

# ENGLISH 618B

Professor Mark Brazaitis

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Office Hours: by appointment

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Class Hours: Thursday 4-6:50 p.m.

Class Location: Colson G6

Objective: In this class, you will become a better writer of creative nonfiction. To do so, you will both read and write a lot of creative nonfiction.

Requirements: Over the course of the semester, you will read three book-length works (Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss*, and Elizabeth Kolbert's *Under the White Sky*) as well as several shorter works.

Grades: Grades will be based on the effort you put into all aspects of the class. I expect everyone to earn an 'A.' If you are doing less than 'A' work, I will let you know.

Submitting Work: Your works of creative nonfiction are due Thursday at midnight the week before they are critiqued and should be emailed to your fellow students and your instructor. You may turn in a maximum of thirty pages per submission period (as long as it is a continuous work—i.e. a very long essay or a memoir excerpt). You may turn in three short-short works of creative nonfiction (1500 words or fewer) at a time. (Note: One class will be devoted to short-short works of CNF, so you'll be writing at least one this semester!)

Feedback on Your Peers' Work: You should provide a page or so of typed (12 point) comments on each piece you critique. In-text comments are helpful and appreciated but not required. Your comments should be professional, courteous, and clear.

Workshop Method: Do not address the writer by name. Refer to the writer as "the writer" or "the author." When called on, be prepared to offer one positive comment (what you thought was effective about the work) and one suggestion (what could be improved in the work and how). Do your best not to repeat the comments of your classmates. The first person called on will be asked to provide a summary of the work.

Your Work: I would love to read everything you've ever written. Unfortunately, I have to restrict myself to what you submit to this class. Exception: if you've asked me to chair or serve on your thesis committee.

## **Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments**

Tuesday, August 24 Introductions - Writing exercise – Practice workshop – Course expectations Read: “I’m Not Black, I’m Kanye” by Ta-Nehisi Coates and “Letter from a Region in My Mind” by James Baldwin (the essays will be emailed to you).

Tuesday, August 31 Workshop Read: Chapters 1 through 5 in *Black Boy*.

Tuesday, September 7 Workshop Read: Chapters 6 through 14 in *Black Boy*.

Tuesday, September 14 Workshop Read: Chapters 15 to the end of *Black Boy*.

Tuesday, September 21 Workshop Read: “On Impact” by Stephen King (the essay will be emailed to you) and from the beginning to page 100 (in my copy—the last paragraph starts: “I’ll weep reading the letters my father sent...”) in *The Kiss*.

\*\*Thursday, September 23, at noon: Special Event: Gwen Strauss will read via Zoom. She is the author of *The Nine* (“*The Nine* tells the true story of a band of women who survived the worst of Nazi Germany...”)\*\*

\*\*Monday, September 27, at 7 p.m. Special Event: James Tate Hill will read in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair (event sponsored by the WVU Humanities Center). He is the author of *Blind Man’s Bluff* (“A writer’s humorous and often heartbreaking tale of losing his sight—and how he hid it from the world.”)\*\*

Tuesday, September 28 Workshop Read: The rest of *The Kiss*. Choose: a short-short essay from any issue of *Brevity* (<https://brevitymag.com/category/issues/>) that the class will read for the following week.

Tuesday, October 5 Workshop Read: essays from *Brevity*.

*October 7-8 Fall Break – Enjoy!*

\*\*Monday, October 11, at 7:30 p.m. Special Event: Sturm Writer-in-Residence Valerie Sayers will read in the Milano Reading Room in the downtown library. She is the author of *The Age of Infidelity & Other Stories* (“In the spirit of Muriel Spark and Walker Percy, *The Age of Infidelity’s* eleven stories embrace the comic, the absurd, and the dead serious.”)\*\*

Tuesday, October 12 Workshop. Read: “What Have We Done to Democracy” and “India: Intimations of an Ending” by Arundhati Roy (the essays will be emailed to you) and “The Uninhabitable Earth” by David Wallace-Wells (the essay will be emailed to you). **Due**: Your short-short essay.

Tuesday, October 19 Workshop Read: “Down the River” in *Under a White Sky* by Elizabeth Kolbert.

Tuesday, October 26 Workshop Read: “Into the Wild” in *Under a White Sky* by Elizabeth Kolbert.

Tuesday, November 2 Workshop Read: “Up in the Air” in *Under a White Sky* by Elizabeth Kolbert.

\*\*Thursday, November 4, 7 p.m. — Special Event: Alison Bass will read in Colson 130 She is the author of *Brassy Broad: How one woman helped pave the way to #MeToo*. (“I was the first reporter in the nation to write about how common it was for male psychiatrists to have sex with their female patients and how that abuse of trust devastated survivors.”)\*\*

Tuesday, November 9 Workshop Read: “‘Bad’ English is Part of My Korean Heritage” by Cathy Park Hong (the essay will be emailed to you).

