

E 325: WRITING BORDER NARRATIVES—W (34710)
MAS 374: (35945)

Spring 2010
TTh 2:00—3:15 p.m.
Classroom: Parlin 310

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Th 12:30—1:30 p.m.
(and by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This Creative Writing course uses the personal essay a way to examine our relationship with the U.S.-Mexico Border. Joined for nearly 2,000 miles, from San Diego, California to Brownsville, Texas and from Tijuana, Baja California to Matamoros, Tamaulipas, these borderlands offer us an opportunity to explore their points of difference and find greater relevance where they converge. Since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848, the international boundary has meant different things to different people, as it continues to do so today.

We will spend the first part of the course reading about the border, as well as learning about the personal essay in its various forms. For the remainder of the course students will write their own personal essays having to do with their experiences or perspectives on the border. These narratives can be drawn directly from experiences of life on or near the border, or they can be drawn indirectly via the experiences of a family member or friend so long as the student/writer maintains some personal connection to the essay. Each student will write two original essays, one of which will be discussed in a workshop setting and the other which will be discussed in a conference with the instructor.

We will use three basic steps to develop your creative writing abilities. The first step is for you to learn how to read like a writer, being aware not only of the content, but also the mechanics behind an essay—scene development, narrative structure, sensory details, etc. Learning to identify these elements will help you understand how to make use of them in your own work. You will have at least one assigned reading, either an essay or historical document, for most of our class meetings. For the early part of the course, you will also read various sections of the textbook dealing with the craft of non-fiction. From time to time you can expect a short pop quiz over these reading assignments.

The second step is for you to learn how to critique essays within a workshop setting. By critically examining someone else's writing you will discover the strengths and weaknesses in your own work. The idea is to develop your editing skills so that you can then further develop your own writing, in and out of this class.

The final step is for you to actually write essays that apply the skills we have discussed. After each critique of your work, you should have several ideas on how to improve the original draft.

Since this course is part workshop, your participation in the class discussion is critical to your final grade.

Note: We will consider only creative non-fiction, which means you will be asked to use more of the literary techniques discussed in the text and during class, as opposed to the more traditional approach followed in a typical research paper.

TEXTS

Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft, 3rd Edition, Janet Burroway, Publisher—Pearson Longman

Puro Border: Dispatches, Snapshots & Graffiti from La Frontera, Ed. Crosthwaite and Byrd, Publisher—Cinco Puntos Press

Course Packet: *Writing Border Narratives*
Available at Jenn's Copy & Binding
2200 Guadalupe St. (lower level)

Recommended: Spanish/English dictionary
The Elements of Style (4th Edition), Strunk & White

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

In-Class Writing Exercises: We will begin many of our classes with short impromptu exercises that will be part of your course journal. The exercises are designed to help you identify non-fiction ideas you may want to write about in your essays and practice some of the techniques discussed in the textbook.

Out-of-Class Writing Exercises: These short papers will give you an opportunity to write toward a non-fiction topic of your choice and receive some direct feedback from the instructor. In some cases you may want to simply extend an idea you had already started writing about during the In-Class Exercises. I will grade these assignments with a $\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{}$, or $\sqrt{-}$, and the work will count toward your Class Participation grade.

2 Proposals: One of the most difficult aspects of writing is figuring out what you want to write about. Most writers will spend the majority of their time in this early stage and start writing just before the given deadline. In an effort to help you identify a topic and develop a first draft to work from, you will turn in a proposal for each of your essays. The proposal will be a one-page document that briefly explains what you plan to write about, your interest in the subject, the angle you will take in writing the essay, any interesting literary techniques you might use, research you hope to do, and anything else you feel would help an editor understand your concept. Grading for the assignments will consist of a $\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{}$, or $\sqrt{-}$ and will count toward your Class Participation grade. I will hand out detailed instructions a week prior to the due date.

Late work will affect your grade.

2 Essays: Students will write two original and complete essays, each 5-7 pages in length, that relate to the border in some significant manner.

Draft deadline: A typed draft of your story (5-7 pages) will be due the class before the actual Essay deadline. Please bring two copies of your draft to class on the dates listed in the schedule—this will count for part of your class participation grade. Students will read each other's work and provide feedback.

Essay deadline: If you signed up for a Workshop, please bring enough copies for everyone in the class. If you signed up for an Individual Conference, please bring one copy to turn in. Consult the Guideline section of this syllabus for complete details.

