Course Description
After a two year hiatus from teaching Essay, I wanted to build a class that rethinks precisely what Essay even means anymore in a 21st Century culture awash in first person narrative on radio, in blogs, op-ed pages, film documentaries, and more. The form has a long and varied history that includes everything from third person analysis to first person memoir. We will focus more on the latter, though students will also study the art of writing an informative essay that blends reflection and research. The opportunities for reading remain endless: Seneca, Montaigne, Thoreau, Baldwin, Woolf, Didion, Dillard, Stegner, Selzer to name just a few. In the end this remains a writing course, so we will focus most of our attention on your papers, but I do hope you’ll explore the work of many of the authors I bring up in class.

Professor Collins’ Bio: As a freelance writer, I first made my break into major newspapers via the opinion pages and eventually moved from that argumentative form to the more reflective personal essay. My essays have received national prizes from the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA), been recognized by the New York Public Library and others. No matter what else I am working on—right now I am focusing on a project to mark the centennial of the National Park Service—I always have a personal essay in the works. To learn more and read some samples of my work, visit www.marycollinswriter.net.

Required Reading
The Art of the Personal Essay, Editor Philip Lopate, Anchor, 1997
Reading Packets provided by Instructor

Paper Assignments
Personal Essay: Write a four-to-five page, first-person personal essay that has a clear angle, some reflection and mirrors techniques in writing samples we’ve discussed. Angle due Sept. 11; Draft due Sept. 16; Final due Sept. 18

Humor Essay: Three-page humor essay. Draft due Oct. 7; Final due Oct. 9

Informative Essay: Write a four-to-six page informative essay (first or third person) that incorporates some outside research, possibly even some outside interviews, but still sustains a narrative tone and essay-like flow. Angle due Oct. 23; Draft due Oct. 28; Final due Oct. 30
**Essay of your Choice:** Five-to-six page essay on a topic and in a style of your own choosing. Angle Nov. 13; Draft due Nov. 18; Final due Nov. 20

**Final Exam:** Select an earlier paper to rewrite for the final exam. Due Dec. 16

**Other Assignments**
- See, Feel, Reflect Exercise, due Sept. 4
- Memory Box Exercise, due Sept. 9
- Identifying Markets, due Sept. 18
- Possible Quizzes on Humor and Informative Readings, Oct. 2 and Oct. 21
- Radio Essay Presentation, Oct. 9
- Share Foreign Author Essay. Dec. 4

**Formatting Instructions**
All papers should be printed on standard 8x11 paper, double-spaced, one inch margins, 12-point font, and include page numbers and source listings. **Please submit two copies to me for every assignment.** Pay close attention to how many copies you must bring into class; sometimes it’s just four copies other times 13.

**Plagiarism:** If you borrow material deliberately and try to pass it off as your own, I will fail you for the assignment and possibly the class. I abide by the rules set out in the Student Handbook at [www.ccsu.edu/page.cfm?p=541](http://www.ccsu.edu/page.cfm?p=541). In short, do your own work or face fierce consequences.

**Grading**
Each new paper assignment is worth more than the previous assignment. If you struggle with the first essay, for example, but show tremendous progress in your writing by the fourth essay, the first essay grade will be given little weight. Over the term I want your writing to improve on many levels, including better control over voice, more creative angles, and more emotional depth and reflection. By the final exam, you should be able to easily distinguish between the hallmarks of an informative versus personal essay.

Important Note: Your essay may have a clear angle and well-composed sentences, but if your work shows no originality and creative flair, you will not earn an “A.” The key to a good essay lies in the unique take a writer might have on even the most mundane aspects of his or her life.

Papers account for 70 percent of your grade. Class participation, which includes the smaller exercises, your role as Lead Reviewer, your engagement in-class and quizzes, accounts for the other 30 percent.

While memory is inherently flawed, in the end all good personal essay writers strive to tell the truth. All of the essay assignments in this class should be based on fact and memory. **You may not make things up.**
**SCHEDULE**
Fall 2014
Essay, ENG 376
T/TR 9:25 to 10:40

**Defining the Essay**
*August 28, Thursday*
**Assignment:** Read the Introduction and “On Noise” by Seneca in *The Art of the Personal Essay*
**Exercise:** I will show you several forms of first person writing in class today from the personal letter to the blog. Bring an example of first person writing that you find online that has all the hallmarks of the self-absorbed, shallow writing we do not want to produce in this class. Bring four copies to share. Keep the sample to two pages (even if it’s just an excerpt).

**Personal Does Not Mean Self-Absorbed: The Art of Writing in “I”**
*Sept. 2, Tuesday*

**Exercise:** Sit in a place that you frequent regularly, such as your kitchen when you eat breakfast. Take a full paragraph of notes on what you see; in the next paragraph record your feelings. Finally, reflect and write a paragraph based on what’s in your mind. Note: reflection involves processing feelings and thoughts so the last two paragraphs should not be the same. Bring in four copies to share with a group.

**Seeing, Feeling, Reflecting**
*Sept. 4, Thurs.*
**Assignment:** Read “A Field Guide to Getting Lost,” Rebecca Solnit and “Memoria ex Machina,” Marshall Jon Fisher (packet) and “The Knife” by Richard Selzer in *The Art of the Personal Essay*

**Exercise:** After reading Fisher and Solnit, create a memory box of your own based on objects that either you used in the past (like Fisher’s Walkman) or that evoke a current or deceased relative (like Solnit’s photograph). Many of the best personal essays involve reflecting on events or people in our past, but how do we convince the reader that what we recall is true? Memory and fact are not always the same. Come prepared to share the story behind the object(s) and to be interviewed by your group about the blend of fact and memory behind your story.

