

EN 412/612-001
 M 6:00-8:45p.m.
 Hibbard Hall 313
 Spring 2014

Instructor: B.J. Hollars
 Email: hollarb@uwec.edu
 Office Hours: MW, 1-3 & by appt.
 Centennial Hall 4104

Syllabus for EN 412/612-001
 Explorations to the Fringes of Nonfiction
 Seminar in Nonfiction Writing
 Spring 2014

A Helpful Note: At The Start Of The Syllabus

Dear Class,

Welcome! Please be sure to read this syllabus carefully (as it is all quite important), but I also wanted to be upfront about the primary secrets to your success in this class. Here they are: **I need you in class and prepared for each class period. I also need you to turn in your work on time. Finally, employ professionalism by checking your email at least once every 48 hours.**

Course Description

English 412/612 will focus on writing and reading nonfiction, with an emphasis on producing several essays of near-publishable quality for a general, literate audience. While this class will discuss a range of nonfiction components (plot, setting, conflict, etc.) we will pay particularly close attention to “the fringes of nonfiction”; that is, innovating the essay form via structure, language, content and various other techniques.

Required Texts and Materials

- *Blurring the Boundaries: Explorations to the Fringes of Nonfiction*, ed. B.J. Hollars
 ISBN: 978-0803236486
- *Bending Genre*, ed. Margot Singer and Nicole Walker
 ISBN: 978-1441123299 (available online)
- .pdfs as assigned (which are to be printed and annotated prior to class)
- Note: Consider a ream of paper a required material.

Attendance Policy

As a general rule, make ups for missed in-class activities, quizzes, exams, etc. will be provided only when due to an authorized absence. It is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor of such situations and to provide appropriate documentation. Students will need to consult with the instructor regarding the nature of the make-ups and due dates. Work that is late for non-authorized reasons will not receive full credit and if it is too late, it will not receive any credit. Although students will not be penalized when absences are authorized, it is important to understand that in some cases the make up work may be significantly different from the original assignments, exams, etc. As a general rule, make ups for missed in-class activities, quizzes, exams, etc. will be provided only when due to an authorized absence. It is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor of such situations and to **provide appropriate documentation**. Students will need to consult with the instructor regarding the nature of the make ups and due dates. Work that is late for non-authorized reasons will not receive full credit and if it is too late, it will not receive any credit. Although students will not be penalized when absences are authorized, it is important to understand that in some cases the make up work may be significantly different from the original assignments, exams, etc. As noted in the “Helpful Note” above, class is mandatory. Barring unforeseen events, I expect you in class for the entirety of every class period.

Having said all that: Listen, this is going to be fun. I need you here.

Nonrequired Readings

As you can see on our class schedule, I've also included various "nonrequired readings" which are meant to correspond with the day's required reading. These "nonrequired readings" are craft related. And thus, should be of great value to a budding nonfiction writer such as yourself. If it helps, just pretend they're required.

Creative Work

Throughout the term, students will be asked to submit several essays for workshop. While your piece is being "workshopped" it is your job to listen carefully to the feedback—not offer a rebuttal to the critique. At the end of the workshop you will have the opportunity to thank the group and speak your mind, though the best protocol for the workshop setting (when your work is under review) is to be an active listener. How does one assess creative work? First and foremost, a full, good faith effort must be obvious to the reader. Also, rewrites and subsequent drafts will prove the student's dedication to the work. Shoddily constructed essays reveal their weaknesses in a number of ways. Thus, it is important that you dedicate the necessary time (and drafts) for each essay. Also, at some point throughout the term, consider creating a nonfiction work that stretches beyond the conventional essay, including podcasts, short films, etc. Please see me so I can offer you the necessary university resources to accomplish this. Also, please refrain from writing about illegal activities as I have an obligation to report such behavior.

Distributing Your Work

You will be asked to upload your essays to the appropriate D2L drop box by the **Friday at noon** preceding your Monday workshop. This will occur at several points during the semester—once for each of your workshopped essays. The rest of the class will then be responsible for printing off that week's essays. I know printing costs can add up, which is why I encourage you to make good use of your university's resources. **Please note that a failure to have each essay printed and annotated will result in an absence for the day.** Our job is to provide a supportive community for our fellow students, and this begins by having read the essay carefully.

Workshop Feedback

While this course will train you to be a nonfiction writer, it will train you to be a fair and generous reader of nonfiction as well. As such, you are required to write on your colleague's work (offering advice, suggestion and observation). Remember, the more generous you are with your thoughts, the more your classmates will feel compelled to be generous with theirs. (And when I say "generous" I don't just mean boosting one another's egos, but rather, putting some serious effort into one another's essays for the sake of the work).

