

English 6740: Alternative Autobiographies

Spring 2016 Three Graduate Credit Hours

“All writing is autobiographical.” Donald Murray

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 4:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Texts:

Sue Hubbell *A Country Year*
Art Spiegelman *Maus*
Packet of materials from the bookstore

Class Purpose:

Autobiography or Life Writing has become an increasingly significant literary genre in the last 30 years. The genre has gained popularity amongst readers and writers, and at the same time, a body of criticism and theory has developed. In this class, we will focus on life writing in the following ways:

- We'll read the theory to frame some of the dilemmas life writers face (such as how to reconstruct long-distant events when memory is faulty; or what writers choose to reveal in their autobiographies.) We will then:
- Explore the theory as it's worked out in a two autobiographies we'll read over the semester;
- We will wrestle with those theoretical issues in our own writing;
- Explore ways other than writing to tell our stories, and then mesh the verbal with the non-verbal;
- We will use our skills and knowledge to help others tell their stories.

MENG Program Learning Outcomes:

1. Gather, analyze, and communicate information effectively as well as think creatively and critically.
2. Cultivate skills in close reading, critical thinking, and logical argument from evidence presented, creative expression, and persuasive writing.
3. Apply various theoretical perspectives and literary terminology to interpretations of literary texts to showcase an understanding of theoretical perspectives.
4. Acknowledge and articulate the significance of primary texts in one specific genre, period, culture or style.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of and interaction with foundational and current scholarly criticism.

6. Demonstrate an ability to employ academic conventions and protocols for written or multimodal presentations, including the application of appropriate conventions, citation formats and style manuals, such as the MLA style sheet for literary papers or the Chicago or APA formats for papers that range into historical or sociological areas of study.

Attendance and participation policy: This course is based on whole class and group discussion and participation, so your attendance is important for the community we make each week. As we meet only once a week, it's even more important that you attend class every time.

If you do have to miss class, please contact a peer to find out what we did and homework for the next week:

Name:			
E-mail:			
Phone number:			

Journals: (Learning Outcomes 1, 2 and 3) **30%**

There'll be lots of reading *and* writing in this class. As part of the writing, I'll ask you to bring 2 full, single-spaced journal pages to class every week which you'll hand in to me in class. I don't accept late journal pages unless you have negotiated with me before the due date.

Your journal will consist of a one page response to:

1. The reading assignment for the week
2. The writing "tool" we learn about in class

Here's the purpose of writing a journal:

For me: your journal writing shows me that you've done the reading, thought about, and understood what you read, and that you're practicing our writing tools.

For you: your journal is designed to prompt you to do the reading as you prepare for class discussion. Your journal also provides you with an opportunity to practice your writing skills.

Computer generate your journal entries. In the top left hand corner of each journal, print:

Name:

Date:

Topic:

You'll get journal credit if:

You give me honest, full, single-spaced pages.

I can tell from your writing that you've done the assigned reading.

You're using the tools in our "Writer's Tool Kit."

You hand your work in each class session. No late work, please.

Your grade will be based on how many full pages you hand in. You have one week's (two pages) freebie, and after that you'll lose points if you don't hand in a journal: -2=A-; -3=B+; -4=B; -5=B- and so on. I will give you journal topics or questions each class session to give focus to your writing and our discussion. You're free, however, to write about something else, so long as it's related to our reading, and fulfills the journal requirements stated above.

Papers: (Learning Outcomes 1,2,3,4,5, and 6) **30%** total
You will write two papers this semester that you will then revise.

Write a three to five page autobiographical essay focusing on your area of a/b interest **15%**
Peer Review: Thursday, February 18th
Due Date: Thursday, March 3rd

In a second, back-up paper, explore underlying theoretical issues: **15%**
Which theoretical issues we've discussed in class did you face in writing your essay?
Focus on one or two issues.
What options did you have for dealing with that issue?
Why and how did you choose the solution you did?
Which "writing tools" did you employ to make your writing effective? Which of those tools worked effectively for you? Which need more practice?
Peer Review: Thursday, March 17th
Due Date: Thursday, March 31st

After the two essays have been submitted and graded, you will have an opportunity to revise both papers, hopefully better grades. **15%**
Peer Review: Thursday, April 7th
Due Date: Thursday, April 21st

Alternative Autobiographical Project: (Learning Outcomes 1,3 and 4) **30%**
How do you express yourself in a non-verbal autobiographical way? This will be the subject of your first and second essay, as well as the topic for your oral presentation at the end of the semester. Consider this a "show and tell": First you tell us about your alternative autobiography (the essays) and then you show us what you do through photos, bringing in your work or whatever is appropriate to your medium.

Oral presentation: (Learning Outcomes 1 and 3)
At the end of the semester, you will have two opportunities to give oral presentations:
Thursday, March 31st The alternative autobiographers working in your area of interest;
Thursday, April 14th or 21st Your own work as an alternative autobiographer.