Final Revision: For your final assignment you will make substantial revisions to one of your two essays. Please be sure to meet with me before the end of the semester in order to get approval on which essay to revise. In most cases, you will be revising the piece that needs the most work. The critiques you receive earlier in the semester will guide you in developing a more effective piece of writing.

Critiques: Learning to read like a writer means learning to critique—both verbally and in written form—like a writer. The ability to discern the effectiveness of different narratives will help you to look more critically at your own work. You will mark your (constructive) comments in the margins of each manuscript and then write or type a 1-2 page critique of the material that you will give back to the writer. As part of your Class Participation grade, you are responsible for writing these comments on every student story. Writing a critique, however brief, will help you articulate your thoughts in the workshop. To make sure everyone is keeping up with this part of this part of the course, I will collect a few of these critiques, along with their respective stories, at unannounced periods throughout the semester. No late work will be accepted.

GUIDELINES

- 1) All drafts and final stories must be typed and double-spaced, with a one-inch margin on all sides. Stick to a standard font: Times or Helvetica. Type your name and the course number (E 325 or MAS 374) in the upper right hand corner of the first page—subsequent pages should be numbered. Use only white typing paper. Use standard alignment (“align left”) and *not* “justify,” which stretches the type from margin to margin. Proofread your work—typos and general sloppiness (pages out of order, missing pages, weird formatting, etc.) will affect your grade. Please be sure to staple your work.
- 2) Essays (with the appropriate number of copies) must arrive in class by their due date. An essay that arrives after the class period will automatically drop one full-letter grade. An essay that arrives the day after class will drop two full-letter grades. No essays will be accepted after the second day.
- 3) When commenting on essays, write your name at the top of the first page of the text. Critiques may be handwritten (as clearly as possible) on the back of the last page of the essay. You may also type your critique on a separate sheet of paper and staple it to the manuscript. Please remember to include your name on both document(s) so that I can give you credit for this part of the course.
- 4) Critiques are due in class the day each story is discussed. No emailed or late work will be accepted. No exceptions.

ATTENDANCE

Students are required to maintain a consistent attendance throughout the semester. You are allowed two unexcused absences, after which further absences will affect your final grade. Excessive lateness will also have a bearing on your standing in the class.

GRADING

1 st Essay	25%
2 nd Essay	25%
Final Revision	20%
Class Participation	30%

A, A-

Excellent to proficient work (skillful use of a variety of creative non-fiction elements—scene development, narrative structure, vivid description of scenery, etc.—as well as close attention to detail)

Active participation in class (frequently contributing valuable perspectives on assigned readings and during the workshop; thorough critiques of essays in workshop)

Consistent attendance (no more than two unexcused absences, no repeated tardiness)

B+, B, B-

Average to competent work (general skill with most creative non-fictional elements—scene development, narrative structure, vivid description of scenery, etc.—and some attention to detail)

Varying participation in class (contributing insightful comments on assigned readings and workshop essays with some regularity; helpful critiques of workshop essays)

Steady attendance (no more than three unexcused absences, no pattern of tardiness)

C+, C, C-

Decent to passable work (moderate understanding of several creative non-fictional elements—scene development, narrative structure, vivid description of scenery, etc.—but lacking attention to detail)

Limited participation in class (speaking up only occasionally with comments on assigned readings and workshop essays; less than helpful critiques of workshop essays)

Uneven attendance (more than four unexcused absences or excessive tardiness)

D+, D, D-

Marginal work (patchy to limited understanding of general non-fiction elements used in developing personal essays; not keeping up with the reading or daily assignments)

Lacking any real participation in class (speaking only when called on and to a very limited degree; adding little to our discussion)

Poor attendance (more than five unexcused absences or excessive tardiness)

Your final grade is based on the quality of your work, the amount of effort you demonstrate, and your progress during the course. Please pay special attention to your spelling, punctuation, grammar, and proofing. Always come to class prepared to discuss the assigned text—this includes all workshop material.

HONESTY

I expect you to do your own work throughout the semester. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will result in disciplinary action in accordance with the policies and procedures of the University of Texas.

