CW/LT3XX WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW: AN INTRODUCTION TO IMMERSION WRITING
IES Abroad Dublin Writers Program Syllabus

DESCRIPTION:
Over twelve weekly sessions, this course will facilitate student engagement with a genre of writing that merges the boundaries between literary art and research nonfiction. Creative nonfiction is the writing of the real. Practitioners explore both the world around them and the world within. Although it employs many of the same literary devices as fiction, creative nonfiction allows the writer to engage with moments from real life, and in so doing look for new meaning. As part of their study abroad experience, students will experiment with approaches such as Travel Writing, Immersion Journalism, and Immersion Memoir, with authenticity and inventiveness serving as keystones in the process.

CREDIT HOURS: 3

CONTACT HOURS: 45

INSTRUCTOR: Stephen McMahon

PREREQUISITES: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:
Students will engage with weekly topic areas through short presentations, guided discussion, group work and writing and imaging exercises that will focus on spontaneity, experimentation and craft. Guest speakers such as travel writers, essayists, journalists, field trips to sites of cultural, historical, and artistic significance, attendance at public readings, exhibitions, and film screenings, will complement and augment the students' experience of this course. Moodle will be used to facilitate student engagement with primary and secondary resources, as well as provide an interactive space for project collaboration.

LANGUAGE OF PRESENTATION: English

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate how the forms and functions of narrative act as fundamental instruments of thought and communication
- Recognize that creative nonfiction encompasses a variety of genres and approaches
- Distinguish between description, exposition and commentary
- Differentiate between objectivity, subjectivity and fiction
- Write candidly and clearly about personal experience and their experience of the world around them
- Appreciate and articulate how immersion writing can serve as a means of responding to and making sense of a new culture
- Analyse and critique their own work and the work of others in a proactive context
- Remain mindful of the need to reimagine aesthetic possibilities rather than merely revise texts
- Present their work in a professional manner

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:
Participation (10%); Weekly Blog Entries (50%); Final Portfolio and Showcase (40%)

Participation (10%):

The ambition in including a participation component is to facilitate students learning from each other and to give them the opportunity to practice and develop listening, speaking and persuasive skills. A set of simple guidelines will be introduced at the start of Session 1. These guidelines will be discussed in detail so that students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Below is an outline of these guidelines:

**Outstanding Participant**: Contributions in class reflect exceptional preparation. Ideas are consistently substantive and insightful, and persuasively presented. Absence would significantly diminish the quality of class discussion.

**Good Participant**: Contributions in class reflect thorough preparation. Ideas offered are usually substantive and insightful, and often persuasively presented. Absence would diminish quality of class discussion.

**Adequate Participant**: Contributions in class reflect satisfactory preparation. Ideas are sometimes substantive and insightful, but seldom offer a new direction for the discussion. Absence would diminish quality of class discussion.

**Non-Participant**: Little or no contribution in class. Subsequently, there is limited basis for evaluation. Absence would not affect the quality of class discussion.

**Unsatisfactory Participant**: Contributions in class reflect inadequate preparation. Ideas offered are seldom substantive, provide little insight, and are rarely constructive. Absence would improve the quality of class discussion.

Weekly Blog Entries (50%):
This continuous assessment component will take the form of a chronological blog, containing ten written reflections and exercises pertinent to the aspects of the course addressed during each session. Students will document their deepening understanding of the genre and communicate moments of significance. To be submitted weekly via Moodle (Weeks 2 – 11 inclusive, 500 words per week).

Final Portfolio and Showcase (40%):
Each student portfolio will include at least ten themed pieces in the form of memoir, travel writing, and immersion journalism. The portfolio will represent the student’s best work and demonstrate a high standard of competency in the processes of drafting and editing. The showcase will take the form of an open reading event, with students presenting a selection of their respective work and discussing their experience of shaping each piece. Digital copies of each portfolio element will be submitted via Moodle and assessed accordingly.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**:
Because IES courses are designed to take advantage of the unique contribution of the instruction and the lecture/discussion format, regular class attendance is mandatory. Any missed class, without a legitimate reason will be reflected in the final grade. A legitimate reason would include: documented illness or family bereavement. Travel, (including travel delays) is not a legitimate reason.

**CONTENT**:
Session 1: Exploring the Genre: Purpose and Practice

Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop

Having introduced ourselves and examined the core ambitions of the course, we will consider and discuss the relationship between narrative and the nature of thought, memory, and language. Students will participate in writing exercises that will explore various forms of nonfictional narrative; first or third person, subjective or objective, tense, and considering identity of speaker and identity of listener.

Required readings and resources:


Session 2: ‘I Wouldn’t Start from Here’: Approaches to Travel Writing

Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop

This session will focus on the practicalities of travel writing, the value of ‘stumbled on’ material, how we might observe without being mere onlookers, and the place of writing in the travel experience with particular emphasis on the Irish travel writing. Students will participate in individual and collaborative writing exercises, designed to serve as prompts for writing their first ‘live’ travel pieces.