Field Trip: (Learning Outcomes 1,3 4) and 5 **10%**
Find someone who is also practicing your alternative autobiography, someone who is a few steps ahead of you in terms of skill and artistry. Visit that person and write about the experience:
Where are there similarities between you and the other person?
What are the differences? How do you account for the differences?

What do you find inspiring about what s/he is doing?

Does the person face the same theoretical issues as you? Explain.

Take photos so you can make a visual as well as verbal explanation of the work. You will present your person's work to the class on Thursday, March 31st. At the same time, you'll hand me a written version of your oral report.

Internet Research (Learning outcomes 1,2,3 and 4)

Throughout the semester, look on line and in publications for other people doing similar autobiographical work as yours. Weave your findings into your field trip report, your papers, and your own project.

Grades:

Journal	30%
Field trip and oral presentation	10%
Papers	30%
Your AA Project, including oral presentation	30%
Total:	100%

Please note: As there are no exams or tests in this class, your grade is based on your continuous, active participation in class activities such as journals, oral presentation and essays throughout the semester. There are no extra points to earn, and if you miss an assignment, you can't make it up later. If you do the work every week and don't take time out, you'll probably get a good grade in this course.

Class Expectations:

You can expect me to:

- Attend class regularly, and on time;
- Stick to the syllabus. If there's any reason to change the syllabus, I'll discuss the change with you before implementing it;
- Return your work, graded, within a week of the due date;
- Attend my office hours on a reliable basis.

In exchange, I expect you to:

- Attend class regularly, and on time;
- Take part in discussions and group work
- Do the homework conscientiously;
- Hand in work on time.

Students should expect to do between 3-4 hours of work outside class for each hour in class.

Read this carefully: If you have difficulty meeting any of these expectations, please talk to me. Make a note of my phone number and e-mail address printed at the top of this syllabus. If you can't make a deadline, make contact with me to negotiate a new date **before** the work is due. I rarely accept late work unless you and I have negotiated a new date **before** the official due date has passed. *E-mail is the most effective way to reach me.*

The Legal Bit:

Because an important part of being a college student is academic honesty, the university expects you to complete all your academic work without cheating, plagiarism, lying and/or bribery. Penalties include failing this class or being suspended from school. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with all aspects of the Student Code as it includes a list of prohibited behaviors, and procedures for dealing with infractions.

Core Beliefs:

According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “determine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student’s core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the department head. The student’s request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student’s beliefs.” Please talk with me if you experience any conflict of core beliefs; you and I can almost always negotiate a way forward without taking the formal route described above.

Disability Accommodation:

When students seek accommodation in a regularly scheduled course, they have the responsibility to make such requests at the Center for Students with Disabilities before the beginning of the quarter [semester] in which the accommodation is being requested. When a student fails to make such arrangements, interim accommodations can be made by the instructor, pending the determination of the request for a permanent accommodation.

Emergency Closure:

If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class via e-mail. Look for announcements from my e-mail address: jelsley@weber.edu sent to your Weber e-mail.

Schedule

Please note: Do the readings *before* the date indicated below so that you can come to class ready to discuss the assigned reading.

Thursday, January 14th

Intro to the class
Writing Tool: Five Senses

Thursday, January 21st

The history of autobiography: “When Memory Speaks”
Writing Tool: Scene, Summary and Musing

<i>Thursday, January 28th</i>	“All Writing is Autobiography,” Donald Murray <i>Writing Tool: Moving Around in Time</i>
<i>Thursday, February 4th</i>	Theory of autobiography: “The Veto of the Imagination,” ps. 1-4 <i>Writing Tool: Start at a moment of Tension</i> Alternative proposal
<i>Thursday, February 11th</i>	Art Spiegelman, <i>Maus</i> <i>Writing Tool: Metaphor</i>
<i>Thursday, February 18th</i>	Peer Review of paper 1 <i>Writing Tool: Conversation</i>
<i>Thursday, February 25th</i>	Theory of autobiography: “The Veto of the Imagination,” ps. 4-14 <i>Writing Tool: Naming Names and Details</i>
<i>Thursday, March 31st</i>	Sue Hubbel, <i>A Country Year</i> Essay 1 due Peer Review of paper 2
<i>Thursday, March 10th</i>	Spring Break
<i>Thursday, March 17th</i>	Theory of autobiography: “The Veto of the Imagination,” ps. 14- 16 <i>Writing Tool: Describing a person</i>
<i>Thursday, March 24th</i>	<i>Maus</i> <i>Writing Tool: Metaphor</i>
<i>Thursday, March 31st</i>	Presentations on Field Trip Essay 2 due
<i>Thursday, April 7th</i>	Workshop day for graded essays 1 and 2
<i>Thursday, April 14th</i>	Presentations
<i>Thursday, April 21st</i>	Presentations