Writing Nonfiction on Social Change  
WRTNG-UG 1303  
Gallatin School, NYU  
Spring 2015  
Tisch LC6  
M 03:30 PM-6:10 PM  

Prof. Nancy Agabian  
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Course Description:  
In this course, we’ll examine nonfiction from times of conflict and crisis to help us write essays and critiques in which we witness, report, advocate, question, and/or desire change in our own era. To provide inspiration, we’ll read essays on 9/11 and its aftermath, Occupy Wall Street, the recent events in Ferguson MO, and other issues. We’ll read authors such as Ta-Nehesi Coates, John D’Agata, Edwidge Danticat, Carolyn Forche, Roxane Gay, Kiese Laymon, and Arundhati Roy, to study their use of formal tools such as narration, observation, analysis, reflection, and argument in exploring avenues of change in the world around them. How do writers bring a personal voice to writing a political essay? And how do reporters balance opinion and research to show the need for change? These questions are considered as you write 1) an essay centered on an issue that you care about, and 2) a report that you write from observation about a social or political movement. Finally, writing an argument or advocacy piece on a public debate allows you to incorporate many of the lessons from the semester. Revision is part of our process, guided by peer reviews.  

Objectives:  
- To become more adept as a critical reader of literary works of nonfiction, especially in identifying the success of an author to present information subjectively and objectively.  
- To experiment with craft techniques of creative nonfiction in an effort to challenge yourself and improve as a writer.  
- To research topics through interview, reporting, the internet, the library and other means to effectively inform your writing.  

Course Materials:  
- A standard notebook (8 1/2 x 11" pages) to write in during class sessions and/or a laptop  
- A folder to keep all class handouts, exercises, drafts and graded assignments  
- A recording device of your choice: digital recorder, mp3 player, your computer program, or a recording app on your phone.  

Required books: Available at the NYU bookstore:  

Optional:  
*Bad Feminist* by Roxane Gay  

Note: The rest of our course readings will be excerpts, posted on our NYU Classes site.  

Major Assignments:  
- Personal Essay: 6-7 pages  
- Reportage: 6-7 pages  
- Argument/Advocacy: 6-7 pages
Participation: Contributions to class discussions, comments during peer workshops, and reading aloud of writing are very important to this course. First of all, I'm really curious to learn what you're thinking. Speaking in class makes you a more active learner, and your discoveries and questions help other students with their interviews, research and writing. Your discussion also helps me understand your progress through the material, so that I can shape the course to your benefit. Verbal feedback during workshop sessions helps you to become a better editor of your own writing.

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class. Missing more than two classes will affect your grade, as will habitual lateness. Arriving late or leaving early for more than ten minutes, on two occasions, will count as an absence. If you miss more than four classes, you'll fail the course. There are exceptions for illness and family emergencies, so please inform me of any circumstances that prevent you from coming to class. If you can, let me know ahead of time if you know you will be late or absent.

Etiquette: Turn off noisy electronic devices before you arrive to class and put them away so as not to get distracted from the real human beings interacting directly with you. You can use a laptop or tablet during class to read texts, write, take notes, or look up information, but don't let your attention stray outside our frame of discussion and from our common tasks.

Academic Integrity Policy: 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 the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website: www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html.

Incomplete policy: A grade of Incomplete will be granted in this course only if you have already completed the vast majority of the work for the semester. If you find yourself at the end of the semester unable to finish the work for this course because of unexpected and unforeseeable circumstances, such as health problems or a family emergency, you must fill out a form called Request for a Grade of Incomplete and bring it to me by our last class meeting.

Final Grade Breakdown:
Personal Essay: 25%
Reportage: 25%
Argument/Advocacy: 25%
Writing Exercises, Research Exercises and Reading Responses: 15%
Participation: 10%
10. April 20
Reader Response: *The Ticking is the Bomb* by Nick Flynn
Writing exercise: Develop one of the exercises from class. Extra prompt: what do logos, pathos and ethos mean to you, for the issue you care most about?
In-class: Discussion and exercise on pathos, logos and ethos

11. April 27
HW due:
Scholarly Research Exercise: Conduct research to inform your argument/advocacy
Writing Exercise: Develop one of the exercises from class. Extra prompt: A list: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How?
Note: Turn in either Writing OR Scholarly Research exercises, depending on your progress
In-class: Discussion and exercise on the range of types of research in observation and argument. Brief reports on Scholarly Research Exercise

12. May 4
HW due:
Scholarly Research Exercise: Conduct research to inform your argument/advocacy
Writing Exercise: Develop one of the exercises from class. Extra prompt: What do you desperately want to improve?
Note: Turn in either Writing OR Scholarly Research exercises, depending on your progress
In-class: Discussion and exercise on rhetoric: counterargument, critique, proposal. Brief reports on Scholarly Research.

13. May 11
First Draft of Argument/Advocacy
In-class: Workshop of Argument/Advocacy Assignment.

14. May 12-14 TBD (replacement for snow cancellation)
In-class: Course evaluations. Presentation of one assignment from the semester. Party! Consultations on final assignment.

May 18
Final Draft of Argument/Advocacy: Email to nancyagabian@yahoo.com by 3:30 pm.