Required readings and resources:


Session 3: Write Here, Write Now: Guest Speaker: Travel Writer

Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop
The group will host a working travel writer who will share their relationship with and practice of writing and their experiences of the profession. The guest will take questions from the students and lead them in a writing exercise that will serve as a prompt for the workshop component to Session 4.

**Required readings and resources:**


**Session 4: ‘This Must Be the Place’: Immersion Travel Writing**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*

The primary focus for this session will be the difference between objectivity and subjectivity. Following on from the writing prompt introduced by the Guest Speaker in Week 3, students will participate in one-on-one writing exercises, with pairs swapping between the roles of reader and writer and documenting the exchanges.

**Required readings and resources:**


**Session 5: Immersion Journalism as Creative Nonfiction**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*

Focusing on contemporary cultural issues in Ireland, this session will highlight the challenges of identifying appropriate sources, use of archival material, simple interview techniques, and confidentiality and ownership issues. Students will identify a topic that they would like to write about and, under the guidance of the facilitator, begin initial research, formulate key questions and identify potential interviewees.

**Required readings and resources:**


**Session 6: Write Here, Write Now: Guest Speaker: Immersion Journalism**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*

The group will host a working Ireland-based journalist who will share their relationship with and practice of writing and their experiences of the profession. The guest will take questions from the students and lead them in a writing exercise that will serve as a prompt for the workshop component to Session 7.

**Required readings and resources:**


**Session 7: Becoming Everyman, Everywoman: Immersion Journalism in Practice**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*

Following on from the exercise assigned by the guest speaker, students will share their experience of participating in a series of short interviews. Focusing on the challenges of shaping a personal narrative while remaining faithful to the fundamental facts of the circumstance, students will discuss and identify their preconceptions and reflect on whether these were confirmed or contradicted.

**Required readings and resources:**


**Session 8: Notions of the Self: Immersion Memoir**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*
During this session, participants will explore the genre of immersion memoir and identify the potential challenges they may face when writing their own immersion memoir. Discussion topics will include the significance of place and perspective, how to maintain and protect the ‘personality’ of one’s writing, and reading and writing between the lines of objectivity and immersion.

**Required readings and resources:**


**Session 9: Immersion Memoir and Truthfulness**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*

This session will focus on developing the students’ awareness of the value and place of the imagination when writing about the experience of ‘reliving’ the past and ‘living’ the present. Discussion topics will include the difference between autobiography and memoir, and how to distinguish between and write memoir and immersion memoir.

**Required readings and resources:**


**Session 10: Write Here, Write Now: Guest Speaker: Memoir**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*

The group will host a professional ghost writer who will share their practice of writing and experiences of the profession. The guest will take questions from the students and lead them in a writing exercise that will serve as a prompt for the workshop component to Session 11.

**Required reading and resources:**


**Session 11: Immersion Memoir and Personal Narrative**

*Facilitator’s presentation, discussion, and writing workshop*

In conjunction with the writing exercise assigned by the guest speaker, the primary focus of this session will be an exploration of how students might ‘weave’ their study abroad experience into their respective personal narratives. Discussions topics will include the value of process versus outcome, if and how their relationship with reading and writing has changed during their time abroad, and how the ability to write honestly might prove valuable in shaping the future.

**Required reading and resources:**


**Session 12: Reading Showcase of Students’ Work**

Completed portfolios will go on display both online via Moodle and at the IES Dublin Centre. In advance of the showcase event, an open invitation will be sent out to all students. The showcase will take the form of a public reading event, with students presenting a selection of their respective work and discussing the process behind each piece.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

*Copies of pertinent extracts will be provided in both print and PDF format.*


**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

*Copies of all text, audio and visual resources available in the IES Dublin library:*


**RECOMMENDED ONLINE, ARCHIVE, AND EXHIBITION RESOURCES:**

- Creative Nonfiction Foundation
- Chester Beatty Library
- National Archives of Ireland
• National Print Museum
• National Library of Ireland
• Irish Film Institute & Irish Film Archive
• The Irish Times
• The Irish Independent
• The Irish Examiner
• Radio Telefís nhEireann: Ireland’s national public-service media organisation

**INSTRUCTOR BIO:**
**Stephen McMahon** has taught at university level and with Study Abroad students since 2002. In 2011, he received the *IES Abroad Instructor of the Year* award for his work with students at IES Dublin. He read for a Master of Arts in English (Creative Writing) at Queens University, Belfast, and is continuing his professional development in the field of higher education teaching and learning with the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin. In conjunction with his teaching commitments, Stephen writes short fiction and has been shortlisted for awards including the Hennessy New Irish Writing Award and The Fish Short Story Prize. His work has been published in several creative writing journals and anthologies. Aside from teaching and writing, Stephen has a passion for travel and documentary photography, and in 2011 was awarded the distinction of Licentiate of the Irish Photographic Federation.