letters will earn no credit.

Research Proposal/Conference 5%

You will identify one specific project that you’d like to pursue this semester and write a brief proposal for the project. The proposal should do the following:

- Briefly (about 100 words) summarize the subject that you are hoping to explore.
- List 2-3 research questions for this subject.
- List 2-3 possible sources you might use.

You will bring a printed copy of your proposal to our individual conference, which will be scheduled during the week of February 26.

Late proposals will lose one full letter grade for each day they are late, and conferences count as a class period (i.e., skipping it would be considered an unexcused absence). **You cannot turn in your workshop submission until I have approved your proposal.**

Workshop Submission 15%

Once I have approved your proposal, you will actually conduct your research (which might mean looking for scholarly sources in the library, speaking to experts on the subject you’ve chosen, interviewing friends and family members, and/or many other possibilities) and write an a complete essay and/or a chapter of a longer project that is able to stand alone.

Your workshop submission must (1) be a work of nonfiction, (2) include at least three sources or research, and (3) be 3000-5000 words.

Your essay must follow the format guidelines on page 3 and be submitted to the class via email **one full week** before your scheduled workshop date. **Late workshop submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances.**

You must have an approved research proposal before you can turn in your essay.

Participation/Professionalism 20%

You are expected to attend each and every class (unless excused—see “Attendance Policy”), show up on time and stay until the end, fully engage in productive conversations about the texts we study, and treat your classmates and their ideas and writing with respect. This also includes some low-stakes writing exercises, which you will bring to class and share with your classmates in small groups.

If you have any questions about this portion of your grade, please come speak to me in office hours. I am happy to help you brainstorm ways to be a more engaged member of the class.



Final Portfolio 30%

Your Final Portfolio for this class consists of two parts:

1. **A personal reflection (800-1000 words)** that articulates your goals, strengths, and weaknesses as a writer of creative nonfiction, as well as the specific choices you had to make when writing and revising your work this semester.
2. **A significantly revised version of your workshop submission.**

The Final Portfolio is due in hard copy on the date of our final. Late submissions will lose one full letter grade for each day that they are late.

Please refer to the prompt, which will be posted to Blackboard well in advance of the deadline.

Important Notes

Formatting

Unless otherwise noted in the prompt, all assignments should be typed in size 12, Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and include one-inch margins on all sides. Your name and the word count should appear in the top left corner of the first page (and no other pages). Include page numbers and staple (not fold or paperclip) the pages together if you are turning in more than one single sheet of paper.

Proofreading/Typos

Although many of the things you turn in this semester will be “drafts,” I expect that you will carefully proofread your work before submitting it to me. This means that you need to fix typos and unintentional grammatical errors and make sure that your formatting is correct (indent new paragraphs and lines of dialogue, for example). If you turn in consistently sloppy work, it will have a dramatic impact on your grade for the assignment.

Assignment Submissions

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date and in the method specified, unless otherwise noted. If it is turned in after class begins, it is late. If you must miss class on the day an assignment is due, you must email it to me or submit it to the appropriate drop box before the beginning of class in order to receive credit (this is the ONLY time when I accept assignments via email). **An absence—even if excused—doesn’t excuse you from deadlines.**

A note on grades: If you ever have any questions about the grade you earned on an assignment, please come talk to me in office hours—*do not bring up your grade in class under any circumstances*. If you would like to meet to talk about your grade, please carefully read and consider my feedback for a full 24 hours before we meet to ensure that we have a productive conversation.

Please note that I do not give extra credit. The only way to earn an A in ENL 306 is by turning in excellent work and being a productive and engaged member of the class.

Course Policies

Attendance

You are expected to attend each and every class. I will excuse a *reasonable* number of absences for contagious or debilitating illnesses, official representation of the university, or the serious illness or death of a loved one. “Reasonable number” means that you are still able to actively contribute to the class; if a medical or family situation makes this impossible, I will refer you to your academic advisor and/or other resources on campus to discuss your options.

In order to receive an excused absence, you must notify me of the circumstances via email *before* the start of the class you’re going to miss and provide me with any necessary documentation.

