Rutgers University  
MFA Program in Creative Writing  
Non-Fiction Workshop 26:200:559  
(Cross-listed in History as 26:510:504)  
Spring 2020

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Offices Hours: Wednesday, 3:00-500 d Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday by appointment

We shall have two kinds of meetings. Roughly three-quarters of them shall be devoted to your writing, to workshop, i.e., the reading (ahead of time), scribbling and commenting upon (ahead of time), and in-class discussion of your work. The remainder will be devoted to outside reading. I realize that this is a more time than is usually devoted to outside reading in a writing workshop. But I find that our discussions of outside reading, even just a few outside readings, however eclectically chosen, adds valuable points of reference, perspectives, and vocabulary to our discussion of your work, repaying the time it takes away from workshop, even in a large one. Here's what I will expect of you:

I expect you to do all the reading and come to class prepared to contribute to a lively discussion of our common reading and one another's writing (prepared with thoughts and comments and questions and constructive criticism, all of which go beyond the easy, the predictable, the clichéd and especially the black and the white). To put it another way: **Attendance and class participation are not optional.** They are a fundamental part of your responsibility as a citizen of this workshop. What's more, the less you speak, the more I'll have to, and believe me when I say that you will tire of that very quickly.

I expect each of you to present your own work at least twice and I hope three times during the term. I would love it if everyone had the chance to submit new work twice and a substantial revision once.

I urge you--and this is purely for your own good--to struggle to take each of our pieces as far as you can take them before sharing them with us. The farther you take a piece, the more we can help you with If, you are fully aware of half the things wrong with your piece when our discussion begins, chances are that half of our discussion of that piece will be a waste of your time. Under no circumstances should you submit a really early- let alone a rough draft.

With the possible exception of those of you volunteering for our first workshop, I will expect you to distribute your work in hard copy a week ahead of your presentation. If for some reason a writer is unable to distribute hard copy, I expect each of you to print up the piece yourselves and scribble on the pages yourselves. With the exception of students with special needs, I want computers on the seminar table to be the rare exception not the rule.

I will expect that (ahead of class) each of you will read and if possible reread each of the pieces on the agenda for that week. Your marginalia and closing comments (imagine a letter to the author, **with a copy to me**) should be carefully considered, thoughtful, humane, penetrating, and honest most of all. Imagine a writer friend, a close writer friend, has asked you to read an essay she's working on in order to help her figure out how to do what is trying to do better (as opposed to what you would do if the piece were yours). There is nothing is to be gained, for your friend or for the art, by holding back.

That said: How you are honest will inevitably shape how helpful your comments will be. The more you are able to say about the experience of reading and the chemistry of the experience-the voice, the language, the structure--the piece the better. The less you say about what you liked and didn't like, what worked and didn't work, the better.

Same with our outside readings: Think of it this way: A discussion is like a paragraph. A good one very rarely starts with a bad first line. The last thing I want to know is whether you liked the book. Save it. Better to talk about what they writer did, how she did it, what you learned from her about writing, what you might like to imitate, borrow, or steal. I will expect you, ahead of class, to mark up the hard copy of each other's work.