SCHEDULE (Subject to change):

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Work To Be Done Before Class</u>
Tue., Jan. 19	Introduction Syllabus/Guidelines	
Thurs., Jan. 21	Exploring: Land, Culture, Genre	Read: Packet— <i>Chronicle of the Narvaez Expedition</i> (excerpts), p. 105-110 Packet—“In the Year 1974,” p.93 Packet—“Ready for Some Futbol,” p.99 Burroway—“Intro,” p.1-12 Burroway—“Creative Non-Fiction,” p.230-241
Tue., Jan. 26	Landscape	Read: Packet— <i>Borderlands/La Frontera: Preface & “The Homeland, Atzlán/El Otro México,”</i> p.17-24 <i>Puro</i> —“Introduction,” p. 9-15 Burroway—“Story,” p.167-176 Write: Exercise due
Thurs., Jan. 28	Character Development	Read: <i>Puro</i> —“Ropa Usada,” p.183 Packet—“All About My Mother,” p.87 Burroway—“Character,” p.87-101
Tue., Feb. 2	Voice/Presence	Read: Packet—“Offering to the Power of Language,” p.79 Packet—“How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” p.25 Burroway—“Voice,” p.47-61 Write: Exercise due
Thurs. Feb. 4	Structure	Read: Packet—“Aria,” p.39 Burroway—“Development,” p.196-204
Tue., Feb. 9	Imagery	Read: Packet—“El Paso,” p.83 Packet—“Cuidad de Muerte,” p. 85 Burroway—“Image,” p.13-25 Write: Exercise due
Thurs. Feb. 11	Imagery/Humor	Read: <i>Puro</i> —“All Jokes Will Be Taken Seriously,” p.83 Burroway—“What I Learned,” p.26 Write: Proposal for 2nd Essay due in class

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Work To Be Done Before Class</u>
Tue., Feb. 16	Discourse	Read: Packet—"The Pachuco and Other Extremes," p.1 Packet—"Pocho Pioneer," p.71
Thurs. Feb. 18	Setting	Read: Burroway—"Setting," p.132-144 Burroway—"At the Dam," p.144 <i>Puro</i> --"Soliders of Misfortune," p.119
Tue., Feb. 23	Theme	Screening: <i>The Ballad of Esequiel Hernandez</i>
Thurs. Feb. 25	Peer Reviews	Write: Deadline for draft of 1st Essay Bring 2 copies to class (no late work accepted)
Tue., March 2	Workshop Guidelines	Write: Deadline for 1st Essay (Individual conference = 1 copy) (Workshop = 20 copies)
Thurs. March 4	Fauna	Read: <i>Puro</i> —"Counting Sheep," p.229 Burroway—"Workshop," 11-12 and 209-211 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Tue., March 9	Workshop	Read: <i>Puro</i> —"Camera of Dirt," p.30 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Thurs. March 11	Workshop	Read: Burroway—"Beauty," p.67 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Tue., March 16—18		SPRING BREAK
Tue., March 23	Workshop	Read: <i>Puro</i> —"Tijuana Wonderland," p.33 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Thurs. March 25	Workshop	Read: Packet—"In Athens Once," p.57 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Tue., March 30	Spiritual	Read: Packet "Healing Faith," p.165 Packet—"Hospitals Feeling Strain..." p.125

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Work To Be Done Before Class</u>
Thurs. April 1	Emotion	Write: Proposal for 2nd Essay due in class Read: Burroway—“JohnJohn’s World,” p.146 Burroway—“Red Sky in the Morning,” p.176
Tue., April 6	Tension	Read: Burroway—“The Slow Train to Kandy,” p.146 <i>Puro</i> —“The Border Patrol State,” p.72
Thurs. April 8	Theme	Screening: <i>Lone Star</i> Discussion of central themes
Tue., April 13	Imagery	Screening: <i>Lone Star</i> Discussion of imagery
Thurs. April 15	Peer Review	Write: Deadline for draft of 2nd Essay Bring 2 copies to class (no late work accepted)
Tue., April 20	Workshop Review	Write: Deadline for 2nd Essay (Individual conference = 1 copy) (Workshop = 20 copies)
Thurs. April 22	Workshop	Read: Burroway—“Powder,” p.284 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Tue., April 27	Revision/ Workshop	Read: <i>Puro</i> —“I Don’t Talk about Her…” p. 239 Burroway—“Revision,” p. 204-209 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Thurs. April 29	Workshop	Read: Packet—“Towards a New Consciousness,” p.33 Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Tue., May 4	Workshop	Read: Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Thurs. May 6	Final Class Meeting/ Workshop	Read: Workshop—2 Essays Write: Critiques
Sat. May 15 at 9 a.m.		Write: Revisions due in my office (bring 1 copy)

No Final Exam