WRT 114: Writing Culture
Introduction to Creative Nonfiction

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(and by appt.)

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Class Meets: MW 3:45-5:05
Classroom: HBC 306

Course Description

WRT 114 introduces students to writing Creative Nonfiction (CNF), a genre that includes many kinds of prose: memoir, biography, travel writing, science writing, food writing, and literary journalism (to name only a few). A simple way to think about this genre is that CNF writers seek to tell *true stories in a literary manner aimed at captivating a broad readership*. In this respect, CNF writers are always keenly aware of the reader's *experience* of the text, and this affects their entire composition process. Rather than present reality as a series of raw facts, CNF writers borrow techniques of fiction writing—description, anecdote, scene construction, characterization, and dialogue—to present the truth in a dynamic and compelling way. They also borrow poetic devices, such as imagery, figurative language, and attention to the musicality of language. In this class, we'll study these building blocks of creative nonfiction and use them strategically in our own composing. We'll read many pieces of CNF writing and use them as models and springboards for our own projects. You'll have the freedom to experiment with subject matter, voice, point of view, style, form, and the use of research to enrich your writing. No subject matter or writing experiment will be considered taboo, as long as you stay faithful to the truth—or your version of it—and work to demonstrate its meaning to others.

CNF writers tend to focus on the *tensions* that emerge between individuals and the world around them. Thus, the official title of this course, "Writing Culture," refers to writing about oneself and others in the context of a broader culture. How do we, as individuals, negotiate cultural norms, expectations, rituals, and practices? How does culture shape us as individuals? To what degree do we absorb or resist our cultural influences? And how do we, as individual actors and witnesses to our world, shape the culture in which we live? These are just a few of the many questions we'll consider as we move through this course.

Please note, that the more regularly you write, and the more time you put into your writing, the more productive you will be as a writer. Writing daily (even for a few minutes!) is the first step

to knowing yourself intimately and being able to speak confidently in a voice that feels authentic and satisfying to you.

Learning Objectives

Syracuse University has recently implemented shared competencies across the university. Shared competencies enhance undergraduate education through an integrated learning approach. They also enable students to communicate their learning experience, provide pathways for academic development, and integrate different aspects of a Syracuse University education. Integrative learning fosters a student's ability to learn, connect, and demonstrate the competencies across their experiences by: putting theory into practice; considering the perspectives of different disciplines to advance collaborative problem-solving; adapting the skills learned in one situation to problems encountered in another; and reflecting on connections made over time between academic, co-curricular, and pre-professional settings. Undergraduate students develop shared competencies through their major degree requirements, liberal arts requirements, and experiences.

Our course objectives directly align with **two** of Syracuse University's **shared competencies:**

- **Communication Skills**—Effective individual, interpersonal, and collaborative presentation and development of ideas through oral, written, and other forms of expression to inform, persuade, or inspire.

- **Critical and Creative Thinking**—Exploration and synthesis of ideas, artifacts, issues, and events to inform and evaluate arguments, develop new insights, and produce creative work. Reflection on, and application of divergent modes of inquiry, analysis, and innovation to research, knowledge, and artistic creation.

The specific course objectives are identified below; each one is tagged with one of the above competencies.

In this course, students will:

- Read and critically engage with creative nonfiction texts representing a diverse range of topics, subgenres, and perspectives (Critical and Creative Thinking).

- Learn about, and put into practice, conventions and characteristics of creative nonfiction (Communication Skills: practice).

- Compose a series of creative nonfiction texts and take them through the processes of composing and revising (CS: Context, Practice, Responsive Communication).

- Explore relationships between research and creative nonfiction, and learn conventions for incorporating research into their texts (CS: responsible communication).

- Develop an awareness of audience, and work to construct an ethos and voice that responds to audience needs and expectations (CS: Context and Practice).

- Experiment with voices, styles and forms(CS: Context and Practice).

- Reflect on their writing processes (Critical and Creative Thinking).

