ADVANCED CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOP
ENG 483
T/TR 9:25 to 10:40
Willard, Room 005
Spring 2012
Professor Mary Collins

Office Hours: T/TR 11:00 to 12:00
T/TR 2:00 to 5:00
Willard Hall, Room 329

Contact: collinsmae@ccsu.edu
Ph: 832-2770 (0)
Ph: 904-5364 (H) before 9:00 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Unlike the other Creative Nonfiction courses in the Creative Writing sequence, ENG 483 does not have a “boot camp” for six weeks or include lots of smaller assignments that hone in on specific writing techniques. In this class, you will take all that you have learned in your advanced writing courses and apply it to essays and features that showcase your interests and special attributes as a writer. I give you tremendous leeway in selecting story angles, for example, and also expect you to be much more mindful of voice and audience. Ideally, you will learn about markets for your work and follow through and actually submit your best material (and possibly get paid!).

Each time I teach ENG 483, I also incorporate a civic project. I believe the decline in literacy skills in the United States has made sophisticated writing a “hard” skill—more like engineering—than what is normally called a “soft” skill that everyone has in some degree or another. So what does that mean for you? I believe you have an obligation to use your literacy skills not just to publish, but also to provide important services to your larger community that only people with advanced writing skills can provide. Our project this term: to interview and feature Vietnam Veterans in Connecticut and produce a keepsake-quality magazine for them by March 31. I have raised $4000, so the stakes are high, the quality needs to be exceptional, and the audience is ready made. They expect 1000 to 1500 people at the March 31 “Homecoming for Vietnam Veterans” event, which you are required to attend, so mark your calendar.

The Professor: Most of you have already had me before, so I will just post my website here: www.marycollinswriter.net.

REQUIRED READING
The Vietnam War: A Concise International History, Mark Atwood Lawrence, Oxford University Press
Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction, Editor Judith Kitchen
Reading Packet provided by the professor.
Paper One: VIETNAM VETERAN MAGAZINE PROJECT, Essay: Dr. Eileen Hurst will talk to the class in the first two weeks and assign each of you at least one Vietnam Veteran. You must contact that veteran, secure letters and other artifacts, such as photographs, then reflect on the experience and write a three-page essay of your own that in some way relates to the Vietnam War in Connecticut. I am going to give you a lot of leeway on angles here. This essay will appear in the magazine. Contact Vietnam Veteran by January 26; Draft of essay due February 2; Essay due February 9. Revision due one week after it is workshopped.

Humor Column: Three-page draft due March 1; Final Column due March 6

Paper Three: Third Person Reported Essay. In this four-to-five page essay, strive to sustain all the warmth and personality of a personal essay but write in THIRD PERSON. You must do some outside reporting and incorporate the research into your narrative. Angle due March 15; Draft due March 27; Final due March 29

Paper Four: Write an essay (first person personal or third person) on a topic of your own choosing. Draft due April 10; Essay due April 12. Five to seven pages.

FINAL EXAM: Rewrite one paper.

OTHER ASSIGNMENTS

- Query Letter Assignment: Due April 12

GUIDELINES: I want TWO copies of each paper you submit. All papers must be double-spaced, on white paper, include page numbers, and a listing of any source you use. We will workshop all papers so be certain to bring enough for everyone in the class plus two for me (13 copies).

Creative Nonfiction is called “creative” because it borrows literary techniques from fiction, but everything you write in this class must be based on fact. You may not make things up.

I encourage you to test yourself and to strive to execute writing techniques you have not tried before, such as writing a reported third person essay in a narrative style. I will give you a lot of credit for intelligent risks.

Plagiarism: If you borrow material deliberately and try to pass it off as your own, I will fail you for the assignment and possibly the course. I abide by the rules set out in the
I worked for 20 years as a freelancer and never missed a deadline; that’s how I stayed in business. All deadlines in this class are firm. All students are expected to attend class regularly and on time. I take attendance every day and give you an in-class grade every day. If you expect to miss more than TWO classes all term, please see me after class. Chronic tardiness will impact your final grade. A third absence may result in a full grade reduction or even failure for the course. Ninety percent of the most important work in ENG 483 takes place IN CLASS, so when you miss too many classes, you miss the core of the curriculum. There is no class text—the “curriculum” springs from my 20 years of experience as a writer in a range of markets.

**GRADING**

Anyone who takes ENG 483 is usually already an accomplished writer. I rarely encounter students who skip classes, drag their feet on assignments etc. The average grade for this advanced workshop tends to be a B to high B; that said I do expect HIGH QUALITY work. Do not be misled by the short page count on each paper. I always emphasize QUALITY over QUANTITY, especially in this mixed media market where the texts keep getting shorter and shorter.

