

Semester at Sea Course Syllabus
Colorado State University, Academic Partner

Voyage: Fall 2017
Discipline: English
Course Number and Title: E 311C Intermediate Creative Writing: Nonfiction
Division: Upper
Faculty Name: Sarah Sloane
Semester Credit Hours: 3

Meeting: B Day 1400-1520, Adlon

Prerequisites: One (1) college composition course AND one (1) beginning creative writing course (or similar) with a minimum grade of B (or equivalent)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This creative nonfiction writing course will focus on writing true stories in forms ranging from the personal essay to journalism. We will experiment with collage essays, the “new journalism,” memoirs, autobiographical writing, travel writing, cultural critiques, interviews, profiles, braided essays, hybrid forms, flash nonfictions, literary essays, and more. Students will practice writing strategies, techniques, and structures, review the elements of craft in creative writing, and use each port as a place to practice their evolving skill in different writing techniques. By also reading examples of these genres, students will complement their writing practice by seeing how contemporary writers have navigated similar forms, preoccupations, questions, and reader expectations.

Students will be expected to complete weekly writing exercises in creative nonfiction, choosing three to expand and polish for their final grade. In addition we will all practice a version of Harry Matthews’ “Twenty Lines a Day,” keeping a record of our entire voyage this way. Writing workshops will be the centerpiece of the course, with required background readings tied to some of the countries we visit and the skills we want to learn. Students are expected to keep a writer’s notebook where they collect observations, transcribe conversations, and reflect on what they see or experience in each port as it might tie to larger questions of form (both the form of their writing and cultural forms), perspective (personal, cultural, objective, or multiple), and evolving understanding of cultural nuance and norm.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To practice writing true stories and understand the limits of form;
- To develop a sensitivity to the craft of writing creative nonfiction, honing one’s own writing process to produce the best work possible;
- To read with a sensitivity to language and an awareness of the forms and craft used by contemporary writers;
- To develop close reading skills;

- To gain an awareness of the wide range of creative nonfiction possibilities, including digital storytelling, speculative essays, the video essay, 20 lines a day, writing in and about movement or travel;
- To learn the difference between motion and action in essays;
- To enrich their experiences of Semester at Sea ports with specific creative writing exercises;
- To learn how to write compelling long-form essays of more than ten pages.

REQUIRED TEXTS

AUTHOR: George Perec
 TITLE: *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*
 PUBLISHER: Wakefield Press; Reprint Edition
 ISBN #: 978-0984115525
 DATE/EDITION: Any (September 30, 2010 seems to be most recent)

AUTHOR: Lee Gutkind
 TITLE: *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction—from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything In Between*
 PUBLISHER: Da Capo Lifelong Books
 ISBN #: 978-0738215549
 DATE/EDITION: Any

AUTHOR: Robin Hemley
 TITLE: *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing: Memoir Journalism, and Travel*
 PUBLISHER: University of Georgia Press; ARC edition
 ISBN #: 978-0820342559
 DATE/EDITION: Any (March 1, 2012 may be the latest)

AUTHOR: Ellah Wakatama Allfrey (Editor)
 TITLE: *Safe House: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction* (Commonwealth Writers Book 2)
 PUBLISHER: Dundum
 ISBN #: 978-0820342559
 DATE/EDITION: Any (May 31, 2016 is the latest publication)

AUTHOR: Rob Spillman (Editor)
 TITLE: *Gods and Soldiers: The Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Writing*
 PUBLISHER: Penguin Books
 ISBN #: 978-0143114734
 DATE/EDITION: Any

AUTHOR: Katherine Boo

TITLE: *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*
 PUBLISHER: Random House
 ISBN #: 978-0812979329
 DATE/EDITION: Paperback, 2014

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Bremerhaven, Germany – September 9

B1–September 12: Begin discussing Gutkind, Part I: What is Creative Nonfiction? The Definition Debate. In-class writing assignment on observation, how to take field notes, and Matthews’ Twenty Lines a Day exercise. Assign Emerson’s “Self Reliance.” Assign twenty lines a day.

B2–September 14: Discussion of Emerson’s “Self Reliance.” What is an essay? What does it mean to assay? Relationships between fiction, poetry, visual and conceptual art, and nonfiction. Writing the immersion memoir (Hemley). How to take notes in Barcelona.