**Memory, Facts, Truth**
*Sept. 9, Tues.*
**Assignment:** Read “Goodbye to All That,” by Joan Didion and James Baldwin’s “Notes From a Native Son,” in *The Art of the Personal Essay*

Angles for Personal Essay due September 11. Bring in four copies for group work.
Emotional Reporting
Workshop Angles Personal Essay
Sept. 11, Thurs.
Assignment: Draft of Personal Essay due September 16. Bring in 4 copies.
Read “Jesus was a Surfer,” by Jay Baron Nicorvo, Ploughshares, Fall 2014 (packet)

Connecting the Dots
Workshop Drafts
Sept. 16, Tues.
Identify a market for personal essay either in print or online and share your find with the class.

Markets
Editing Your Own Story
Sept. 18, Thurs.
Assignment: Read essays assigned for workshop.

Workshop Personal Essays
Sept. 23, Tues.
Assignment: Read essays assigned for workshop.

Workshop Personal Essays
Sept. 25, Thurs.
Assignment: Rewrites of personal essay due September 30. Bring in 6 copies (the class will split into two groups)

Workshop Rewrites
Sept. 30, Tues.
Exercise: Anyone can learn to be funny on the page. Study what makes the four writers in the packet humorous and come prepared to discuss their various techniques. Possible quiz on the readings.
HUMOR ESSAY UNIT

Wednesday, October 1, 6:00 p.m.
RJ Julia Bookstore in Madison, CT is hosting BJ Novak, writer and producer for The Office and author of the humorous short story collection, Just One More Thing. He’ll be signing and speaking about his young adult book, The Book with No Pictures, so this isn’t precisely what I wanted, but funny is funny. The bookstore does expect a range of ages in the audience. Please visit www.rjjulia.com to purchase your ticket ($17.99).
Note: The event is actually at the First Congregational Church at 26 Meeting House Lane in Madison not at the bookstore. This will be a great way to launch our humor segment for this class. If you cannot make this event, you will have to attend another author reading this term to make up the credit. I’d really like to see as many of us attend as possible. The book is a children’s title, but he’s such a major figure in TV humor writing that I hated to pass up the chance to see him live as a class. We can carpool from the Willard parking lot. Given the timeframe (rush hour), we’ll have to leave around 4:30.

What’s So Funny?
October 2, Thursday

Workshop Humor Drafts
October 7, Tues.
Visit Transom, Moth, 2nd Story or another radio site that features first person essay pieces. Come prepared to share a favorite with the class. (The pieces do not have to be humorous.)

Essay on Radio and other Media
Possible Guest Speaker
Oct. 9, Thurs.
Assignment: Read essays assigned for workshop.

Workshop Humor Essays
Oct. 14, Tues.
Assignment: Read essays assigned for workshop.

Workshop Humor Essays
Oct. 16, Thurs.
Assignment: Read the Informative Essay Packet, which includes excerpts from Michael Pollan and Malcolm Gladwell. Come prepared to discuss the different ways the authors integrate reflection and storytelling into fact-packed essays. Possible quiz on readings.
INFORMATIVE ESSAY UNIT

Integrating Research into a Narrative
Oct. 21, Tues.
Assignment: Angle for your Informative Essay due October 23.
Exercise:

Your Story In Relation to Society
Workshop Angles
Oct. 23, Thurs.

What Does It Mean to be Perceptive?
Workshop Drafts
Oct. 28, Tues.
Assignment: Informative Essay due October 30. We’ll work out the best way to distribute the papers since you will not meet on October 30 in class. We may post them on Blackboard.

Mid-Term Conferences. Required.
No Class.
Meet with me in my office, Diloreto Room 208-20, during your assigned slot.
Oct. 30, Thurs.
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop.

Workshop Informative Essays
November 4, Tuesday
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop.

Workshop Rewrites
Nov. 11, Tues.
Assignment: Angles for final essay due November 13.
Read “Once More to the Lake,” by E.B. White in The Art of the Personal Essay. Come prepared to discuss how White plays with time and structure. Most essayists follow predictable narrative structures but the form can achieve a lot of depth if you experiment.

FINAL ESSAY UNIT

Experimenting with Time and Structure
Workshop Angles for Final Essay
Nov. 13, Thurs.
Assignment: Workshop drafts of final essay. Bring in four copies.
Workshop Drafts for Final Essay  
Nov. 18, Tues.  

Essayists’ Walkabout  
We’ll meet in class to collect papers but then take a tour around campus for 30 minutes to tap into your new mindset as trained essayists. We’ll discuss how you process things in new ways when you think about the world in relation to penning personal essays about your experience and environment.  
Nov. 20, Thurs.  
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop.

Workshop Final Essays  
Nov. 25, Tues.  
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop. If we discuss your paper today, your rewrite is due December 2. Bring in 13 copies.

November 27, Thursday, NO CLASS  
Thanksgiving Break

Essay has become popular in cultures around the world. Identify a foreign essayist and share a two-page excerpt of that author’s work with the class. Bring in 4 copies to share in small group work.

Essay Across Mediums and Cultures  
Workshop Rewrites  
Dec. 4, Thurs.  
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop discussion.

Identify an essay you wish to rewrite for the final exam and bring in four copies of the original to share with a group.

Workshop Rewrites  
Workshop Essays chosen for Final Exam  
Dec. 9, Tuesday  
Assignment: Rewrites of Final Exam Essay due December 16 during our assigned time slot.

FINAL EXAM SLOT: December 16, Tuesday, 8:00 to 10:00 a.m.