Finally, I also ask that all electronic devices (including laptops and phones, etc.) be put away during the workshop portion of our class. I am no Luddite, I assure you, but we need to put all our focus on the work at hand. Also, this ensures that you have your hardcopy in class (and are not skimming it on your email at the last minute). This is a professional courtesy that I expect you to extend to your fellow students.

Blog Posts

A blog post is required for each assigned reading (in-class workshop pieces not included). Essentially, each week you will write a **300-500 word response** to the assigned reading(s), analyzing particular techniques employed and how you might use similar techniques in your own work. You should also engage with the questions posed in the previous posts. **THIS WILL BE TURNED IN ON OUR CLASS BLOG AT LEAST FOUR HOURS PRIOR TO CLASS (2:00p.m.).**

The web address is: fringesofnonfiction.blogspot.com

Revision

It is your responsibility to incorporate your workshop feedback into your essays' revisions at several points throughout the term. I know this is asking a lot. However, since this is a 400-level writing workshop, you'll need to find a way to juggle producing new work while revising old work simultaneously (not to mention your reading and workshopping duties). I repeat: I know this is a lot. But when it comes time to turn in the portfolio, you'll be grateful you revised throughout the term.

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted unless you have made arrangements with me in advance. This is particularly true for your workshop slot. If you do not have your piece turned into the proper drop box by Friday at noon, then you will lose your chance to workshop your piece and will receive no credit for your creative work.

Conferences

I strongly encourage you to visit me during my office hours to discuss your questions and concerns with the course and specific assignments. If you arrange a conference, you must show up. A failure to do so will result in an absence (and result in a zero for participation). I value your time; you must value mine as well. In preparation for your conference, you will need to bring a copy of your piece. **I encourage you to meet with me after turning in any work. This is especially important in a 400-level classroom.**

Grading Summary for Final Grade

- **Blog Posts** – Approximately 20 points. You will receive two possible points for each post.
- **Class Participation** (attendance, quizzes, homework, in-class writing, workshop feedback, etc.)—approximately 15 points. Each week you have the potential to earn one point for being an active class participant. If your workshop feedback is of a poor quality, you will receive no participation points for that class.
- **Creative Work**- 60 points. Throughout the term, you will be asked to turn in three essays for workshop (one of which must rely heavily on research and one of which will be a revision). The class schedule indicates these distinctions. An original essay that is well-written, completed on time, and demonstrates a full and good-faith effort (which means it is free of grammatical mistakes, fulfills the assignment, fits within the length range—8-20 pages—etc.) has the potential to earn 25 points. The revision is worth a possible 10 points. I will be grading on content and effort. This is not a subjective assessment (nor should you expect the full number of points simply for turning in the work).
- **Final Portfolio**- 50 points. This portfolio should include three heavily revised essays (one of which you'll write beyond the workshop), as well as a 750-1000 word artist statement describing your influences and your future as a writer. Your portfolio **MUST** be turned into our D2L drop box during our scheduled final exam time.

145 possible points

Final Exam

Your portfolio must be turned into the proper D2L dropbox during our scheduled final exam time, **Monday, May 12, 9:50p.m.**

Graduate Requirement

If you are a graduate student, you will be asked to craft a fourth essay. In addition, you may also have one additional project (including leading a workshop, creating a CV, etc). You will also be required to submit one essay for publication. Please see me for instructions.

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

I consider any academic misconduct in this course as a serious offense, and I will pursue the strongest possible academic penalties for such behavior. The disciplinary procedures and penalties for academic misconduct are described on the UW-Eau Claire Dean of Students web site (<http://www.uwec.edu/dos/Codes/ch14.htm>) in Chapter UWS 14—Student Academic Disciplinary Procedures.”

Disability Statement

Any student who has a disability and is in need of classroom accommodations, please contact the instructor and the Services for Students with Disabilities Office in Old Library 2136 at the beginning of the semester.

Drop/Withdrawal Dates

February 3rd is the last day to drop full-semester Spring courses with no record. April 7th is the last day to file withdrawal from the University with “W. For more information, go here: http://www.uwec.edu/Registrar/calendar/AcademicRegCal2012_13.htm

Class Environment

As members of this class, we are members of a larger learning community where excellence is achieved through civility. Our actions affect everyone in our community. Courtesy is reciprocated and extends beyond our local setting, whether in future jobs, classes, or communities. Civility is not learned individually, it is practiced as a community. Therefore, I ask only that you be respectful of your classmates and instructor. **Text messaging, disruptive cell phones, inappropriate laptop use, unauthorized recording of lectures or other inappropriate behavior will result in your dismissal from the classroom.** Please do not be late. Please do not sleep. Please do not record our class without prior consent. In short, please observe the rules of common courtesy.