An “A” paper reflects firm control over the basic writing techniques you learned in CNF I and CNF2, and a creative flair that is the hallmark of the best creative nonfiction. Your writing might be exemplary, for example, but if your angle is flat and predictable, it could cost you a grade (or more) on the assignment. In ENG 483 in particular, I expect to see some real effort on the “creative” side of the writing equation—control over voice, fresh word choice, intelligent pacing, some original reporting etc. You are not writing reports, but essays and features, which require storytelling, layers of meaning, fresh reporting and reflection.

**Class Participation:** Class participation accounts for 40 percent of your grade. You will all serve as Lead Reviewers, a role I want you to embrace with gusto as we engage in workshop discussions! But remember: all students must read all papers and be prepared to offer feedback to their colleagues.

**Individual Conferences and Office Hours:** I will meet with each student one-on-one TWICE this term (meetings are required). I am also eager to see you at other times, of course, and encourage you to take advantage of my office hours (see the top of the syllabus). If you cannot make it during those hours, I am happy to schedule an appointment. If you have any special needs, such as a visual impairment or mobility issues that might impede your ability to report, please see me during the first week of class. I work at home most of the time so you may call me there, but not after 9:00 p.m.
VIETNAM VETERAN MAGAZINE PROJECT
PRODUCTION SCHEDULE AND VITAL DEADLINES

Our class is representing CCSU and the generous donors who are financing the Veterans Magazine Project. We MUST meet our deadlines. We will be teaming with a former designer from *The Hartford Courant* and a professional printer based in New Britain, CT. When I say that you are responsible for proofing pages, you are truly responsible for giving them a careful read. I will also copy edit everything but you will actually SIGN OFF on pages, just as you would in a professional publishing situation. Editors usually pick a color and use that color when they put their initials at the bottom of the page. When something goes wrong—like a misspelled byline that wasn’t corrected—the editors can see who was responsible for that page with just one glance at that bottom corner. So we will mimic the patterns of a professional editorial production cycle.

While I will be the one dealing with the logistics, it’s important for you to at least be aware of all of the deadlines. It’s also up to you to accumulate plenty of artwork so we can have a vivid design both on the cover and in the interior.

**PRODUCTION SCHEDULE**

- Full text and all art to the Designer, February 23
- **Fully Designed Magazine to me by March 7; reviewed by ENG 483 March 9**
- Feedback on Designed Magazine due to Designer, March 10
- Revised Designed pages to printer by March 14
- Page Proof from Printer to me by March 17
- **FINAL PAGES to Printer by March 19**
- Completed Magazines printed by March 23
- Distributed at the Hartford Armory Event, March 31

This is going to be an incredible project—indeed, one of the best and most fulfilling civic projects I’ve ever done in one of my classes and I’ve done plenty. Do not be intimidated. I will walk you through each part of the process. It will be a great learning experience and we will be giving these soldiers something they should have had when they first came home—respect and affirmation.
SCHEDULE

Jan. 19, Thursday: Introduction to ENG 483 Agenda  
Vietnam Veterans Magazine Project  
Reading: The Vietnam War: A Concise International History, Mark Atwood Lawrence, Oxford University Press, Chps. 1-5; “Random,” Scott Ely, Short Takes anthology

Jan. 24, Tuesday: The Art of the Interview  
Gathering Artifacts and Art  
Guest Speaker, Eileen Hurst, CT Veterans Project  
Reading: Complete The Vietnam War by Lawrence; “The War at Home,” Janet Wondra, Short Takes anthology  
Assignment: Write a two-page portrait of someone you have lived with (or two people, if you wish). I prefer you write about relatives but that is not required. The angle: explore the deep currents that people hide from each other, the things that have had the most impact on their lives but which, often, they speak of the least. Read Wondra’s piece FIRST before writing and note how well she uses detail, action and strands of dialogue to reveal the profound feelings that lie below the surface in her characters. Bring in FOUR copies for group workshop.

Jan. 26, Thursday: Workshop Portraits  
A Brief History of the Vietnam War  
Assignment: You MUST make contact with the veteran(s) assigned to you and be prepared to share your findings with the class by January 31. The goal: to interview the Vietnam Veteran(s), collect any letters or other written materials he/she may have, and secure copies of photographs and other memorabilia that might work well as art in the magazine.

January 31, Tuesday: Report on Vietnam Veterans Assigned to You  
Reading: “Random,” Scott Ely, Short Takes anthology  
Assignment: Drafts of Vietnam Essays due February 2. Bring FOUR copies to class for group work.

February 2, Thursday: Workshop Drafts Vietnam Project Essays  
The Power (and Challenge) of Candor  
Assignment: Bring in copies of artifacts/letters etc. Track down material from the families of fallen Vietnam Veterans.

February 7, Tuesday: Assess Photographs, Artifacts etc. for Designer  
Assignment: Vietnam Project Essay due February 9
February 9, Thursday:

February 14, Tuesday: Workshop Vietnam Project Essays
Assignment: Read essays assigned for discussion.

