ENG 3423/ Topics in Creative Writing: Non-Fiction

THE ART OF THE ESSAY, 3 credit hours

**Instructor:** Laura Davenport, PhD  
**Office Hours** before and after class/ by appt  
**Class Time:** Mondays 5:30-8:15  
**Location:** FS 3.402  
**Email:** laura.davenport@utsa.edu  
**Phone:** 413-695-9881

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

“Myself,” said Montaigne, “am the groundwork of my book.” An essay is a foray into such groundwork to produce personal or formal inquiries and assessments of any given topic, whether about hunting elephants, the death of a moth, or about girls in Des Moines. In this course we both read and write short prose works encompassing autobiography, memoir, travel sketches and book reviews, demystifying and engaging a process that produces provocative and entertaining literature.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

This course is designed to introduce you to a wide range of creative nonfiction writing while you develop an understanding of prose form and style through reading, analyzing, and writing short creative essays. In your writing, you will be invited to explore artful uses of word choice, sentence construction, and essay construction. In your reading, you will be challenged to read like a writer, to ask yourself why the author made particular choices he or she made, and to use the readings as models for your writing. Our engagement with the content of the course will be achieved through various writing experiments and exercises, active class discussion, and brief analytical writings. This will demand that each of you approach your work with a willingness to investigate new terrain with scrutiny and sincerity as well as a willingness to share your ideas and writing with the rest of the class.

**Requirements:**

This course will take advantage of the methods of creative writing workshops and studio courses. Students will engage in writing exercises focused on visual art prompts, and in studio critique sessions/workshops culminating in final portfolios. Active and constructive class participation is essential (which means regular attendance, in-class writing, and informed discussion are a crucial part of your grade).

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Brown, Rebecca. American Romances: Essays. City Lights  
Sikelianos, Eleni. The Book of Jon. City Lights

I will also provide supplementary texts to you either as handouts or as PDFs that you’ll need to print out and bring to class.

**REQUIREMENTS & GRADING POLICY**

At least three short essays/ non-fiction stories; Two major revisions; Weekly readings; Oral & written responses to the readings; Participation in discussions of peer work; Final portfolio

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation/Workshops/MFA Lecture</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drafts/Reading Responses</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literary Analysis Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Portfolio/Revisions</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Written Work: Your essays/non-fiction stories should be no longer than 2000 words long, but please remember that I encourage you to produce shorter, tighter work rather than longer, messier work. In all your written work, it’s important that you pay close attention to grammar, punctuation, diction, and syntax. All written work for workshop will be posted to Blackboard.

Class Participation/ Workshops/ Attendance: I expect you to come to class fully prepared to talk about the readings and assignments for that day. Be sure to bring all of your questions, insights, problems, etc. that come up as you read and write. We will also write a lot in class. Please be prepared to share your work out loud. Healthy conversations, debates, and disagreements are encouraged; however, disrespect and personal attacks will not be tolerated and will adversely affect your grade.

Weekly Response Papers: For many class meetings, I will pose a question for your written response (1-2 pages). The questions will relate in some way to the reading assignment, a writing exercise, or a previous class discussion. I will post the question on Blackboard. You may upload your paper to Blackboard as well. These papers must be formatted according to MLA guidelines.

You are 100% responsible for information that you miss from being absent or late. Please contact your peers to get any missed assignments, copies of handouts, etc.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend every class. Assignments will often be made in class, and it is your responsibility to find out what is expected of you. Being absent in no way excuses being unprepared for the following class. In-class writing assignments cannot be “made up.” More than three (3) unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. More than two (2) unexcused absences excludes the possibility of earning an A in this course. Only absences documented with a physician’s note or from some other worthy source will be “excused.” In all cases, the professor will have the final say as to whether an absence will be excused.

Religious Holidays: Students unable to attend classes on particular days because of sincerely held religious beliefs shall, without penalty, be excused from such classes and be given meaningful opportunity to make up examinations, graded activities or assignments provided the instructor is notified of their needs within the first two weeks of the term.

Flu Season: Please do not come to class if you are sick. According to the CDC, most people recover from the flu (including H1N1) in about a week. This means that if you get the flu, you will most likely not miss more than one class. And if you do need to miss more than one class, remember that a doctor’s note can function to excuses absences and that as a UTSA student you pay a health fee every semester which covers general clinic use at University Health Services.

Late Papers: Late assignments will be marked down one letter grade for every period they are late. If a student is absent the day an assignment is due, his/her work will be marked down two letter grades. (In other words, do not skip class to finish an assignment or simply to save on embarrassment.)

Plagiarism and Collusion: The University of Texas at San Antonio defines “scholastic dishonesty” as including but not limited to, “cheating on a test or other class work, plagiarism (the appropriation of another’s work in one’s own written work offered for credit), and collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing course work offered for credit.) Should a student be accused of academic dishonesty, the faculty member may initiate disciplinary proceedings.” The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th ed., provides a detailed discussion of “Forms of Plagiarism” and “Other Issues,” including the impropriety of submitting the same paper to more than one instructor or in more than one class by the same instructor.

Classroom Conduct: The following is taken from the Provost’s statement on “Civility in the Classroom”: “Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. To assure all students have the opportunity to gain from time spent in class,
students are prohibited from engaging in any form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result, minimally, in a request to leave class.”