Barcelona and Valencia, Spain – September 15-18

B3–September 20: Gutkind: The Objectivity Debate, Composites, Compression. What is truth. Give first immersion memoir writing assignment. Start reading *Safe House*.

B4–September 22: Discussion of the cultural contexts of Ghana and the lives of rural and urban people there today. What are the primary identities, where does power lie, what are the social institutions that appear most popular in this culture? What makes this culture one of Africa’s safest and most successful democracies? Read and discuss first part of *Gods and Soldiers*.

No Class – September 23

B5–September 25: First essay assignment due: Rough draft of a four-to-six page braided essay. Continue reading *Safehouse* and *Gods and Soldiers*.

B6–October 1: Discussion of collaborative creative writing projects and how Barcelona and Tema might represent different answers of the same cultural question. Discussion of how to turn field notes into essays. Shifting from observations into building meaningful essays. Form.

Tema and Takoradi, Ghana – September 27-30

No Class – October 2

B7—October 4: Debrief about Barcelona and Tema and ongoing student collaborations. How to introduce visual elements (photographs; video clips) into your writing. Second part of *Gods and Soldiers* discussed.

B8—October 6: Second essay assignment due. Continue discussion of Hemley's immersion writing, looking over "The Quest" and thinking about what kind of "quest" they might be on in Capetown in two days. Practice "the quest" essay on the ship.

Cape Town, South Africa — October 7-12

B9—October 14: Practicing information-gathering techniques, from interviews to observations to collection of artifacts from the scene. Read selections from Perec's *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*.

No Class — October 16

B10—October 17: Background information necessary to be a good CNF writer. How do we find information on the ship? What are all the research techniques we might need to learn to fill in the backstory? Finish reading and discussing Perec's *An Attempt to Exhaust a Place in Paris*.

Port Louis, Mauritius — October 19

B11—October 20: Revision processes. Also, what did we see in Mauritius in terms of cultures crossing and mixing and blending? What have you written about in your 20 lines a day? What are some ways that form can echo the dynamics of a multicultural society? The collage essay. Start *Beyond the Beautiful Forever*s.

No Class — October 22

B12—October 23 Discuss Gutkind, "Truth or Fact" and section on "Compression." Begin "Redo" assignment in Hemley for Cochin. Continue reading *Beyond the Beautiful Forever*s. Who are you as a writer? What is your relationship to truth and fact?

Cochin, India — October 25-30

No Class — October 31

B13—November 1: Finish and discuss *Beyond the Beautiful Forever*s and discuss the difference between literary journalism, memoir, and fact-based writing more generally. Mixing genres.

Yangon, Myanmar — November 4-8

B14—November 3: Hybrid essays. Selections from Gutkind. Sample essays from Hemley

discussed. How to do research, particularly historical research.

B15—November 10: Continue discussing hybrid essays as well as selections from *Brevity's* online magazine. poetic traditions and how they infuse Vietnam. Practice writing in a Vietnamese poetic form. Discuss *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*. How to connect poetry, fiction, nonfiction, plays, dialogue, images, more.

No Class — November 11

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam — November 14-18 FIELD COURSE

B16—November 13: Third essay due: A creative essay (story, series of poems, play, hybrid form) about what a student has learned about the cross-cultural reality and representation of an abstract concept such as memory, identity, systemic racism or sexism or homophobia, so far on the voyage. How does historical knowledge connect with these representations?

B17—November 20: WRITING WORKSHOP DAY Writing Day, sharing drafts, peer review, meeting of collaborative writing groups, and preparation for expanding on the collaborative projects in China.

No Class — November 21

B18—November 23: Looking at Chinese visual art and poetry of ekphrasis. Deeper discussion of how to do research before, during, and after country visits.

Shanghai, China — November 24-29

B19—December 1: Gutkind on kinds of essays that can be in sync (in terms of form/architecture/movement or psychological experience) with what you see. Discussion of the collage essay. Hemley on “Infiltration.” Infiltration writing exercise for Japan.

Kobe, Japan — December 2-6

B20—December 8: Working together on essays that can spring from the 1800 lines of the “Twenty Lines a Day” exercise done all semester. What patterns emerge? What topics occur? Looking again at Percec’s exhaustive attempt at observing St. Sulpice’s cafes.

