

Literature Of Creative Nonfiction

English 178, Section 1 – Fall 2014

I wrote *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and then waited for the novels that I was sure would come pouring out of the psychedelic experience...but they never came forth. I learned later that publishers had been waiting, too. They had been practically crying for novels by the new writers who must be out there somewhere, the new writers who would do the big novels of the hippie life or campus life or radical movements or the war in Vietnam or dope or sex or black militancy or encounter groups or the whole whirlpool all at once. They waited, and all they got was the *Prince of Alienation*... sailing off to Lonesome Island on his Tarot boat with this back turned and his Timeless cape on, reeking of camphor balls.
— Tom Wolfe

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The genre of creative nonfiction seems to have sprung to life fully formed in the 1960s. Of course this was not the case, and in this class we will look at the canonical texts and historical influences which led up to the development of a literary phenomenon that seized the public imagination with the unorthodox writing of practitioners like Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, and Gay Talese. We'll examine how these authors created a genre which has been a major influence on American culture ever since.

REQUIRED TEXTS

With the exception of *The New Journalism*, all books should be available at Spartan Bookstore.

The New Journalism; Tom Wolfe

Gay Talese Reader; Gay Talese

In Cold Blood; Truman Capote

Slouching Toward Bethlehem; Joan Didion

Armies of the Night; Norman Mailer

Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test; Tom Wolfe

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas; Hunter S. Thompson

**This is a craft. This is an art form.
I'm writing stories, just like fiction writers,
only I use real names.
— Gay Talese**

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with the genre's major literary works and critical approaches.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

ASSIGNMENTS

Here are the major assignments required for this course:

1. Students will turn in two-page response papers for each reading assignment that demonstrate familiarity with the text. (SLO 1,3,5)
2. Each student will give a 10-15 minute presentation, working in teams to cover the readings. These presentations will include the author's use of creative nonfiction techniques, background information on the author, particularly his or her professional career; and social and historical factors which influenced the work. (SLO 1,4,5)
3. Our major semester project will be a five to ten-page critical essay analyzing works from class and the student's own reading. Students will choose a theme such as the Vietnam War in creative nonfiction; development of the first-person narrator in journalism; or perhaps the origination of the nonfiction novel, and create an original exploration of how our texts connect to this theme. (SLO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

GRADING POLICY

Final grades will be calculated thus:

- 20% two-page critiques
- 20% presentations
- 20% class participation
- 40% final paper

There are no examinations for this class.

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING POLICY

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

**I was as sick as I have ever been when
I was writing “Slouching Toward Bethlehem”;
the pain kept me awake at night and so for twenty and
twenty-one hours a day I drank gin-and-hot-water
to blunt the pain and took Dexedrine to
blunt the gin and wrote the piece.
— Joan Didion**

CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

Students are allowed one unexcused absence, and those who come in after roll call will be considered absent. If you are ill, or are presented with an emergency that will cause you to miss more than one class, please contact me as soon as possible. In addition, the following practices are forbidden while class is in session: eating and the use of laptops or cell phones.

FACULTY WEB PAGE AND MYSJSU MESSAGING

Copies of the syllabus and schedule may be found on my faculty web page at <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/cathleen.miller/>.

SJSU WRITING CENTER

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Room 126 in Clark Hall. It is staffed by professional instructors and upper-division or graduate-level writing specialists from each of the seven SJSU colleges. Our writing specialists have met a rigorous GPA requirement, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. The Writing Center website is located at <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/about/staff/>.

SJSU ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty are required to report all infractions to the office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at <http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.htm>. The SJSU rules against plagiarism are set forth in the SJSU Catalog, which defines plagiarism as the act of representing the work of another as one's own (without giving appropriate credit), regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements. Plagiarism at SJSU includes, but is not limited to: (1) the act of incorporating the ideas, words, sentences, paragraphs, or parts thereof, or the specific substance of another's work, without giving appropriate credit, and representing the product as one's own work. It is the role and obligation of each student to know the rules that preserve academic integrity and abide by them at all times. This includes learning and following the particular rules associated with specific classes, exams, and/or course assignments. Ignorance of these rules is not a defense to the charge of violating the Academic Integrity Policy. All instances of violating the Academic Integrity Policy will be reported to the Dean of Student Services.

CAMPUS POLICY ON COMPLIANCE WITH AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the DRC to establish a record of their disability.

**I'm an alcoholic
I'm a drug addict
I'm a homosexual
I'm a genius
— Truman Capote**