February 16, Thursday: Workshop Vietnam Project Essays
Brainstorm Ideas for Magazine Design
Assignment: Read essays assigned for discussion. Complete any additional reporting you need to do to complete your overall package on your assigned veteran.

February 21, Tuesday: Workshop Revisions
Edit Other Material from Fallen Vietnam Veterans (letters, artifacts etc.)
Assignment: Read essays assigned for discussion.

February 23, Thursday: Workshop Revisions
Select Final Copy for Magazine
Important Deadline: Final magazine text due to the designer
Note: NOW is the time to catch any major problems. Once the printer shoots the copy, it will be very costly to make changes.
Reading: “Me Talk Pretty One Day,” David Sedaris, Short Takes anthology
Assignment: Bring in writing that you find funny. Strive to select contemporary material (it can be from magazines, essay collections, or online sites). Some authors to consider: Dave Barry, PJ O’Rourke, Tim Cahill, Amy Sedaris (David’s sister!), Tina Fey, Steve Martin, Woody Allen

February 28, Tuesday: Mastering Humor
Assignment: Draft of three-page humor column due March 1. Bring in FOUR copies for group discussion.

March 1, Thursday: Workshop Humor Columns (drafts)
Assignment: Humor Columns due March 6. Bring in 12 copies (enough for the class and two copies for me).

March 6, Tuesday: Workshop Humor Columns (final)
Important Deadline: Designed Magazine due to me March 7, Weds.

March 8, Thursday: Proof Vietnam Veteran Magazine Copy
Important Deadline: Final changes due to me by March 13. *Note: changes cost money so only request essential alterations.

Workshop Humor Columns (final)
March 13, Tuesday: One-on-one Conferences Required (meet in my office, Willard, Room 329)

Reading: “The Unexpected Mrs. Stowe,” by David McCullough, in his book Brave Companions. Other excellent third-person reported essay/feature writers to investigate: John McPhee, Tom Wolfe, Ian Frazier, Susan Orlean

Assignment: A third person reported essay on a topic of your own choosing — ANGLE and REPORTING plan due March 15.

March 15, Thursday: Workshop Third Person Paper Angles

Practice Reading for ENG 483 Student Selected to Represent the Magazine Project on March 31

Assignment: DRAFT of Third Person Paper due March 27. Bring in FOUR copies.

March 19 to 23: SPRING BREAK

Final proof of Vietnam Magazine to PRINTER, March 19, Monday

Magazine printed by March 23, Friday

March 27, Tuesday: Workshop Drafts of Third Person Papers

Assignment: Third Person Reported papers due March 29. Bring enough copies for everyone in the class and two copies for me.

March 29, Thursday: Final Reflections on Vietnam Project

Practice Reading

EVENT: HOMECOMING CELEBRATION FOR CT’S VIETNAM VETERANS, March 31, Saturday, Hartford Armory). Attendance REQUIRED.

Most Americans had a very complex reaction to the men and women who returned home from fighting in the Vietnam War. The CT Veterans’ Project, which operates under the umbrella of a national program sponsored by the Library of Congress, has decided to organize the homecoming celebration most Vietnam Veterans never had. It’s all part of a larger series of events that will take place in CT over the next few years to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the war. Our class is in charge of producing a keepsake-quality publication for 1000 or more veterans that are expected to attend Homecoming on March 31, 2012. PLEASE do everything you can to make it to this special event.

We will select one or two students from our class to read from their essays at the event.

April 3, Tuesday: Workshop Third Person Papers
April 5, Thursday: Workshop Third Person Papers
Assignment: Write an essay (either personal or third person) on a topic of your own choosing. **DRAFT due April 10.** Focus on the LITERARY aspects of the essay form.

April 10, Tuesday: Crafting a Literary Voice
**Matching Your Work to a Market/Audience**
Assignment: Essays due April 12. Bring in enough copies for the class and two copies for me.
Write a query letter to a specific target publication or website (research submission guidelines) for one of the papers you wrote this term. Bring FOUR copies of the letter to class.

April 12, Thursday: The Art of the Query
Assignment: Read papers selected for discussion.

April 17, Tuesday: Workshop Essays
Assignment: Read papers selected for discussion.

April 19, Thursday: Workshop Essays

April 24, Tuesday: One-on-One Conference, Required

April 26, Thursday: Workshop Revisions of the Essays
Assignment: Select the paper you wish to revise for the Final. Bring FOUR copies of the original submission to class for group discussion.

May 1, Tuesday: Workshop Paper Selected for Final
Assignment: Visit mediabistro.com and skim the types of jobs offered for relatively inexperienced writers and editors. Come prepared to talk about the range of jobs you find (and salaries!). Find ANOTHER free job-line that offers writing and editing jobs for people with limited experience. Share your inside information with the class!

May 3, Thursday: Career Options in Writing and Editing

 Finals: May 7 to 11