If you miss class for any other reason, or if you do not contact me (I do not retroactively excuse absences without very good reasons), it will count as an unexcused absence. You are allowed two such absences before they affect your final grade. **Each additional unexcused absence, beginning with the third, will lower your final grade for the course by one full letter grade.** Therefore it is impossible to pass the course if you accumulate six or more unexcused absences.

Three instances of tardiness (whether five minutes or forty minutes) will be equal to one unexcused absence. There are no exceptions.

Electronic Devices

While laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices can sometimes be useful in the classroom, I have found that they are, 9 times out of 10, disruptive or distracting in a class like this. Please leave them off and put away during class time. You may, however, use your laptop to complete in-class writing.

Note: If you need to use an electronic device during class due to a documented disability, please let me know; I am happy to make an exception under those circumstances.

If you have family responsibilities that require you to be available by phone, please leave it on silent/vibrate and answer it in the hallway.

Email/Office Hours/Appointments

I am available to meet with you during my regularly scheduled office hours—for Spring 2015, they are on Wednesdays from 10:00 am until 1:00pm in Robert Bell 242. That means that, if you stop by during that time—unless I am meeting with another student—I will be available. **If I need to reschedule office hours for any reason, I will send an email to the class and post a notice on Blackboard.**

If you are unable to come to office hours, I am happy to make an appointment to meet with you at another time. Simply send me an email with (1) a brief overview of what you’d like to discuss and (2) 3-5 times when you are available (“Between 2 and 3 on Tuesday,” not “Sometime next week”). **If you make an appointment, I expect that you will show up, or email me as soon as possible to let me know that you are no longer able to meet at that time.**

I am also happy to answer questions via email, though I ask that you make an effort to check the syllabus or the assignment prompt before sending one, as it will give you an immediate response and give me more time to plan for class and grade work in a timely manner. Questions like “What is the assignment for Tuesday?” or “How long does this essay need to be?” will be easily answered this way.

Please note that it may take me up to 24 hours on weekdays and up to 48 hours on weekends/school holidays to respond to emails.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words or ideas without proper citation or permission, or claiming someone else’s work as your own.

Instances of plagiarism are taken seriously at Ball State and may result in the failure of the assignment, failure of the course, or suspension or expulsion from the university.



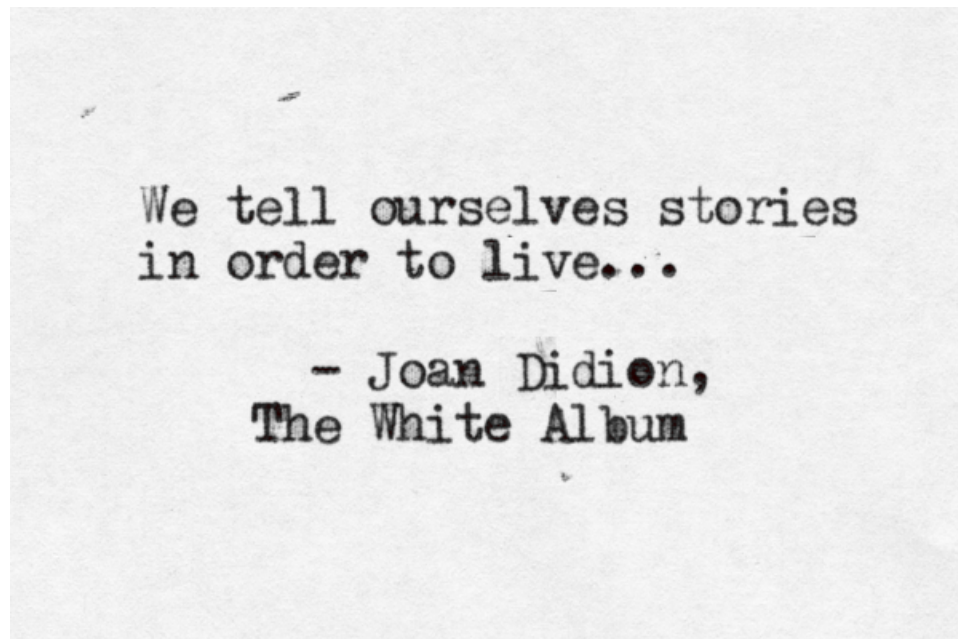
Campus Resources

Disability Services: If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file with that office before any accommodations can be made. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

Counseling Center: Students often write about difficult and/or traumatic experiences in creative nonfiction—the death of a close family member or friend, struggles with health conditions, etc.—and sometimes reading and writing about these subjects can bring difficult emotions to the surface. If this happens, I *strongly encourage* you to take advantage of the Ball State Counseling Center, which provides *free and confidential* counseling to students. You can find out more by visiting bsu.edu/campuslife/counselingcenter or by calling 765-285-1736.