In order to maintain a workshop environment that fosters mutual respect, please do not:

1. **Use cell phones in class**: All cell phones must be on silent before you enter the class. Under no circumstances should you check phone messages or read/reply to text messages during class. Should you forget to silence your phone and it rings, do not answer it in class. If it is an emergency and you must answer, please do so and take your belongings with you. Otherwise, silence the phone with as little fuss as possible.
2. **Come to class tardy or leave early**: If you have a legitimate reason for being late or leaving early, let me know in advance so we can make arrangements.
3. **Chat during lecture or class discussion**
4. **Talk out of turn or attempt to dominate the conversation**
5. **Pass notes**
6. **Read the newspaper, magazine, or other irrelevant material during class**
7. **Sleep**
8. **Use your laptop**
9. **Use your iPod or other electronic devices**
10. **Shuffle, zip or unzip backpacks, shuffle papers, slam notebooks, or otherwise make the sort of racket associated with preparing to leave the classroom before class is dismissed.**
11. **Eat or drink anything smelly.**
12. **In any way unnecessarily distract fellow students from their purpose for being in class.**

**Program Policy Regarding Student Writing And Behavior in Creative Writing Courses:**

Writing instructors may, at their sole discretion, refuse to workshop or comment on any student work they deem patently offensive or outside their professional purview. Instructors should make every effort to communicate their standards so students know what is likely to be considered acceptable. If the instructor determines that a student’s submission is unacceptable, they should inform the student and give him or her an opportunity to submit an alternative work.

If an instructor believes a student’s writing or personal manner suggest they are emotionally unstable and may pose a risk to themselves or others, the instructor may insist the student see a professional counselor (through the university counseling center) as a condition for continued participation in the workshop. If the student’s behavior violates the Student Code of Conduct, the instructor may file a referral with Student Judicial Affairs. Faculty may also, at their discretion, report concerns about student behavior to the UTSA police. In all cases, instructors should register their concerns with the Department Chair.

**Relevant Web Contacts/Resources:**
- Counseling Services [http://www.utsa.edu/counsel/index.htm](http://www.utsa.edu/counsel/index.htm)
- Student Judicial Affairs [http://www.utsa.edu/OSJA/index.cfm](http://www.utsa.edu/OSJA/index.cfm)
- Student Code of Conduct [http://www.utsa.edu/infoguide/appendices/b.cfm](http://www.utsa.edu/infoguide/appendices/b.cfm)
- UTSA Police Department [http://www.utsa.edu/utsapd/COURSE_SCHEDULE](http://www.utsa.edu/utsapd/COURSE_SCHEDULE)

- This schedule is subject to change; all changes will be announced in class.
- Readings and assignments are to be completed for the date listed.
Week 2
8/29
Introductions/Syllabus/Questions
In-class writing

Week 3
9/5
No Class Labor Day Holiday
Assignments:
Read handouts on BB for 9/12
Write a short response paper (3 observations on each text) post to BB (for 9/12)
ESSAY #1: Spend some time in a place or situation where you feel uneasy and write a short single-scene essay based on your experience. Post to Blackboard by Friday 5 pm. (for 9/12)

Week 4
9/12
In Class: Discussion of BB handouts
ESSAY #1 Workshop

Assignments: Read all of John D’Agata’s short introductory essays in The Next American Essay (NAE)
Be prepared to discuss one idea that particularly interests you from each short essay.

Week 5
9/19
In Class: Discussion of D’Agata
Continue Essay #1 Workshop

Assignments: Read Woolf (handout), Sontag (NAE) & TBA
Short response paper (3 observations on each text); Research the periodic sentence. Find a definition and examples. Post to BB
ESSAY #2: Write an essay that is a portrait of a place or person composed of one or more periodic sentences. Post to BB

Week 6
9/26
In Class: Discussion of Woolf, Sontag and TBA
ESSAY #2 Workshop

Assignments:
Read TBA
Assignment: Short response paper (3 observations on each text)

Week 7
10/3
In Class: Discussion of TBA
Cont. Essay #2 Workshop

Assignment: Read BB handout, Kincaid (NAE),
Short response paper (3 observations on each text)
ESSAY #3: Investigate a library resource you have never used before (the map room, for example) and use that resource as inspiration for an essay in the form of a list. Post to BB

Week 8
10/17
Midterm
In Class: Discussion of BB handout, Kincaid
ESSAY #3 Workshop

Assignment:
Read Carson (NAE), Cha (NAE)
Assignment: Short response paper (3 observations on each text)

Week 9
10/22
In Class: Discussion of Carson and Cha
Essay # 3 Workshop cont.

Assignment: Read Prevallet (all)
Short response paper (3 observations about this text)

Essay # 4: Write a meditative essay using different prose/poetry forms

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<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>10/31</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Class: Discussion of Prevallet</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESSAY #4 WORKSHOP</td>
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Assignment: Read Didion (NAE)
Short response paper (3 observations on each text)

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<th>Week 11</th>
<th>11/7</th>
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<tr>
<td>In Class: Discussion of Didion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay # 4 Workshop cont</td>
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Assignment Read Hemingway (all)
Short response paper (3 observations on text)

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<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>11/14</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Class: Discussion of Hemingway</td>
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Assignment: Read Brown (all)
Short response paper (3 observations about this text)

ESSAY #5: Choose a date from your life, read a newspaper from that date, and write an essay in which you braid together events from the newspaper and events from your own life. Bring copies for everyone.

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<tr>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>11/21</th>
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<tr>
<td>In Class: Discussion of Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESSAY #5 Workshop</td>
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Assignment: Read Sikelianos (all)
Short response paper (3 observations about this text)

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<tr>
<th>Week 14</th>
<th>11/28</th>
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<tr>
<td>In Class: Discussion Sikelianos</td>
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<td>ESSAY #5 Workshop</td>
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<th>Week 15</th>
<th>12/5</th>
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<tr>
<td>In Class: Read TBA</td>
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<td>Assignment: Short response paper</td>
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<th>Week 16</th>
<th>Last Class/ Final 5-7:30</th>
<th>12/12</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment: Short response paper</td>
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Turn in portfolios
Class Reading