NEW COURSE PROPOSAL: ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
ENGLISH 4761: CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITING

1. Catalogue Description

a. English 4761
b. Creative Nonfiction Writing
c. (3-0-3)
d. F or S
e. CREAT NONF WRIT
f. Advanced practice in the writing and revising of creative nonfiction, with an emphasis on the development of the student’s individual style. May be taken twice with permission of the Department Chairperson. Group 6. (WC)
g. Prerequisites: English 1002G and 2001 or, with permission of instructor, 2003, 2005, or 2007.
h. This course will be offered initially in the Fall of 2004

2. Objectives and Evaluation of the Course

a. Students will develop advanced ability and a repertoire of artistic strategies in the writing of literary nonfiction prose.

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Students will deepen their understanding of creative nonfiction and its subgenres through intensive readings of past and contemporary authors.

Students will develop critical reading skills through intensive study of classic and contemporary writings in the genre. Students will write a critical analysis of a classic essay.

Students will confront the various issues inherent in the practice of creative nonfiction, such as the tension between differing prose styles, the stance of personal voice and vision, and the importance of meditative/artistic approaches to experience.

Students will develop interpersonal skills and intellectual rigor through vigorous workshop participation.

b. Students will be evaluated primarily in terms of creative nonfiction essays written and revised for the course. These assignments should show a thorough understanding of the genre. A smaller but significant portion of the grade will reflect the students’ participation and skill in workshop discussions. Additional written assignments will entail critical analysis of important texts in the genre. See sample grade breakdown in Section 3.
c. This course is delivered in traditional format.

d. (1) Course Objective for Graduate Students in addition to above:

Graduate students will develop advanced interpersonal skills through design and leadership of workshops.

(2) Sample projects that require application of the graduate course content:

In addition to the assignments for undergraduates, graduate portfolios will be suitably longer than the undergraduate requirement, or there will be additional graduate creative nonfiction essays required.

Graduate students will also be required to read deeply in an important figure in creative nonfiction and report on their reading to the class. A written review of book-length creative nonfiction is also required.

Graduate students will be expected to help lead discussions during workshop.

(3) Separate methods of evaluation for graduate students:

Graduate students will be held to a higher standard for their writing style and maturity of thought. In addition, they will be evaluated separately for longer and/or additional assignments than undergraduates, and for their facilitation and leadership of workshops.

e. This is a writing-centered course. The quality of students’ writing will be the principle determinant of the course grade. The students will revise all required essays after the instructor (and workshop) has read and commented on them.

3. Outline of the Course (Sample Only—This syllabus focuses on a historical approach, one of many possibilities)

Class will meet for fifteen weeks, with either three 50-minute class sessions per week (MWF) or two 75-minute sessions per week (TTh).

Weeks 1-2: Discussion and reading of the early writers of literary nonfiction, such as Seneca, Plutarch, Montaigne, Shonagon, Kenko, Hsiu or Bacon. Analysis of technique and the unique sense of personal voice in prose. What can a developing writer learn from writers of the past? Close attention to how essayists choose their topics and transition smoothly from thought to thought in a non-narrative structure.
**Weeks 3-5:** Workshop discussion of student essays. Mandatory conferences with instructor to critique revised student work.

**Weeks 6-7:** Discussion of such 18th and 19th century writers as Addison & Steele, Shen Fu, Lamb, Ts’ui Shu, Hazlitt, Maria Edgeworth, Equiano, Leopardi, Jacobs, Turgenev, Thoreau, Addams, Martineau, Bello, Marti, or Pak Chiwôn. What can a developing writer learn from these centuries? The essay as urban spectacle and country meditation. Essayist as witness and philosopher. Varieties of structure and tone discussed.

**Weeks 8-10:** Workshop discussion of second round of student essays. Mandatory conferences with instructor to critique revised student work.

**Weeks 11-12:** Discussion of such modern and contemporary essayists as Du Bois, White, Woolf, Fisher, Tagore, Orwell, Baldwin, Tāhā-Husayn, Didion, Soyinka, Dillard, hooks, Sontag, Cioran, Adorno, Borges, Ocampo, Paz, Lispector, Hsun, Ferré, Ozick, Rich, Castillo, Mora, Lorde or Vidal. Presentations by graduate students on individual authors. Contemporary issues in creative nonfiction. Discussion of memoir as genre. Contemporary tastes in style. The lyric essay.

**Weeks 13-15:** Workshop discussion of third round of student essays. Optional conferences with instructor to critique revised student work.

**Evaluation: Undergraduate**

Class participation 20%

Final portfolio (all drafts and at least 25 pages of finished writing) 80%

**Evaluation: Graduate**

Class participation and presentation 20%

Final portfolio (all drafts and at least 40 pages of finished writing, including a review of a contemporary author) 80%
4. Rationale:

a. Purpose and Need: The genre represented by this course is defined in this way by the Illinois Arts Council: “Creative non-fiction is distinguished from non-fiction by its strong narrative literary quality found in personal essays or memoirs. This does not include works that are primarily analytical, scholarly or journalistic.” The editors of Fourth Genre, a journal dedicated to such writing, add that “its writers often braid narrative telling with fictional and poetic techniques and combine portraiture and self-reflection with reportage and critical analysis. . . .”

Creative nonfiction is a thriving genre with ancient roots. Many prestigious creative writing programs in the U.S. offer advanced degrees (MA, MFA or PhD) in it, and many literary journals use precious space to publish it, along with fiction and poetry. This course offers students advanced undergraduate and graduate study in writing and critiquing literary nonfiction prose, and in the artistic exigencies and choices faced by the writer. It also provides an understanding of the history of the genre and how that history influences contemporary writing. The course may at different times emphasize personal essay, nature writing, memoir, travel writing and any of the other subgenres, or it may offer a general overview of nonfiction prose. This historical or subgenre approach, as well as advanced expectations for student writing and class participation, make this course distinct from English 2001: Creative Writing: Nonfiction. This course will allow graduate students who wish to concentrate on creative writing or professional writing to work in this important genre—there is currently no opportunity for this. The course will also be a useful elective for students in the undergraduate minor in professional writing and the MA track in professional writing.

b. Justification of the level of the course and prerequisites: This course will complement the existing English 2001, and allow student writers to strengthen their writing skills at an advanced level. All the other genres of creative writing already have a 4000-level course in place. Further, a historical aspect to this course would make it appropriate for advanced, not beginning, prose writers, who should focus on contemporary authors and styles as models for their work. Also, this course will allow graduate students who wish to concentrate on creative writing to work in this important genre—there is currently no opportunity for this. English 1001G and 1002G are prerequisites for all English courses 2000 and above, and all 4000-level creative writing courses require the 2000-level course in the same genre as prerequisite or, with instructor’s permission, in another genre.

c. This course is not similar to any existing course.

d. For English majors, this course may be taken as a Group 6 elective. For graduate students, this course would be an approved elective.
5. Implementation

   a. This course may be assigned to Drs. Abella, Carpenter, Guzlowski, Kilgore, Markelis, Martone, Radavich, and Scott.

   b. There are no additional costs to students.

   c. Texts (instructors could select—these are examples)


6. Community College Transfer

   No community college course will be accepted as a substitute for this course.

7. Date approved by the English Dept.

8. Date approved by the CAHCC

9. Date approved by CAA CGS

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