Course Title: Writing the Personal Essay: From Start to Finish

Course Code: CNF 54

Instructor: Kimberly Grey

“The essayist attempts to surround something—a subject, a mood, a problematic irritation—by coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk, each seemingly digressive spiral actually taking us closer to the heart of the matter.” —Phillip Lopate

Grade Options and Requirements:
You have three options:
1) No Grade Requested (this is the default option)
2) Credit/No Credit: Your attendance will determine your grade.
3) Letter Grade: Your attendance, participation, and submitted work will account for 100% of your grade. Over the course of the quarter, you should plan to turn one significant piece for workshop. If you miss more than one class, you aren’t eligible for a letter grade.

Course Work
Reading: Over the span of six weeks, students will read a wide variety of personal essays and participate in lively discussions on the assigned text. Students should expect to read approximately 3-4 essays a week, including a craft essay.

Writing
Students will have the opportunity to turn in one significant piece of writing in their preferred genre for feedback from their instructor and peers. New work will be generated by in-class exercises and assigned prompts. Most writing will be done outside of the classroom, with class time used for discussion and workshop. Students should come prepared each week with pen and paper and the required texts. By the end of the course, students should have completed a portfolio of one short essay (2 pages) and one long essay (5-6 pages).

Workshop
A writing workshop is meant to support one another’s efforts with positive and critical feedback. Students will gain knowledge about their own work by listening to feedback and through their own careful consideration of the work of others. On scheduled workshop weeks, students will post their new work to Canvas where the rest of the class can access
and print them for workshop. Each student will receive written comments back from their peers and instructor. There will be one small group workshop and one large group workshop for each student (workshopping is optional unless you have signed up for a letter grade).

**Tentative Weekly Schedule:**

**Week 1: The Personal Essay: Craft Elements**

- Welcomes and Introductions
- Experimenting with Language: Writing Exercises
  - “The Essayist Is Sorry for Your Loss” (pg. 280)

**Week 2: Perspective, Shape & Time**

- The Particular Challenges of Creative Nonfiction (pg. 145 in *Tell It Slant*)
- The Basics of Any Good Writing Form (pg. 163 in *Tell It Slant*)
  - “The Pain Scale” by Eula Biss (pg. 28 in *Touchstone Anthology*)
  - “Leap” by Brian Doyle (pg. 165 in *Touchstone Anthology*)
  - “Portrait of My Body” by Phillip Lopate (pg. 299 in *Touchstone Anthology*)

**Week 3: The Personal, the Public & Universality**

- The Tradition of the Personal Essay (pg. 89 in *Tell It Slant*)
- Gathering the Threads of History (pg. 55 in *Tell It Slant*)
  - “Consider the Lobster” by David Foster Wallace (pg. 525 in *Touchstone Anthology*)
  - “Autopsy Report” by Lia Purpura (pg. 405 in *Touchstone Anthology*)
  - “A Small Place” by Jamaica Kincaid” (pg. 257 in *Touchstone Anthology*)

**Week 4: The Past & the Present**

**SMALL GROUP WORKSHOP**

- “The Love of My Life” by Cheryl Strayed (pg. 500 in *Touchstone Anthology*)
- “Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan (pg. 514 in *Touchstone Anthology*)
- “Repeat After Me” by David Sedaris (pg. 443 in *Touchstone Anthology*)

**Week 5: WORKSHOP**

**Week 6: WORKSHOP**