REQUIRED Materials
Textbooks:

- *Tell it Slant*, 3rd edition, by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola
  ISBN#: 978-1-260-45459-8

- *In Short*, eds. Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones
  ISBN: 978-0-393-31492-2

- *In Fact*, ed. Lee Gutkind ISBN#: 978-0-393-32665-9

Note: Some required readings will be on BlackBoard. Please come to class with notes or annotated texts every day.

Learning Aids
(Please bring to class *every day*)

- Assigned readings
- Pencil or pen Notebook
- Computer or tablet (if you do not have a laptop, you can borrow one at the Bird Library tech desk for 3 hours at a time)

Grading

For every major assignment, you will receive a detailed assignment sheet along with information about how it will be graded.

Assignment	Percentage
Unit 1: Flash nonfiction portfolio 10-12 pp. of your best flash nonfiction + 1-2 pp. critical reflection	**20%**
Unit 2: Personal/Lyric Essay 6-8 pp. essay + 1-2 pp. critical reflection	**30%**
Unit 3: Literary Profile Essay 6-8 pp. essay + 1-2pp. critical reflection	**30%**
Revised and/or Expanded Essay Revised U1 or U2 essay with 1-2pp. critical reflection	**10%**
Class Participation See further explanation below	**10%**

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D	60-69
F	<60

In a creative writing class such as this, most of the learning happens through your extensive writing, reading and listening. *Practice is the essential act in writing and learning to write well.* That is why class participation is so important here.

For our purposes, a strong class participation grade will result from:
- Regular and on-time attendance
- Timely and diligent completion of all homework assignments (reading and writing. I will conduct random annotation checks to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading!)
- Thoughtful, well-considered and attentive participation in all classroom activities including discussions, workshops, writing activities and read-arounds
- Thoughtful, well-considered and helpful responses to classmates' writing
- Writerly and analytical responses to our shared readings

You can seriously damage your participation grade by missing class or showing up late; sleeping in class; not completing the assigned reading, in-class work and homework; using technology as a distraction rather than an educational tool for the class; holding irrelevant side conversations with peers in class or not providing helpful and constructive, specific feedback in peer workshops.

Attendance Policy

Writing studios are courses in language learning, and language is learned in communities; therefore, it is *essential* that you attend class and participate. Absences and lack of preparation for class will affect your classmates' work as well as your own. The work you do in class, the work you do to prepare for each class, is as important as any polished assignment you turn in for a grade. In addition, each unit calendar is only a projection and may be subject to occasional changes and revisions as it seems appropriate, necessary, or just interesting. That is another reason why your attendance is vital.

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned. Check Blackboard for any required heuristics or activities, contact a classmate and/or get in touch with me to find out what you missed. Please realize, however, that class time cannot be reconstructed or made up, and that your performance, your work, and your final course grade will be affected by absences.
Three tardies will equate to one absence. If you miss the equivalent of three weeks of class or more without any **official** documented excuse, you will **not** pass the course. I don't anticipate any of you will be in that position, however, so let's all agree to do the work, come to class, learn a lot, and make the course a meaningful experience.

Late Assignment Policy

- All assignments are **due on BlackBoard by midnight (11:59PM) EST** on the day listed on the unit calendar, unless otherwise stated. You are responsible for submitting all work on time.
- Late homework/informal assignments will lose 3 points per calendar day and will not be accepted one week past the due date.
- Late unit assignments will lose 5 points per calendar day and will not be accepted one week past the due date.
- **On days when complete rough drafts are due for workshop, students who do not have one will be docked five points on the final project grade.**

Computer Policies

Our course is loaded on BlackBoard, a University on-line teaching support system. The url for BlackBoard is http://blackboard.syr.edu. I expect you to be able to locate, download, and link to our course materials. I will also expect that you familiarize yourself with the tools that we will be using for assignment submission, draft exchanges and so on. If you are unfamiliar with BlackBoard, please familiarize yourself with the platform right away.

