

**If you wish to take this course as an Open Studies student, you MUST ensure that you apply for Open Studies status, which is open between June 1 and July 31<sup>st</sup>.**

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/future-students/open-studies/open-studies-dates>

<https://iac01.ucalgary.ca/StudentAdmission/SectionPages/LaunchPadUndergrad.aspx>

**English 595: Creative Non-fiction**

**Professor Aritha van Herk**

**Wednesdays, 17:00 to 19:45**

**September 9 – December 9, 2020**

**Those who wish to take this course must apply for permission with a portfolio of relevant writing (20 pages), attached as a pdf document, to vanherk@ucalgary.ca**

**Your name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Prior Creative Writing and English courses:**

**Your reasons for wishing to take this course:**

**You MUST include a one-page proposal of the nonfiction project you plan to write.**

**Deadline for portfolio: July 20, 2020.**

**You will be notified of your enrollment in the class by August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.**

## Course Description

This Creative Writing course seeks to enable students to work from experience and research toward the writing of an effective and compelling narrative. Creative Non-fiction's impetus is to use the techniques of literary craft within a factual or research-based framework to write in a compelling, dramatic, and aesthetically interesting manner. This work can comprise an essay, a journal article, a research paper, a memoir, or a prose-poem. The subject can be personal, but it need not necessarily be so. The mixture of public and private, historical and contemporary matter contributes to the power of this writing: there are no limits to subject matter as long as that topic is explored in a narrative way. The writing should seek to translate to the reader a particular subject, place, or personality vividly and unusually. Topics (NOT themes) might range from barber shops to grain elevators, from elixirs to eyeglasses, from shoes to revolving doors, from the phrase *esprit de l'escalier* to "no one expects the Spanish inquisition." This class provides an opportunity to engage in depth with an object, neighbourhood, or locution.

Constraints: NO violence; No fantasy

This form enables the investigation of unusual questions in contemporary times. Although focused on narrative, it is less a genre in and of itself than a text instigated by voice and research, strong description, evocative images, and powerful revelations. While it relies on the author's ability to recount or to springboard from actual events, it relies also on imagination and craft to relay important ideas: stories of event, experience, loss, coincidence, and accident. Most of all, the successful work of nonfiction incites reflection on a crucial epiphany or moment of recognition that the writer can offer the reader.

We will discuss contemporary works of creative non-fiction, including examples of autobiography, memoir, travel narrative, literary journalism and ficto-criticism. The aim of the course is to enable students to research and develop a powerful piece of writing that is both creative and critical, whether a lyric essay, a meditation, or a well-researched dive into an historical or place-based subject.

This is NOT a course in writing critical essays, but a course that will seek to inspire students to stretch their notions of writing as a persuasive or informative incentive in order to create a narrative that informs and pleases.

Text: Lee Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction*

The class will function as a workshop of the whole. As we will likely be working virtually, students should expect to be active and present via ZOOM.

Students' writing will be workshopped at least twice in the term.

### **Grade breakdown:**

- Final project of 75 pages of a well-crafted work of Creative Non-fiction: 50%
- Presentation on one challenging aspect of research and practice: 10%
- Workshopped writing: 20%
- Participation in workshopping, contributions to class discussion: 20%

### **Book-length works as examples**

Andre Aciman, editor. *The Proust Project*

Laura Buzzard, Don LePan, Nora Ruddock, Alexandria Stuart, editors. *The Broadview Anthology of Expository Prose – Third Canadian Edition*

Kyle Buckley, *The Laundromat Essay*

Alain de Botton, *A Week at the Airport*

Chelene Knight, *Dear Current Occupant*

Robert Kroetsch, *A Likely Story*

Alberto Manguel, *The City of Words*

Jan Morris, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*

Patti Smith, *Woolgathering*

Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*

Jesse Thistle, *From the Ashes*

Kim Thuy, *Ru*