Basic and Bold Syllabus

The Basics and the Bold:
Fundamentals of Editing Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
WRTNG-UG 1019-001; NYU Gallatin, Fall 2014

Class time and location: Tues, 6:20-9:00 p.m; TISC LC5
Office hours and location: Fri., 12:30-2:00, 1 WashPl, Rm 425
Professor: Barbara Jones, Baj4@nyu.edu

Overview: Literary agents and book editors find that a variety of submissions (including novels, story collections, memoirs and narrative nonfictions) require similar kinds of editorial attention. The purpose of this class is to learn to identify and attend to these ubiquitous weaknesses in concept, plot and prose by focusing on two kinds of editing:

1) The bold—that is, identifying and troubleshooting the bigger conceptual and structural problems, including the frequent habit of not being bold at all;
2) The basics—that is, sweating the small stuff by learning the tricks of a fiction editor’s trade and using them, from cutting unnecessary texts to “unpacking” terms to making sure characters (real or imagined) behave as believably as possible, etc.

Course objectives: 1) An improved understanding of which kinds of ideas are big enough for a creative fiction or nonfiction book-length manuscript, including which ideas are more saleable; 2) Increased ability to edit one’s writing; in particular, a strong familiarity with the top 10-15 most common “basic” troubles and how to fix them.

Required texts (available at Shakespeare & Company):
- The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides;
- The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction (Shorter Version, 7th Edition);
- The Liar’s Club by Mary Karr
- When the Emperor was Divine by Julie Otsuka
- 30 pieces of student writing

Optional texts:
- The Elements of Style by E.B. White;
- How to Read Like a Writer by Francine Prose;
- A Visit from the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan

Work requirements: 1) One original piece of a novel, memoir, or work of narrative nonfiction, 2) a revised piece of writing that shows specific improvements on your first piece of writing for class, 3) do the reading, attend class, participate in class, and do the few homework or in-class ungraded quiz sheets.

Grading policy: Grades are based on attendance, class participation, fulfilling all assignments, and on showing improved editorial understanding and skill.
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**Academic integrity:** As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise your academic integrity include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating.

**Session-by-session:** Early in the semester, class will focus on basics and boldness in student writings (first half of class) and in published writings (second half of class); later in the semester, the class session will focus on student writings.

**Class 1 (Sept. 2):** Introduction to the course, class goals, class principles and concepts, including “What is ‘acquiring editor’s mind’?,” “What is an editorial letter?,” “What are we looking for when reading published writings?” “What are we looking for when reading student writings?”

**Class 2 (Sept. 9):** PLEASE NOTE: CLASS ON SEPTEMBER 9 WILL BEGIN AT 7:30. Come to class prepared to discuss one story not otherwise on this syllabus and of your own choosing from *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*; Students whose work will be discussed on Sept. 16 will hand out photocopies of approx. 12-30 pages to each class member.

**Class 3 (Sept. 16):** Discussion of first half of *The Virgin Suicides* by Jeffrey Eugenides and three student manuscripts.

**Class 4 (Sept. 23):** Field trip to Barnes & Noble and/or McNally Jackson Bookstore

**Class 5 (Sept. 30):** Discussion of book store field trip and of three student manuscripts.

**Class 6 (Oct. 7):** Discussion of “The Things They Carried” by Tobias Wolff and “A&P” by John Updike and of two student stories.

NO CLASS October 14. Fall recess.

**Class 7 (Oct. 21):** Discussion of the second half of *The Virgin Suicides* and of two student manuscripts.

**Class 8 (Oct. 28):** Discussion of *The Liar’s Club* by Mary Karr and of two student manuscripts.

**Class 9 (Nov. 4):** Discussion of “Shiloh” by Bobbie Ann Mason and three student manuscripts.
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**Class 10 (Nov. 11):** Discussion of and “The Conversion of the Jews” by Philip Roth and one story by Flannery O’Connor and two revisions of student writing.

**Class 11 (Nov. 18):** Discussion of four student revisions.

**Class 12 (Nov. 25):** Discussion of first half of *When the Emperor Was Divine* by Julie Otsuka and of three student revisions.

**Class 13 (Dec. 2):** Second half Julie Otsuka novel and three student revisions.

**Class 14 (Dec. 9):** Discussion of three student revisions; also, a course wrap-up, including class-compiled list of basics, our top pitches, other unfinished business.

**Note:** This syllabus may be adjusted to focus on troubles and goals that arise from the particular students and student writings.