Syllabus: Fiction and Creative Non-Fiction: Form, Content, Publication
ELEC-GG 2540

Description: Narrative, whether it's via fiction or creative nonfiction, presents challenges all throughout a piece's lifecycle, up to and including publication. In this course, which is designed for writers of both fiction and non-fiction, we'll look at three specific aspects of the fiction and nonfiction writing process; form, content and publication. In our formal studies we'll concentrate on specific areas of mastery, including the development of strong scenes and effective dialogue. We'll also use specific techniques to discover what early drafts indicate about your piece that a reader picks up on and you might not, and throughout the semester we'll survey the changing world of publication, with some trips, related assignments, and guest lecturers. Readings will include many contemporary masters of the forms, although most of the texts discussed will be student work, via submissions of current projects and also through assignments and in-class exercises. Students will be expected to submit for workshop at least two separate current projects for class discussion.

Expectations/Requirements:

1. It is expected that everyone in this class has or will have 30-40 pages of fiction or nonfiction which he or she is willing to share with the class in a workshop format. While these pages need not be written during the course of the semester, they should be in the second or later draft stage; in other words, clean manuscripts with some thought, structure and craft. Two separate pieces are required.

2. There will be homework, generally quite simple. This homework is mandatory, and the non-receipt or late receipt of it will affect your grade. Homework is used to conduct the following week's in-class exercises, so is vital to the smooth running of the class.

3. It is vital the every member of the class contribute to the general discussion. If you are not comfortable speaking in and to a group, this is not the class for you. If you are concerned about this but feel strongly that you can still make a contribution, you must see me in the first two weeks of class to discuss. You must not miss class for any but the most serious reasons. I require advance notice and in some cases approval of any absence. If you are ill, you must let me know in advance if at all possible via email. I've encountered only a few instances in twelve years at NYU in which an illness was so severe that advance notice wasn’t possible or practical.

Grading: I grade in thirds: one third based on your completion of the written work, one third on your timely completion of the homework, and one third on your collaboration in the class. I do not grade on the 'quality' of your written work, nor do I offer or ever give in completes, short of extremely extenuating circumstances that are subject to verification.
Schedule: Since this is the first time this course is being offered, there is no week-by-week schedule, but these are the things we'll cover and with luck, in this order (although guest lecturers may come in out of sequence due to their availability and I will make schedule adjustments accordingly). Also, once I determine what the class is working on, I may emphasize/de-emphasize portions to fit the class’s interests. Plus I may be inspired to discuss something else entirely.

But here are the general areas we'll cover in our 15 classes together:

1. Craft
   a. Strong sentences
   b. Grouping sentences
   c. Scenes in fiction/non-fiction
   d. Endings
2. Content
   a. Themes and conflicts
   b. What is a piece ‘about?’
   c. Kinds of details
   d. Metaphors
   e. Overcoming genres
3. Letting go
   a. A 'finished' manuscript
   b. Choices
   c. Journals and magazines
   d. New Media
   e. Agents/Books/Traditional long form

Other requirements: We will have at least two guest speakers, both editors, and perhaps more. You will be expected to attend one panel on publishing which, in a lovely coincidence, will be held during class time downstairs at Gallatin. You will also be expected to attend at least two public readings during non-class time, and to do some independent research which will be described in detail later, but will involve some visits to bookstores, magazine stores, etc. I am also going to try to put together a visit to the William Morris Endeavor agency, which would be optional as it would be during business hours.

Readings/Texts: The two required texts for this class are last year’s *Best American* anthologies: *Short Stories*, edited by Geraldine Brooks, and *Essays*, edited by Edwidge Danticat. I will distribute whole or parts of other works individually, either via licensed online sources or legal photocopies.

Office hours: Tuesday 6:30-7:30 Gallatin 416

Blackboard: The Blackboard class site will be used to track requirements—homework, pages, and attendance. A copy of this syllabus will be posted there as well.