

ENG 235: Creative Nonfiction  
Fall 2008  
Cedar Crest College  
Section 80; Thursday 7-9:30 p.m.  
Curtis 253

Professor Mary H. Snyder  
Hartzel Hall 220  
Office hours: MW 1-3:00 p.m.  
Phone: 610-437-4471, x4483 (office)  
Email: [mhsnyder@cedarcrest.edu](mailto:mhsnyder@cedarcrest.edu) or  
[merre727@aol.com](mailto:merre727@aol.com) (for faster response time)

This course is a workshop in writing creative nonfiction. Our goals in this course include learning and developing skills as writers; reading a range of nonfiction, and learning techniques from the various readings; improving our ability to analyze and critique written prose; and gaining experience in editing and revising our own work. The readings will show you many possibilities for your own work, and I'll urge you to try writing in different styles and forms during the semester. You will spend a great deal of time discussing and revising your work—in group workshops and in conference with me.

### Texts

Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.

Flynn, Nick. *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Gerard, Philip. *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004.

Kitchen, Judith, ed. *Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005.

Tall, Deborah. From *Where We Stand: Recovering A Sense of Place*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. (Handout)

**Course Description:** English 235 focuses on the process of writing complete works of nonfiction through intensive writing practice and through focused critical assessment. Assessment will be done in the writing workshop format, requiring each student to evaluate assigned/submitted works in writing prior to whole-class discussion. Students will read the work of frequently published writers as well as that of their peers. The role of the instructor is to assign readings and writing exercises that strengthen the student writer's knowledge of and facility with techniques for creating effective nonfiction; to guide workshop discussion of written work in a manner that will benefit both the writer of the work at hand and the other writers present; to define and explain important elements of nonfiction writing and the writing process; and to evaluate the performance of students as developing writers, as critical readers, as focused and responsible workshop participants, and as members of a mutually supportive community of writers.

### **Course Outcomes, Objectives, and Assessment:**

English 235, Nonfiction Writing is designed to facilitate the following educational outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate nonfiction writing ability
- Students will demonstrate close reading and analytical/critical thinking skills
- Students will demonstrate the ability to revise/edit written work
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of basic writing and literary terms

To attain these outcomes, English 235 pursues the following course objectives:

- At the completion of this course, students will be able to write complete works of nonfiction in various modes
- Students will be able to analyze and critically evaluate completed works of nonfiction writing and to provide suggestions for improving them
- Students will be able to devise their own approaches to the teaching of nonfiction writing

English 235 achieves its intended educational outcomes through the following forms of assessment:

- Students will demonstrate their nonfiction writing abilities through the completion of writing exercises and the writing of complete works of nonfiction in various modes

- Students will demonstrate close reading and analytical/critical thinking skills through written and oral assessment of works written by established writers and by their workshop peers
- Students will demonstrate the ability to revise/edit written work through written and oral assessment of works written by established writers and by their workshop peers
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of basic writing and literary terms through written and oral assessment of works written by established writers and by their workshop peers

**Classroom Protocol:** As this class depends on collaborative effort, I'll expect you to be actively involved in discussions, to come to class prepared, and to formulate questions and ideas about the readings. You will be required to participate in discussions, in workshops, and in sharing your work; your participation **WILL** affect your grade (see below). Also, I'll expect you to respect your peers, whether discussing their creative work or their ideas about writing. ***And, let me be very clear: no cell phone, laptop, or Internet use – or any technological item use for that matter – during class, or I will ask you to leave.***

**Attendance:** Simply put, you are expected to attend and participate in each class meeting. There is no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. If you miss a class, you remain responsible for the material covered. Missing more than 1/4 of the class meetings (4 classes in a semester) will result in a final grade of F. **Very important: DO NOT miss a workshop class. If you do, you will need a very good reason.**

**Class Cancellation:** If Cedar Crest's campus is open, you should expect our class meetings to be held. If troublesome weather threatens to close the campus and thus cancel class, however, you should refer to Cedar Crest's Inclement Weather Hotline at 610-606-4629 for notification. If I cancel class independently of the campus closing, due to weather or for other reasons, I will send a class-wide email to your Cedar Crest account.

**College Policy Regarding Learning Disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Learning Center.

**My Policy Regarding Late Assignments:** I DO NOT accept late assignments. If you experience extenuating circumstances that prevent you from completing an assignment on time, you will need to have documentation of that circumstance and I reserve the right to make my decision. If it is an extenuating circumstance, you have 24 hours past the due date to hand in the assignment, both through email and a hard copy. Thus, no late assignments will be accepted unless proper documentation of an extenuating circumstance is provided and approved by me, and then only by getting the late assignment to me, both through email and hard copy, within 24 hours of the due date. A penalty for lateness will apply. **Again, very important: You must pass out your work when you're scheduled to pass it out, and you must show up for workshops. If you can't make it to class to hand out your work, have a friend do it for you, or drop it off ahead of time for me to pass out. There will be a penalty. Workshop classes must be attended.**

**My Policy Regarding Email:** I will not accept writing assignments over email, especially due to the new version of Microsoft. Also, I will only respond to emails that I deem necessary to do so. I recommend that you bring any concerns or questions to me before/after class or during my office hours.