B21—December 10: Read about ethics in Hemley and “Creative Nonfiction Police” in Gutkind. How to do fact-checking. The problem of pronouns. When to change the names.

B22—December 12: Pulling it together. Writing assignment due that synthesizes their journals, observations, and what we have read. Closing discussion of readings.

B23—December 14: Gutkind on points of view, inner/outer and private/public pov. When

and how to reveal intimate details of self and writing subjects.
Honolulu, Hawaii – December 16

B24—December 16: How to continue one’s life as a writer after Semester at Sea. Approaching Hawai’i as a writer. Connecting the experience of overseas travel with the return to the US.

Study Day – December 19

B25—December 20: Final discussion and Field Notes: What does it mean to be going “Home”? What is the notion of “home,” nostalgia, homesickness? How does one’s new cross-cultural awareness inspire and infuse observations? Possible Class readings of students’ best work. In-class writing and discussion.

San Diego, California – December 23

FIELD WORK

Semester at Sea field experiences allow for an unparalleled opportunity to compare, contrast, and synthesize the different cultures and countries encountered over the course of the voyage. In addition to the one field class, students will complete independent field assignments that span multiple countries.

Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field class.
Field Classes constitute at least 20% of the contact hours for each course.

Field Class and Assignment

The Field Class for this course will take place on Tuesday, 14 November, in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

Class title: Past and Present, History and Presence: Writing about the Ghosts of Saigon

Our field class will take place over the course of one day in Ho Chi Minh City. In this field class, we will learn to write in the genre of literary journalism, blending our knowledge of the past involvement of the US in Saigon, Ocean Vuong’s nonfiction poetry, and our first person observations of hotels, bars, historical landmarks, Ho Chi Minh Museum, American photography museum, and interviews with local people about the US occupation. We will look at how the location of the journalist—their sense of home, regions of experience, sense of body, self-definition, sexual identity, class, race, ethnicity, and degree of personal wealth—changes the story. We will end the day by writing down impressions and reflections from the day, to be reworked as an essay into the meanings of Saigon for stateside millennials. Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students.

Independent Field Assignments

Students will keep a journal with guided assignments for each port we visit, consolidating their observations with those made by other students all semester long. Six days a week students will be writing 20 lines a day, including those days spent in a port.

In groups of three, students will also define their central preoccupations or questions early in the voyage and then make systematic observations around the world to answer it. The three of them will also function as a peer review group for their essays-in-progress.

METHODS OF EVALUATION/GRADING SCALE

97-100%: A+	87-89%: B+	77-79%: C+	Less than 60%:
93-96%: A	83-86%: B	70-76%: C	F
90-92%: A-	80-82%: B-	60-69%: D	

All students will be graded according to the scale used at Colorado State University, as described above. In addition, the percentages of the final grade are as follows. Students will be evaluated according to their demonstrated abilities as writers engaging with primary texts, questions, and principles of writing creative nonfiction. The percentages for each assignment are as follows:

CNF Essay #1	15%
CNF Essay #2	15%
CNF Essay #3	15%
Ten Short Writing Assignments	20%
Twenty Lines a Day	25%
Collaborative Field Notes and Peer Review	10%
TOTAL POSSIBLE	100%

ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Attendance in all Semester at Sea classes, including the Field Class, is mandatory. Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. Instructors must make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor's supervision (e.g., examinations, laboratories). In the event of a conflict in regard to this policy, individuals may appeal using established CSU procedures.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Semester at Sea provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a

class, should contact ISE to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation.

A memo from the student's home institution verifying the accommodations received on their home campus is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit this verification of accommodations to academic@isevoyages.org as soon as possible, but no later than two months prior to the voyage.

STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct. Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one's own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the University are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity. All Semester at Sea courses adhere to this Academic Integrity Policy and Student Conduct Code.

Depending on the nature of the assignment or exam, the faculty member may require a written declaration of the following honor pledge: "I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."

RESERVE BOOKS AND FILMS FOR THE LIBRARY

The documentary, "The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief/Rakkyo Café" (2006). Documentary directed by Jake Clennell.

R.W. Emerson's essay "On Self-Reliance."

The most recent issues of *Poets and Writers* magazine and *The Writer's Chronicle* (available online).