WRITING ABOUT HEALTH  
ENG 385  
T/TR 9:25 to 10:40, Willard Room 308  
SPRING 2016  
Professor Mary Collins  
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Office Hour: M/W 10:30 to noon; T/TR 2:00 to 3:00 and 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
While our primary subject area might be health, this class actually focuses on the art of translating complex information into compelling narrative for a general reader, a skill set you can use in a wide range of environments. Students will study the basic techniques required to write effective narrative nonfiction, but ENG 385 places more emphasis on sources, creative research and using experts than ENG 370, the level one narrative nonfiction course many of you have taken already.

I deliberately built the class to serve both writing minors and students from other majors, such as nursing, psychology or wellness. The only prerequisite: ENG 105 or 110 (grade C- or higher).

We have two community engagement projects this term, which will really add extra spice to our exciting curriculum! Never hesitate to visit me at my office to ask for additional help if you feel ill-prepared to execute some of the narrative techniques we’ll study. I have added supplemental readings in the packet for students who have not taken ENG 370.

Professor Bio:
I worked as a freelance writer and editor for 20 years in Washington, D.C. for a range of clients, including National Geographic and the Smithsonian. My latest book, American Idle: A Journey Through Our Sedentary Culture, won the grand prize in nonfiction at the Indie Book Awards in New York in 2010. The book is a blend of storytelling, sociology and public health research. I won the CCSU Teaching Award in 2010 and the Community Engaged College Educator Award for professors in Connecticut in 2015. For more information, go to www.marycollinswriter.com.

Books and Readings
- Excerpts from Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction, by Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd, Random House, 2013, and Creative Nonfiction by Philip Gerard (Packet)
- Excerpts from The Craft of Research by Wayne Booth, Greg Colomb and Joseph Williams, University of Chicago, 2008, third edition (Packet)
- Selected Readings, Packet
  - Suggested Reading: A Field Guide for Science Writers, Robin Henig, et. al.

ASSIGNMENTS
- Personal Essay: A four-to-five page (1000 to 1200 words) personal essay on a topic of your own choosing that reflects many of the storytelling techniques we cover in class. This first assignment will encourage students to first learn how to tell their own stories before we shift to studying how to tell other peoples’ stories or to pen third person informative health
pieces. Angle must have some sort of health-related focus. Angle Jan. 28; draft Feb. 9; Final Feb. 11 (enough copies for entire class and two for me). All rewrites due Feb. 23.

- **New Britain Community Health Center Project/Field Trip Feb. 25.** Each student will work with the CHC to identify a writing assignment. They just created a new website and need 300-to-400 word items about patients, practitioners and more to post to the site. We will visit the Center as a class on February 25, but I do expect you to return to meet with people. Set aside time during the week of Feb. 23-March 2 to go to the Center again around noon (lunchtime for most of the people we’ll be talking to). See the CHC Packet for details. All students will write a 4 page essay or profile AND then edit that material into a 300-to-400 word item for the CHC website. It will be a wonderful exercise in how to handle long form readers vs. online readers! Field Trip Feb. 25; Draft March 3; All copy due March 8; Revisions March 17; Complete project due March 29.

- **Health Humor Column (750 to 1000 words).** After the involved CHC community project, I thought you’d enjoy a light assignment. Humor is a wonderful way to convey complex information! Have fun with this assignment. The only requirement: the angle has to have some health-related hook. Angle March 31; Draft April 5; Final April 7.

- **Interview-to-Essay project on Cycling Without Age.** A four-to-five page co-authored essay, personal essay or third person essay based on material you secure from people involved with the Cycling Without Age program in West Hartford. You might interview elderly residents of the Center, for example, who participate in the program, which brings them about town in a bicycle rickshaw. CWA started in Denmark and included a storytelling element from the start. The founder produces small hard-cover copies of life stories from the rickshaw riders, but we can elect to feature other primary players as well, including the local woman from Denmark who started it all here (one of only three towns in the U.S.), the pilots who ride the rickshaws and others. The end product will be a compilation of various types of essays/profiles and be printed in either magazine form or on a website. Field Trip to Hughes Health Center in West Hartford April 19; Angle April 21; Draft April 26; Final April 28; Page Proofs and work with Designer May 3 and for Final Exam

**OTHER ASSIGNMENTS**

- **Transcript/Art of the Interview:** Each student will interview another student in the class about his or her personal essay health story and type up a transcript of the interview as well as an angle. Due Feb. 9 (three copies, one for the subject and two for me)

- **Test on The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Feb. 11**

- **Personal Observation Exercise:** Go on location where you can observe people involved in some sort of health-related activity (gym, dining hall [diet], health center). Write one page of personal observations. Bring in four typed copies to class. Due Feb. 18.

