ENGL 5362.001 and .701 Graduate Nonfiction Workshop  
Course Syllabus, Fall 2020

Instructor: Andrew Brininstool  
Department: English and Creative Writing  
Office Location: LAN-256  
Phone Number: (936) 468 – 5759¹  
Email: brininsta@sfasu.edu

Class Location: T.E. Ferguson Room 292 and ZOOM  
Class Meeting Times: M 6:00 – 8:30

Office Hours: MW 4 – 6pm  
TR 12 – 2pm

COVID-19 MASK POLICY

Masks (cloth face coverings) must be worn over the nose and mouth at all times in this class and appropriate physical distancing must be observed. Students not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing will be asked to leave the class. All incidents of not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Students who are reported for multiple infractions of not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing may be subject to disciplinary actions.


Please Note: This course is listed as a “traditional, Face-to-Face Instructional Method” style lecture. On the other hand, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, in accordance with other guidelines, has placed limitations on how many students may be in particular classrooms at one time. For our classroom, Ferguson 292, the cap has been placed at ten (10).

Thus, our class will meet in-person as scheduled, unless you are a member of the .701 group, in which case you will meet with us simultaneously via ZOOM. In either case: Attendance will be taken every class meeting, for every student on the class roster.

¹ My office phone is answered only during office hours. The best way to reach me is via the email address provided above.
Course Description

In the 1960s, writers began to experiment with journalism. Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, and Truman Capote began using elements of fiction—certain techniques such as characterization—to report on the nation. This New Journalism has developed over the ensuing decades.

In 1997, the Seneca Review published a special issue devoted to a new, strange form of nonfiction. Unlike New Journalism, the issue showcased a form closer to poetry than to fiction. They named the genre ‘the lyric essay’.

My primary hope for this course is to build upon elements of craft often discussed at the undergraduate level (plot, character, setting, dialogue, tension/conflict, etc.) by turning a critical eye toward narrative intention and asking a number of seemingly simple though often overlooked questions: How does nonfiction work? What makes a particular narrative satisfying to us while another, similar narrative leaves us wanting more? We will work under the premise that any text worth evaluating has intention, and that writers must make decisions in constructing a narrative in order to gain the desired impact on the reader.

I will hand out a number of supplemental texts (essays, primarily) for us to ogle. When reading, we will focus much—though certainly not all—of our attention on a number of questions, namely, (a) What is the intention of this text?; (b) What structural choices has this writer made?; (c) Why have they made these choices?; (d) How have these choices educated our understanding of the theme of the narrative?

In workshop, these questions alter slightly: (a) What is the intention of this text?; (b) What structural choices has the writer made?; (c) In what ways are these choices effective and in what ways are they ineffective?; (d) How might this writer go about revising their work in order to reach the desired purposes of the narrative?

Texts


Bolts, Nuts

• Please purchase a blue folder for this course and bring it with you every class meeting. The folder should contain everything that pertains to this class.

• Attendance is mandatory. Your third absence will result in a letter-grade deduction from your final grade. The fourth absence will result in a final grade of F. Attendance will be taken within the first five minutes of class.

• Plagiarism tends to be rare in creative writing classes, but it has been known to happen. Later in this syllabus, in a section required by the state, we will outline the university’s policy. But know this: plagiarism will lead to a final grade of F for the course.
• You will write three short pieces as mimetic exercises: reactions to something we’ve read.

• You will write three longer pieces of nonfiction.

• You will put together a final portfolio.

Workshop

So, here’s how it works. We follow the Iowa Model:

• A writer turns in a piece of original work on a given date—for our purposes, I will be collecting all work on one date; this will lead to less chaos.

• On a particular class meeting, four students’ work will be up for discussion. You and your fellow classmates will run discussion. I will recalibrate as I see fit.

• Our point is to discuss what works in the piece and why before moving on to our concerns for the piece and why they concern us.

• You are responsible for reading and annotating all stories (aside from your own).

• You are responsible for writing a 250-word response letter to each of your classmates’ work. Here is a simple layout:
  
  o The first paragraph of this letter should offer a simple plot summary or detail the characters and what they have at stake. Write this as though for somebody who has not ever read the piece
  o The second paragraph should address the aspects of the piece you feel are working
  o The third paragraph should address the aspects of the piece you feel are falling short, why, and perhaps how to fix them.

• Please bring two copies of each response letter to class.
  o One will go to me, the other to the writer.

• Do not throw away anything from this class. Not one thing.

Grading Breakdown

Three Exercises 15
Three Nonfiction Pieces 20
Critical Responses 50
Participation 15
Total 100

Insofar as: 100-90: A; 89-80: B; 79-70: C; 69-60: D; 59- F
Students with Disabilities

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/.

Academic Integrity (A-9.1)

Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Definition of Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit. Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

1. The student will be able to write well-organized, substantial, grammatically and syntactically clean essays on literary and/or related topics.

2. The student will be able to demonstrate retention of key contents of selected literary texts as well as key concepts and themes informing literary study.

3. The student will be able to analyze a literary text with respect to form, contextual, and thematic matters.

4. The student will be able to conduct sophisticated literary research involving a variety of primary and secondary materials and/or library catalogues and databases and properly document that research.
5. The student will understand and be able to apply both traditional (e.g., New Critical) and current (e.g., postcolonial, feminist) literary theories/critical methodologies.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic, or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance available to help SFA students succeed.

Tentative Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Of</th>
<th>Course Happenings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 24</td>
<td>Introduction to Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What Is Nonfiction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Joyas Voladoras”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HW: Didion, pp 1 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 31</td>
<td>Discuss Didion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss Exercises One and Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HW: Finish Didion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 7</td>
<td>Exercises Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Fourth State of Matter”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HW: Finish First Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 14</td>
<td>Workshop Round One Begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 21</td>
<td>Workshop Round One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 28</td>
<td>Workshop Round One Ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 5</td>
<td>Readings from Sullivan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise Three Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 12</td>
<td>Workshop Round Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 19</td>
<td>Workshop Round Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 26</td>
<td>Workshop Round Two Ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2</td>
<td>Workshop Round Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 9</td>
<td>Workshop Round Three Ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 16</td>
<td>Revision Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Nonfiction Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 23</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>