Writing Center: From the Writing Center — “The Writing Center is a community of Ball State students who value writing. Come and collaborate with one of our trained peer tutors on any project for any major. The Writing Center is a comfortable, supportive environment for writers from all communities and backgrounds. The Writing Center is located in Robert Bell 291 and offers both face-to-face and online appointments. To make an appointment, go to ballstate.mywconline.com.”

University Libraries: As a Ball State student, you have access to the university's library system, which includes both Bracken Library and the Science-Health Science and Architecture branch libraries. The library should be your first stop for research—either by going in and searching for books and/or discussing your research questions and interests with the librarians, or by using the library's website to access academic article databases (such as JSTOR) and other sources. We will visit the library together multiple times this semester, but I also *beg of you* to (1) utilize these resources and (2) express your gratitude to the librarians, who know *everything*.



Daily Schedule

Tuesday, January 6

Syllabus, introductions, course overview

Thursday, January 8

Meghan Daum - "Haterade" (B), [Writing Exercise due](#)—bring copies to class

Tuesday, January 13

Maureen Stanton - "Laundry" (B), Ch. 1 of *Backwards Research Guide for Writers* (BRG), [take syllabus quiz on Blackboard](#)

Thursday, January 15

Roxane Gay - "What We Hunger For" (B), Ch. 2 of BRG

Tuesday, January 20

Men We Reaped (Part 1), Ch. 3 of BRG

Thursday, January 22

Joan Didion - "The White Album" (B), [Writing Exercise due](#) (bring 3 copies to class), [Writing Journals due](#)

Tuesday, January 27

Men We Reaped (Part 2), Ch. 4 of BRG

Thursday, January 29

Jo Ann Beard - "The Fourth State of Matter" (B), Ch. 5 of BRG

Tuesday, February 3

Notes from No Man's Land (Part 1), Ch. 6 of BRG

Thursday, February 5

David Foster Wallace - "Consider the Lobster" (B), [Writing Exercise due](#) (bring 3 copies to class)

Tuesday, February 10

Notes from No Man's Land (Part 1), Ch. 7 of BRG

Thursday, February 12

excerpt from *In Cold Blood* (B), Ch. 8 of BRG, [Writing Journals due](#)

Tuesday, February 17

excerpt from *Columbine* (B), Ch. 9 of BRG

Thursday, February 19

excerpt from *Friday Night Lights* (B), [Writing Exercise due](#) (bring 3 copies to class)

Tuesday, February 24

TBD—ethics of writing about others' lives

Thursday, February 26

Conferences, Research Proposals due

Tuesday, March 3 & Thursday, March 5: No Class - Spring Break

Tuesday, March 10

Thrown (Part 1), Ch. 11 of BRG

Thursday, March 12

reading TBD, **Writing Exercise due** (bring 3 copies to class), **Writing Journals due**

Tuesday, March 17

Thrown (Part 2), Ch. 12 of BRG

In Print Festival: March 17

Thursday, March 19

TBD, Ch. 13 of BRG

Tuesday, March 24

Workshop: _____ and _____

Thursday, March 26

Workshop: _____ and _____

Tuesday, March 31

Workshop: _____ and _____

Thursday, April 2

Workshop: _____ and _____

Tuesday, April 7

Workshop: _____ and _____

Thursday, April 9

No class - AWP

Tuesday, April 14

Workshop: _____ and _____

Thursday, April 16

Workshop: _____ and _____

Tuesday, April 21

Workshop: _____ and _____

Thursday, April 23

TBD

Tuesday, April 28, 2:15-4:15pm: Finals Week Meeting

(Almost) Everything You Ever Needed to Know About Getting Published

**** Note:** If I need to make any changes this schedule, I will make an announcement in class, send a follow-up email, and upload an updated schedule to Blackboard.