- **Earn extra credit by attending the career fair, Power of the Pen: Careers in Writing, Literature and Publishing, Monday, April 4, CT Room, Memorial Hall, 3:30 to 5:30.**

**Format for Papers:** All papers should be printed on 8x11 white paper, double-spaced, in 12-to-14 sized font, include page numbers and **sources.**

**GRADING**

Papers and general assignments will count for 60 percent of the total grade with class participation and in-class quizzes on the readings making up the other 40 percent. The course will involve a lot of group work and even some workshopping, so students must come ready to engage in the small group setting (15 or fewer students).
**Plagiarism**
I have taught for almost 30 years and have sonar for stolen material and ideas. If you plagiarize, expect to fail the assignment and possibly the class. I abide by the rules on plagiarizing set forth in the CCSU Student Handbook. In short, **do your own work or expect fierce consequences.**

**Office Hours:** I have office hours M/W 10:00 to noon and T/TR 2:00 to 3:00 and again 4:0 to 5:30 and by appointment. All students will have a required one-on-one conference with me at the midterm.

**Special Needs**
Please let me know if you have any special needs I must accommodate for you to succeed in this class, including any physical issues you might have when we go on the field trips.
SCHEDULE
ENG 385, Spring 2016
*Assignments listed under each date are for the following class.

Translating Complex Stories into Narrative
Jan. 19, Tuesday
**Reading:** In the Packet, read “Superbugs” by Jerome Groopman, The New Yorker; “Living in a Daydream,” by CCSU student (used with permission)
**Assignment:** Identify three instances where Groopman “translates” something complex for the reader. Can you also find examples in the student’s personal essay?

Good Prose, Good Topics, Good Research
Jan. 21, Thursday
**Reading:** The Craft of Research by Booth; Good Prose excerpt by Kidder and Todd; “Fat Factors,” New York Times Sunday Magazine, Robin Henig; (Optional: Excerpt from Gerard, Creative Nonfiction, for students that have not taken ENG 370, CNFI)
**Assignment:** Write a list of Robin Henig’s sources in “Fat Factors” and bring the list to class.

More Translation Tools
Assessing the Credibility of Sources
Jan. 26, Tues.
**Assignment:** Angle for personal essay due Jan. 28 (typed and four copies); complete Skloot Worksheet
**Reading:** The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Skloot, to page 63

Skloot
Workshop Personal Essay Angles
Lead Reviewer Job
Jan. 28, Thurs.
**Assignment:** Four copies of a draft of your personal essay and TWO SOURCES for that essay. Be certain to make it clear where you found your health information and be able to discuss your source.
**Reading:** Skloot page 63-176, but you can skip Chapters 9, 14, and 18

Interview Exercise
Skloot
Feb. 2, Tues.
Students will stage interviews with each other with a special emphasis on finding out more about your partner’s health story.
**Assignment:** Transcript and angle for interview due Tuesday, Feb. 9.
Come prepared to look up one more source for your personal health assignment while on the field trip at the library.

Field Trip to the Library
MEET IN THE LIBRARY
Feb. 4, Thurs.
Assignment: Transcripts due Feb. 9, three copies (two for me and one for your partner); draft of personal essays due Feb. 9 (four typed copies)

Reading: Finish Skloot (can skip Chapters 33, 34, 35)

Review of Skloot
Workshop Personal Essay Drafts
Feb. 9, Tues.
Assignment: Study for a test on Skloot, with special focus on writing techniques she uses to translate complex information for the average reader and tools she uses to develop characters.