Please also note that *all document submissions to BlackBoard must be in **Microsoft Word format or in pdf format**. Please do NOT upload "pages," "webarchive," "googledoc," "submission text" or any other format of document when submitting assignments on BlackBoard. *I CANNOT OPEN THEM.*

In class, we will use computers frequently to brainstorm, draft, conduct informal research and exchange drafts for review. As stated in the "Required materials" section, please bring your laptop to class every day. If you do not have a laptop, you may borrow one from Bird library for the duration of our class meetings.

Please remember that any composing you do for the course, regardless of the media, falls under the Code of Student Conduct. If, for instance, you are writing on BlackBoard or on a website or blog you have created for the course, the guidelines concerning harassment, threats, academic dishonesty etc. still apply.

In addition to our frequent use of BlackBoard, I will contact you regularly via email using the BlackBoard listserv, which has been created using your "syr" email address. **Please check your "syr" account at least once daily throughout the semester.** I will do the same, so please know that you can use email to set up an appointment with me or contact me about coursework at any time and I will respond within 24 hours, EXCEPT on Saturday and Sunday.

Student Work

Your work may be used for educational purposes during the current semester and in subsequent semesters. For example, you may be asked to share your work with a peer, the class, or with me during classroom activities or for homework, or I may use your work as a model or sample in class. *I will always render it anonymous before distribution.* Your work may also be used in program assessment. Your registration and continued enrollment in this course constitute your permission.

Academic Integrity

Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit and for upholding course-specific, as well as university-wide, academic integrity expectations. The policy governs citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and truthfulness in all academic matters, including course attendance and participation. The policy states that any work a student submits for a course must be solely their own unless the instructor explicitly allows collaboration or editing. The policy also requires students to acknowledge their use of other people's language, images or other original creative or scholarly work through appropriate citation.

These expectations extend to the new, fast-growing realm of artificial intelligence (AI) as well as to the use of websites that charge fees or require uploading of course materials to obtain exam

solutions or assignments. Students are required to ask their instructor whether use of these tools is permitted—and if so, to what extent—before using them to complete any assignment or exam. Students are also required to seek advance permission from instructors if they wish to submit the same work in more than one course. Failure to receive this permission in advance may violate the Academic Integrity Policy.

The Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric establishes recommended guidelines for the determination of grade penalties by faculty, while also giving them discretion to select the grade penalty they believe most suitable, including course failure, regardless of violation level. *In other words, any violation, no matter how 'minor,' may result in course failure.*

Writing Studies' Statement on AI

The use of generative AI writing tools (such as ChatGPT, GrammarlyGO, GPT-3, GPT-4, BERT, or others) is allowed in this class within specific contexts and **only** if such use is properly acknowledged. Assignments for the course have been designed to help you develop as a writer, and some of them may call on you to practice writing with the help of such tools. As your instructor, I will assume that any use of these tools will be only within the contexts the assignment allows (for instance, you can use ChatGPT for brainstorming if the assignment asks you to do so). You must acknowledge the use of AI in your assignment in an "Acknowledgement of AI Use" statement that:

- Specifies which technology was used and on what date (ChatGPT, GPT-3, etc.)
- Includes explicit descriptions of how the information was generated
- Identifies the prompts used
- Explains how the output was used in your work

The use of AI outside of contexts where the instructor specifies its use, or failure to acknowledge any use of AI technologies in your work will be considered an academic integrity violation and addressed according to Syracuse University's Academic Integrity policies. You are the author of your work for the course and authorship means you take responsibility for your words and claims, regardless of which tools you use.

Additionally, if I suspect unethical or dishonest use of AI in your assignments, I may use an AI detection tool, such as GPTzero or OpenAI's GPT detector to check your work for potential violations of academic integrity.

Please see me if you have any questions about this policy.

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Religious Observance

SU's religious observances policy, found at
http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm
Syracuse University recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Students may enter their observances in MySlice, under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Disability Resources

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal is to create a learning environment that is useable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite you to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources.

The CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin the process.