## Grading

In-class writing (10%) – Assigned in class; handed in; given a check, check plus, or check minus.

Reading responses to texts (10%) – For each class that we'll be discussing parts of books, type a detailed, two-page response to it in which you discuss your ideas about the book. Which aspects of the work do you think might influence your own writing (and why)? What have you learned from the writing—how has it taught you to write (or not to write) in your own work? (The “shorts” will have a similar but distinct assignment appropriate to your reading of them.)

Presentations (10%) – Each of you will be required to give one short (5-10 minute), informal, oral presentation to the class, in which you will discuss a particular text (or section of a text) and initiate group comments about it. This is NOT a formal oral report; it's simply a chance for you to discuss your own ideas about a text with the class.

Final portfolio (50%) – You will write, workshop, and revise four creative nonfiction writing assignments. You'll receive a “temporary” grade from me, and then a portfolio grade at the end of the semester, after revising all four assignments and handing them in as a portfolio. You will need to include your original draft and your final draft of each writing assignment. The portfolio grade is worth 50% of your final grade.

Participation (20%) – will be evaluated as follows:

## Grade Criteria for Participation

- A Regularly demonstrates excellent preparation: has clearly read the assigned material and thoughtfully considered any suggested questions, etc. Brings original thought and perspective to discussion, making significant contributions that expand and extend our collective understanding and appreciation of the written work. Listens attentively to other class members and instructor and responds constructively. Maintains active involvement throughout the semester.
- B Regularly contributes to class discussions and has clearly read the assigned material, considering any suggested questions, etc. Brings original thought and perspective to discussion. Listens attentively to other class members and instructor. Maintains consistent ongoing involvement throughout the semester.
- C Contributions to discussion show that the assigned materials have been read. Listens attentively to other class members and instructor. Level of involvement variable, but can contribute when called upon.
- D Doesn't often contribute without being called upon. Completion of assigned reading sometimes in doubt. Level of involvement consistently unsatisfactory.
- F Does not contribute to discussion unless called upon. Contributions when called upon indicate that assigned materials have not been read.

**\*\*Workshop Protocol:** A good portion of our class time will be devoted to group discussion of your works-in-progress. This discussion will cover all aspects of the work—content, form, strategy, technique, language, etc. Each of you will submit drafts of your essays several times during the course. It will be your responsibility to make copies of your work and distribute them to the class **BEFORE** your workshop session. **Note: When you receive someone else's work to critique for workshop, please mark up the manuscript to point out problematic or praiseworthy writing, and then type a detailed (one full page) response to the author, which you'll return to her with the manuscript.**

## Assignment/Workshop Schedule

8/28: Introductions, syllabus, in-class writing – “Summer”

9/4: *Creative Nonfiction*, Chap. 1/*Short Takes* – assigned selection and Editor's Introduction, pp. 11-16 – Reading response to one short

- 9/11: *Creative Nonfiction*, Chap. 2/Writing Assignment #1 due with copies  
In-class writing
- 9/18: *Creative Nonfiction*, Chapters 3-5/WORKSHOP, critiques of peers' essays
- 9/25: *Magical Thinking*, Chapters 1-12/Reading response to Didion  
In-class writing
- 10/2: *Magical Thinking*, Chapters 12-22/Writing Assignment #2 due with copies  
In-class writing
- 10/9: *Creative Nonfiction*, Chapters 6-8/WORKSHOP, critiques of peers' essays
- 10/16: *Suck City*, pp.3-237/Reading response to Flynn  
In-class writing
- 10/23: *Suck City*, pp. 241-350/Writing Assignment #3 due with copies  
In-class writing
- 10/30: *Creative Nonfiction*, Chap. 9/WORKSHOP, critiques of peers' essays
- 11/6: *From Where We Stand* - Chapters 1,2,4 (Handout)/Reading response to Tall  
In-class writing
- 11/13: Research/Writing Assignment #4 due with copies  
In-class writing
- 11/20: *Creative Nonfiction* - Chapters 10,11/WORKSHOP, critiques of peers' essays
- 11/29: No class
- 12/4: Revision discussion/Revision conferences
- Final Portfolio** due by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, 12/8/08, in my office(Hartzel Hall 220).