Tuesday, November 16 Workshop Read: “A Pickpocket’s Tale” by Adam Green (this work of literary journalism will be emailed to you). **Due**: a revision of one of the pieces you wrote for this class. You won’t be required to provide written feedback on your classmates’ revisions. However, we will have an enlightened and helpful conversation about them on December 2!

November 20-28 – Fall Recess – Enjoy!

Tuesday, November 30 Workshop of revised pieces.

Tuesday, December 7 Workshop. Discussion on publishing.

#### *WVU COVID-19 Overview*

- WVU will resume pre-pandemic campus programming this fall.
- The University strongly recommends all students and employees be vaccinated for COVID-19. [Reasons to Get Vaccinated](#)
- You are considered fully vaccinated:
  - 2 weeks after your second dose in a 2-dose series, or
  - 2 weeks after receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine
- At this time, students and employees are not required to be vaccinated. The University will reevaluate vaccination requirements upon FDA approval.
- Vaccinated students and employees — including those who had received the vaccine from a WVU or WVU Medicine vaccine clinic — must [verify their vaccine status](#) by entering their information into the Vaccine Verification System.

- Individuals who have questions about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine are encouraged to speak with their primary care physician or a representative from [WVU Medicine Student Health](#).
- [Mask requirements](#) for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals

### *Inclusivity Statement*

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in your classes, please advise your instructors and make appropriate arrangements with [the Office of Accessibility Services](#). (<https://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>)

More information is available at the [Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (<https://diversity.wvu.edu/>) as well.

### *Incomplete Policy*

The WVU Catalog contains the full [Incomplete Policy](#).

### *Sale of Course Material Statement*

All course materials, including lectures, class notes, quizzes, exams, handouts, presentations, and other course materials provided to students for their courses are protected intellectual property. As such, the unauthorized purchase or sale of these materials may result in disciplinary sanctions under the [Student Conduct Code](#). (<https://studentconduct.wvu.edu/campus-student-code>)

### *Sexual Misconduct Statement*

West Virginia University does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or relationship violence. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff; keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the [Title IX Coordinator](#).

If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure confidential, please seek assistance from the [Carruth Center](#), 304-293-9355 or 304-293-4431 (24-hour hotline), and locally within the community at the [Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center](#) (RDVIC), 304- 292-5100 or 304-292-4431 (24-hour hotline).

For more information, please consult [WVU's Title IX Office](#) (<https://titleix.wvu.edu/resources-offices>).

### *Student Evaluation of Instruction Statement*

Effective teaching is a primary mission of West Virginia University. Student evaluation of instruction provides the university and the instructor with feedback about your experiences in the course for review and course improvement. Your participation in the evaluation of course instruction is both strongly encouraged and highly valued. Results are strictly confidential, anonymous, and not available to the instructor until after final grades are released by Admissions and Records. Information about how you can complete this evaluation will be provided by your instructor.

### **Important Telephone Numbers**

1. [911](#) (9-911 from campus phones)
2. Department of Public Safety / Campus Police: [\(304\) 293-2677](#)
3. Environmental Health and Safety: [\(304\) 293-3792](#)
4. Health Sciences Safety Office: [\(304\) 293-6924](#)
5. Carruth Center for Counseling and Psychological Services: [\(304\) 293-4431](#)
6. Faculty-Staff Assistance Program: [\(304\) 293-5590](#)
7. Parents Club Hotline: [1 \(800\) 988-0096](#)
8. Student Health Service: [\(304\) 285-7200](#)

## **Student Emergencies Numbers**

In the event of emergencies involving WVU students, students and parents should contact the Office of Campus and Community Life at [\(304\) 293-5611](#).

If the emergency occurs outside normal business hours (Monday-Friday, 8:15 am – 4:45 pm), please call the Department of Public Safety at [\(304\) 293-3136](#) where someone is on call 24 hours a day.

### **How do I get zoom?**

Follow these instructions:

<https://app.box.com/s/dzop520q0pm3kf0p4d4zngslh48ynb83>

### **What happens if I am ill or quarantined?**

Please contact me to devise a plan to complete the work, per University policy:

[https://tlcommons.wvu.edu/syllabus-policies-and-statements#covid\\_syllabus](https://tlcommons.wvu.edu/syllabus-policies-and-statements#covid_syllabus).

Students may also request an emergency leave of absence in some situations:

<http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/enrollmentandregistration/#Emergency>