The Writing Center

Experienced writing consultants at the Writing Center (101 HB Crouse Hall, on the Quad) can teach you how to succeed on individual assignments and ultimately become a better writer. They're prepared to work one-on-one with you *at any stage* of your process and with any kind of writing you're attempting while attending SU. Whether you need help understanding an assignment, brainstorming ideas, revising subsequent drafts, or developing editing strategies, face-to-face and online appointments are available for 25- or 50-minute sessions throughout the semester and can be reserved up to seven days in advance via their online scheduling program, WCOnline. In addition, drop-in appointments are welcome Monday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and brief concerns or questions can be emailed to consultants via the eWC. For more information on hours, location and services, please visit http://wc.syr.edu. This is a free resource to all students and highly recommended for every assignment you work on in this class.

Orange SUccess

This class will participate in Orange SUccess, which promotes student success through coordination and communication among students, instructors, advisors, and campus support service departments. If I observe that you are experiencing difficulties in the course (attendance concerns, low test scores or participation, in danger of failing, etc.), I may send an email to your syr.edu email account through the Orange SUccess system. My message will tell you about my concerns and ask you to meet with me or an academic advisor. Your advisor, TA, and/or I will work with you to create success strategies to address any difficulties you are having. In addition, if I observe that you are doing well in my course, you may also receive "kudos" from me acknowledging your efforts.

Orange SUccess may involve taking advantage of various campus support services, such as academic tutoring or advising. If I recommend that you use campus support services, I or your advisor will redirect you to that support office so they will be better prepared to assist you.

Orange SUccess provides essential notices by email and/or text. Please check your syr.edu account frequently and respond quickly if you receive an email from Orange SUccess.

Note that independent testing has shown that Orange SUccess is now compliant with international accessibility standards (WCAG 2.0). Please see the Orange SUccess website for additional details: http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/aboutus/accessibility-update/ We appreciate your ongoing dedication and support to our students and their academic success at Syracuse University. Please contact us with any questions or concerns at orangesuccess@syr.edu.

Discrimination and Harassment

The University does not discriminate and prohibits harassment or discrimination related to any protected category including creed, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, gender, pregnancy, disability, marital status, age, race, color, veteran status, military status, religion, sexual orientation, domestic violence status, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

Any complaint of discrimination or harassment related to any of these protected bases should be reported to Sheila Johnson-Willis, the University's Chief Equal Opportunity & Title IX Officer. She is responsible for coordinating compliance efforts under various laws including Titles VI, VII, IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. She can be contacted at Equal Opportunity, Inclusion, and Resolution Services, 005 Steele Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1120; by email: titleix@syr.edu; or by telephone: 315-443-0211.

Federal and state law, and University policy prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and retaliation). If a student has been harassed or assaulted, they can obtain confidential counseling support, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, from the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team at the Counseling Center (315-443- 8000, Barnes Center at The Arch, 150 Sims Drive, Syracuse, New York 13244). Incidents of sexual violence or harassment can be reported non-confidentially to the University's Title IX Officer (Sheila Johnson Willis, 315-443-0211, titleix@syr.edu, 005 Steele Hall). Reports to law enforcement can be made to the University's Department of Public Safety (315-443-2224, 005 Sims Hall), the Syracuse Police Department (511 South State Street, Syracuse, New York, 911 in case of emergency or 315-435-3016 to speak with the Abused Persons Unit), or the State Police (844-845-7269). I will seek to keep information you share with me private *to the greatest extent possible, but as a professor I have mandatory reporting responsibilities to share information regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and crimes I learn about with the University's Title IX Officer to help make our campus a safer place for all.*

Student Mental Health

Mental health and overall well-being are significant predictors of academic success. As such, it is essential that during your college experience you develop the skills and resources effectively to navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides (https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/) and seek out support for mental health concerns

as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at 315-443-8000, and I encourage you to explore the resources available through the Wellness Leadership Institute, https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/wellness-leadership-institute/

Additionally, in our BlackBoard course, I have included a guide titled "I Need Help—resources for physical, mental, emotional and material needs." This guide lists some of the resources available to you as SU students. I encourage you to always get the support you need.