

# CRWR 312—Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop

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Prof. Judy Blunt

Autumn 2016

LA 307

T/H 12:30-1:50p

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Office: LA 112

Office Hours: T/H 11-12 & by appointment Wed and Fri.

Course Description: Our study of narrative nonfiction will require a substantial commitment of time for reading and writing, so please adjust your semester schedule accordingly. Through analysis of professional writing, we will identify and discuss the elements of craft and technique writers use to accomplish great works. By practicing these techniques, students will improve their mastery of nonfiction writing, and in workshop will learn to identify common errors in both their own work and in that of others.

Required Books: Students are required to provide their own paper copies of the following easily found books: *Indian Creek Chronicles* by Pete Fromm; *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls; *Pulphed* by John Jeremiah Sullivan. We'll be reading them in this same order, so start Fromm's book first. The Book Exchange, Fact and Fiction and Shakespeare Books all have them, they're available at the library, and they're cheap on Amazon. If you are using an e-book, it must show page numbers so you can refer to the text as you would with a real book.

Assignments: Short reading assignments will be provided, either as handouts or in electronic form. You are responsible for accessing and printing assigned reading sent via email, and coming to class with comments and questions prepared for discussion. Well-considered, thoughtful comments and contributions to both professional and peer writing will become the basis of your participation grade, which is half your overall grade. Writing assignments may include in-class writing, writing prompts, workshop commentaries and your own original essays. Present all work in standard format, 1-inch margins, 12 pt. standard font. Every essay must have a title and page numbers, and have the author's name and "Blunt-CRWR 312" at top left. I do not accept late assignments except in extreme circumstances.

Workshop: Students will workshop three short essays in the course of the semester, according to a schedule we sign up for in the first week. I encourage all forms of nonfiction, from literary journalism to memoir, from profile to personal essay and lyric essay. I simply require you to write from a first person point of view. Our workshop format is that of a community of writers working to give the most useful feedback to one another, and all students are expected to contribute to the discussion. Constructive criticism of the essay, its diction, organization, development and voice are part of a nonfiction workshop, but writers are responsible for fully editing and proofreading their submissions so we are not forced to sideline issues of content and style for those of grammar, syntax and spelling. The ultimate goal of our workshop is to give critical feedback and support, so that each student gains confidence and skill as a writer.

We will assume the author of each essay is writing from personal experience or observation, and take this into account in our discussion. Writers who address sensitive topics or very personal events in their nonfiction must be prepared to discuss the work objectively. If you have any questions or concerns about the appropriateness of an essay topic, please come to see me during office hours. I am a proponent of free speech, and have a high level of tolerance for any well-formed argument or opinion—even if I don't agree with it. But there are some ground rules. In class, even controversial opinions must be both offered and countered respectfully. I will not tolerate hate speech or writing that attacks, denigrates or degrades other people.

Note: I don't allow students to use computers, phones or any Wi-Fi connected electronic device during class, unless we're doing an in-class writing exercise. Print out your reading material. Use paper to take notes.

Attendance: I take strict attendance and more than three absences will lower your grade. More than 5 absences and you will be asked to withdraw from the class. After the third late arrival, chronically tardy students will be marked absent. Please be on time.

Grades: Attendance issues aside, the highest grades will be awarded to students who complete reading and writing assignments on time with good attention to both the sentence-level construction and the overall story; who pull their weight in class discussions and in workshop with respectful, honest, well-reasoned written and spoken comments; and whose revised essay reflects a basic mastery of nonfiction writing skills.

Finals: As a final project, students are required to substantially revise or expand one of the essays they presented to workshop. This revision is due during our final meeting.

Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. In this course it will result in a failing grade for the class and a report to the Dean of Students.

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please come and see me to make arrangements. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

As the semester progresses, we, as a class, may agree to alter or amend this syllabus/schedule to suit our changing needs.