

MODEL PROPOSAL FOR TAKING UNDERGRADUATE COURSE FOR GRADUATE CREDIT*

HEATHER BROWN

ENGLISH 480: CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOP
SPACES AND PLACES: WRITING ABOUT THE AMERICAN WEST, WRITING ABOUT HOME

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE:

I consider this course not only a rare opportunity to learn about the culture of America by studying its landscapes but also a chance to discover the country's literature in a way that cannot be experienced in the classroom. Not having taken very many American literature courses in the past, I hope that this experience will give me a good foundation for exploring the authors that have contributed to our country's national identity and fill in some gaps in my reading. My studies have rarely led me to read literature beyond the nineteenth century, so I relish the opportunity to be exposed to twentieth-century literature under the guidance of a professor who is a specialist in this period of American fiction. I believe that national identity is partly created by its literature, and I would like to learn how this is the case in more recent American culture. By seeing the landscapes that have inspired the literature that his course focuses on, I can begin to understand both landscapes and texts in a way that would not be possible independently of each other.

In order to understand the regions that inspired texts like *Ceremony* and *Desert Solitaire*, I will be able to discover how the authors have either failed or succeeded in accurately translating visual experiences into the written word. Comparing the reality of the Laguna reservation and Arches National Park to their representations in the texts will reveal the craft of writing in a way that goes beyond reading the words on the page alone. As a scholar who is also interested in creative writing, I will be able to learn the discipline of a craft that seems somewhat foreign to me currently. I know that not only will my academic understanding of literature grow during this course and trip, but my creativity will flourish as well by being given the chance to write down my own observations of the American West. There seems no better way to combine the creative with the academic than the way this course weaves them together so seamlessly.

Furthermore, I have recently become interested in the structuralist theory of Claude Levi-Strauss concerning the power of the written word, and I believe that this course will give me a firsthand application of Levi-Strauss' ideas. I will be granted the opportunity to participate in the same kind of anthropological study that he undertook. Levi-Strauss claims that the written word is so powerful that it can create and shape national identity. The authors covered in this course have recreated the American landscape that inspired them to use the power of words to reshape our idea of these specific places.

* In your proposal, please follow the general format of this model, adapting as necessary to your own topic. Extra readings and assignments required for graduate credit are highlighted in yellow below.

ENG 480 is a chance for me to explore the literature of the country I call home. I hope to discover America on this trip. I hope to understand how the literature of my country can shape its identity. Lastly, I hope to be given the chance to explore my own writing under the direction of a professor who specializes in these interests, along with fellow classmates.

EXTRA WORK REQUIRED FOR GRADUATE CREDIT:

In addition to the regular class readings—the four long works and the individual selected essays on the bibliography below—I will be reading works that deal with the craft of creative nonfiction. These readings, listed on pages 2-3 of the course syllabus, include Robert Root's *The Nonfictionist's Guide: On Reading and Writing Creative Nonfiction*; selected essays from *The Art of the Personal Essay*, edited by Phillip Lopate; and selected essays from Gretel Ehrlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces*, beyond those required for undergraduates in the course. Because this is a writing workshop, these supplemental readings deal, appropriately, with specific craft issues in writing creative nonfiction. Similarly, along with the journal writing, group presentation, and two formal essays expected of the rest of the class, I will undertake an extra assignment of planning and delivering a lecture on one of these issues of craft. (See below.) I am interested in pursuing a career in teaching on a university level, so this assignment offers a unique and valuable sort of job training.

GRADUATE BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Brickerhoff, John Jackson. "Seeing New Mexico." *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*. 15-25.
- Dillard, Annie. "Seeing." *The Art of the Personal Essay*. Ed. Phillip Lopate. 692-706.
- Egan, Timothy. "Plymouth Rock West." *Lasso the Wind*. 33-47.
- Ehrlich, Grete. "The Solace of Open Spaces." *The Solace of Open Spaces*. 1-15.
- Flores, Dan. "Inventing the Southwest in Abiquiu." *Horizontal Yellow*. 201-252.
- Neff, Emily Ballew. Prologue. *The Modern West: American Landscapes, 1890-1950*.
- Ortiz, Simon. *Sand Creek*.
- Pyne, Stephen J. *How the Canyon Became Ground*.
- Sides, Hampton. Chapters on Canyon de Chelley and The Long March. *Blood and Thunder*.
- Tompkins, Jane. "At the Buffalo Bill Museum, June 1988." *West of Everything*. 179-203.
- West, Elliott. "Part II: The Gold Rush." *The Contested Plains*. 97-170.
- Williams, Terry Tempest. "The Clan of One-Breasted Women." *Refuge*. 281-90.
- Wilson, Chris. *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition*.

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS
EXPANDED FORMAL ESSAYS
ESSAY AND LECTURE ON CRAFT

To earn graduate credit for this course, a student must expand the length of the two formal essays to between fifteen and twenty pages (compared with the ten-twelve page essays required of undergraduates).

The graduate student must also submit an additional paper of approximately ten pages, which closely examines an element of the craft of creative nonfiction, and then share that paper with the undergraduate students in a teaching environment. The assignment recognizes that our graduate students are preparing themselves not only as writers but also as teachers of creative writing. The process of the assignment should deepen their own understanding of the craft and then provide practical, hands-on experience in teaching that aspect of the craft.

The specifics of the craft lecture should be composed in consultation with the faculty member, but it might include, as examples, a discussion of the role of point of view in creative nonfiction or of the ethics of travel writing or of the use of fragmentation in the structure of an essay. The craft lecture should draw upon the readings within the course, both those assigned to the undergraduates and the additional readings assigned to the graduate student. It should make use of examples that the undergraduate students will be familiar with.

Since the lecture will be delivered while the class is on the road, the student will not be able to depend upon technology such as PowerPoint or web access or even posters. Therefore, it must be written and conducted in such a way as to achieve and maintain student interest. It is its own genre of creative writing and should be written with this in mind. Originality, insight, wit, narrative, voice—all aspects of creative nonfiction—should be a part of the craft lecture as well.

The lecture should be fifteen-twenty minutes in length and should include additional time for student questions and responses.