English 412/612 is a combined lecture and discussion course. This means that, in part, all students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experience and the learning experience of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that makes other students feel uncomfortable in their learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, or making comments that could be perceived as racially, sexually, ethnically, culturally or in any other way offensive. As a Safe Space trained faculty member, I try to be particularly mindful of these matters. Simply put, our classroom is a safe space for all students. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas. I look forward to treating students with the utmost respect and offering each the opportunity to succeed.

Consider this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope." In short (and this applies to women, too, of course, though Emerson apparently ignores the female gender here), we learn best when we are sincere about our pursuit.

Readings

You will be required to attend between **two** outside readings this term. I will provide you with the necessary details in the near future.

My Goal

I want to be the most accessible professor you've ever had.

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Spring 2013

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Part I. The Conventional Essay

- 2/3 The Constellation Essay: Paul Auster's "Why I Write" (.pdf); Building Blocks of Nonfiction #1; Workshop Group 1
Nonrequired Reading: *The Paris Review* Interview with Paul Auster (online)
- 2/10 Same Subject, Different Essay: Matthew Vollmer's "Keeper of the Flame" (.pdf) & Mark Slouka's "Hitler's Couch" (.pdf); Building Blocks of Nonfiction #2; Workshop Group 2
- 2/17 Top Secret Fieldtrip: Building Blocks of Nonfiction #3; Workshop Group 3
- 2/24 The Very Personal Essay: David Sedaris's "Now We Are Five" (.pdf); Building Blocks of Nonfiction #4; Workshop Group 4
Nonrequired Reading: Lee Martin's "Split Tone" (*Bending Genre*)
- 3/3 Immersion Journalism: Tessa Fontaine's "The Trick is There is No Trick" & "Notes from the Road: The Snake Charmer" available here: <http://therumpus.net/topics/sideshow/>
Building Blocks of Nonfiction #5; Workshop Group 1 (RESEARCH)
Nonrequired Reading: Aimee Nezhukumatathil's "Over the River and Through the Woods..." (.pdf)
- 3/10 The Detached Memoir: Monica Berlin's "The Eighteenth Week" (*Blurring the Boundaries*); Building Blocks of Nonfiction #6; Workshop Group 2 (RESEARCH)

Part II. The Unconventional Essay

- 3/24 Restructuring Structure: Ander Monson's "Outline Toward a Theory of the Mine versus the Mind and the Harvard Outline" (*Blurring the Boundaries*); Building Blocks of Nonfiction #7; Workshop Group 3 (RESEARCH)
Nonrequired Reading: Margot Singer's "On Scaffolding, Hermit Crabs, and the Real False Document" (*Bending Genre*)
- 3/31 Memoir/Journalism Hybrid: Beth Anne Fennelly's "Salvos into the World of Hummers" (*Blurring the Boundaries*); Building Blocks of Nonfiction #8; Workshop Group 4 (RESEARCH)
Nonrequired Reading: Lia Purpura's "On Miniatures" (.pdf)
- 4/7 Documentation vs. Exploitation: Annie Agnone's "Desperately Seeking Sasquatch" and "Inside a Vegas Wedding" available here: <http://intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com/2013/09/19/desperately-seeking-sasquatch/>

- <http://intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com/2013/08/02/inside-a-vegas-wedding-chapel/>
Building Blocks of Nonfiction #9; Workshop Group 1 (REVISION)
- 4/9 Guest Reading: Phong Nguyen
- 4/14 Flash Nonfiction: Ashley Butler’s “Dazzle” AND Brian Oliu’s “Contra” (*Blurring the Boundaries*); Building Blocks of Nonfiction #10; Workshop Group 2 (REVISION)
Nonrequired Reading: Carol Guess’s “On Carnival Lights, Compression, and Mice” (.pdf)
- 4/21 Memory and the Misremembered: Ryan Van Meter’s “Monster” (*Blurring the Boundaries*); Workshop Group 3 (REVISION)
- 4/28 Function To Form: Michael Martone’s “Asymmetry” (*Blurring the Boundaries*); Workshop Group 4 (REVISION)
- 5/5 A Fond Farewell/Final Reading: Dear Sugar’s “The Future Has An Ancient Heart” available here:
<http://therumpus.net/2011/05/dear-sugar-the-rumpus-advice-column-72-the-future-has-an-ancient-heart/>
and prepare to read from your own work for 4-6 minutes.

Final Portfolios needs to be uploaded to the D2L dropbox by our final exam time, Monday, May 12 at 9:50p.m.