Personal Essays due Feb. 11 (11 copies)
Reading: Revision Packet

Test on Skloot
Personal Essays Due
Art of Revision
Feb. 11, Thurs.
Assignment: Read essays assigned for workshop.

Presidents Weekend, Feb. 12-15

Workshop Personal Essays
Feb. 16, Tues.
Assignment: Read essays assigned for workshop.
Assignment: Go on location where you can observe people involved in some sort of health-related activity (gym, dining hall [diet], health center). Write one page of personal observations. Bring four types pages to class.

Workshop Personal Essays
Personal Observation Exercise
Feb. 18, Thurs.
Assignment: Read essays assigned for workshop.
All rewrites due Feb. 23

Workshop Personal Essays/Rewrites
Feb. 23, Tues.
Reading: Field Trip Packet

Field Trip to the New Britain Community Health Center
We will carpool from the Diloreto/Willard Parking Lot
Feb. 25, Thurs.
Assignment: Ideas for CHC Project
Brainstorm CHC Project
Guest Speaker: Yvette Francis, NBCHC and possibly Dr. Robert Dudley
March 1, Tues.
Assignment: Draft of CHC Project Assignment (Essay and Short Web Item)

Writing as Part of a Team
Workshop Draft of CHC Project
March 3, Thurs.
Assignment: Final CHC Project due March 8

CHC Project Due
Mid-Term Conferences (Required)
March 8, Tues.
We will meet in class for about 30 minutes to collect the final submissions and to
discuss the project in general but then I will meet with students one-on-one. Please save
the in-class meeting timeslots for students that have very few other choices because of
commutes, work etc.
Assignment: Read student text assigned for workshop.

Workshop CHC Submissions
March 10, Thurs.
Assignment: Read student text assigned for workshop.

Workshop CHC Submissions
March 15, Tues.
Assignment: CHC rewrites due March 17 (enough copies for everyone)

Workshop Rewrites for CHC Project
March 17, Thurs.

March 21 to March 27, SPRING BREAK

Complete CHC Project
March 29, Tues.
Reading: HUMOR PIECE
Assignment: Topic for a funny short health essay (can be first or third person)

Assignment: Identify a health-related site online that you enjoy reading and come
prepared to share it with the class.

Using Humor to Convey Complex Information
Blogs and Beyond Online
March 31, Thurs.
Assignment: Draft of Humor Column due April 5 (four copies)
Power of the Pen: Careers in Writing, Literature and Publishing  
Monday, April 4  
3:30 to 5:30 p.m.  
Connecticut Room, Memorial Hall  
The English Department is sponsoring this wonderful career day for all students, but especially English majors and writing minors. Come listen to panelists, who majored in English, writing or the humanities, discuss their careers. Meet with working alumni. Last year more than 70 people attended! Free food and drink!

Workshop Draft of Humor Columns  
Careers in Writing and the Importance of Narrative in Health/Medicine  
April 5, Tues.  
Assignment: Final Humor Columns due April 7 (enough copies for all)  
Reading: The Art of Co-authoring Essays

The Co-Authored Essay  
April 7, Thurs.  
Assignment: Read Humor Columns assigned for workshop.

Workshop Humor Columns  
April 12, Tues.  
Assignment: Read Humor Columns assigned for workshop.

Workshop Humor Columns  
April 14, Thurs.  
Assignment: Read Field Trip Packet on Cycling Without Age

Field Trip to Hughes Health and Rehabilitation Center in West Hartford/Cycling Without Age Story Project  
We will carpool from the Diloreto/Willard Parking Lot.  
April 19, Tues.  
Assignment: Angle/Topic due April 21

Cycling Without Age Project  
April 21, Thurs.  
Assignment: Draft due April 26

CWA Project  
April 26, Tues.  
Assignment: Final Content due April 28

CWA Project  
April 28, Thurs.  
Assignment: Whatever we need to do to get things done on CWA Project  
Work with Designer on Lay-out and More for CWA Project

May 3, Tues., Last Class  Final Exams: May 9-13: Ideally we'll have page proofs to work with and will be prepared to go through the steps required to bring a publication to press.