Course Title: The Foundations of Creative Nonfiction  
Course Code: CNF 80  
Instructor: Amy Ettinger  

Course Description:  
In this course, we will explore the craft of nonfiction in our own writing and in the works of published authors. We will examine craft techniques in essays and memoir, and then you will have the chance to use these skills in weekly generative writing exercises. The goal will be to build these short drafts into larger, publishable pieces that you will have the option to workshop in class.

Note About Live Attendance and Recording:  
These class sessions will be recorded.  
Live participation is required in order for students to receive the full benefit of the course. Class recordings are not intended to be a replacement or substitute for class attendance.

Grade Options and Requirements:  
• No Grade Requested (NGR)  
  o This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.  
• Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) or Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)  
  o Grade will be based on attendance (50%) and participation (50%). Participation includes both class discussion and writing exercises.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.

Course Materials:  
I will post the weekly readings for class discussion on Canvas. No textbooks are required.
Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week 1: What is Creative Nonfiction?
We will discuss how CNF overlaps with and diverges from traditional journalism, the rules of the genre, and how it differs from fiction.

Writing Exercise: Giving Yourself Permission
Reading and Discussion: James Baldwin
In-class discussion on workshop guidelines.
Generative mini workshop for brainstorming ideas.

Week 2: Developing Your Voice
Voice is a key component to personal essays and memoir. We will examine the role of voice in creating intimacy and trust with your reader.
Reading and Discussion: Patricia Lockwood
Writing exercise: Write about what keeps you up at night.
Mini-workshop and collaborative brainstorming sessions.
By the end of this week, Group 1 turns in rough draft of up to 1,500 words for next week’s workshop.

Week 3: Writing about other people
How do we write about our ex-partners, sensitive spouses, elderly parents, or our teenage daughters? What are the rules in terms of using real names, events and situations? What are the legal and ethical perimeters, and how do we balance those against societal and familial expectations?
Writing Exercise: We’ll spend our time writing about people we admire, fear, love, or loathe.
Reading and Discussion: David Sedaris
Workshop
By the end of this week, Group 2 turns in rough draft of up to 1,500 words of personal essay or memoir for next week’s workshop.

Week 4: The Dynamics of Scene
Scenes are "live moments"—where things are happening, characters are interacting, action is going on, and big things change. We will discuss what makes a good scene, the rules around dialogue in CNF, and how to use scenes in personal essays and memoir.
Reading and Discussion: Alexander Chee
Writing Exercise: We will write three mini scenes that are inter-related and can be expanded.
Workshop
By the end of this week, Group 3 turns in rough draft of up to 1,500 words of personal essay or memoir for next week’s workshop.

Week 5: Creating Narrative Arc
In both memoir and personal essays, the main character of a piece should wind up in a different emotional or intellectual place than he or she did in the beginning. We will explore how to develop narrative arc in short essays and longer works.
Reading: Joan Didion
Writing Exercise: Chains of Causality
By the end of this week, Group 4 turns in rough draft of up to 1,500 words of personal essay or memoir for next week’s workshop.

Week 6: Uses of Research
Most works of CNF incorporate outside sources. The possibilities include recorded interviews with family matriarchs to cutting-edge studies on neuroplasticity. This week, we will talk about how to weave this research into your narrative without slowing or blocking the flow of the story.
Reading and Discussion: Oliver Sachs
Writing Exercise: Filling in the blanks. We’ll break into groups and brainstorm ways we can add layers to our stories with outside sources.
Workshop
Final words on how to build your writing community and beginning steps to publish your work.