

ENGL 609A
Section 32780
Fall 2018
WPH 200, Monday, 4:30-5:50 p.m.
Instructor: M. G. Lord
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ENGL 609A: Internship—Ethics and Eloquence (This is a provisional syllabus that may be revised as the term progresses.)

Introduction and Purpose:

This course provides an opportunity for you to discuss your internship experience with your colleagues in the LEAP program. You will periodically write observations about your internship. We're also going to consider the ethics of nonfiction writing. The assigned readings will address ethical conundrums that writers face now and have faced in the past, though not always in an ideal fashion. We will also look at how publishers deal with these ethical concerns. I will bring in some working writers and publishers to talk with you about ethics, as well as about your careers in literature.

Course Requirements:

This is not a lecture course. My role is not to decode the class readings. I expect students to read as writers so that they can discern what the author of the assigned text achieved and how he or she achieved it. The best writers read widely and extensively in the area in which they choose to work.

I will give you scans and photocopies of most of the assigned reading. Some of it will dovetail with material we are covering in ENGL 604. I will also expect you to report on your internship experiences both in writing and in class discussion. I will expect you to look as brilliant as you are when I bring in guests from outside USC. (I doubt this will be an issue, but I raise it anyway so you won't coast in class.)

Specific requirements:

- **Attendance:** This is a small class. As a consequence, your presence is essential—physically, mentally, and in conversation. More than one unexcused absence can reduce your grade. If an emergency comes up and you cannot be in class, please discuss this with me beforehand.
- **Class Participation** is critical to student grades.
- **Class Discussion** You should be prepared to offer oral comments on your colleague's work, as well as on the discussion topic. *If there are long*

stretches of silence during a discussion period, each student's grade will drop—even if he or she writes like Tolstoy.

- **Deadlines** Occasionally, you will submit an essay instead of a blog post on Blackboard. When this occurs, you will need to submit your essays to your classmates two days before the class (as indicated on the schedule below). The class will also have a Blackboard component, so you won't be emailing incessantly. **I will provide you with an email list for our class. If the assignment is not confined to Blackboard, you will take responsibility for emailing your work to your classmates and printing the essays you receive from them.**
- **Flexibility** From time to time, visitors—agents, editors or other writers--may visit this class. If this happens, students may have to deviate from the syllabus. *We may also change the reading assignments if a distinguished visitor is available to come to class.* The distinguished visitor's schedule will take precedence—just as it would in real life. Students will learn to be flexible. Inflexibility will have a negative impact on a student's grade.

Grade breakdown:

Class participation: 25%

Quality of Writing: 50 %

Exercises/ homework/ submitting work for class critique and critiquing other students' work: 25%

For more information about University grading policies, please refer to the USC Grading and Correction of Grades handbook, found at:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/ARR/grades/gradinghandbook/index.html>

Required Texts:

Janet Malcolm's *The Journalist and the Murderer*

Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*

Scott Timberg's *Culture Crash*

Suggested Texts:

Diane Middlebrook's *Anne Sexton: A Biography*

Carolyn See's *Making a Literary Life*

Susan Shapiro's *The Byline Bible*

(I will try to provide scans or links for most of the articles and short pieces that we will discuss this term.)

WEEK 1: August 20: Introduction

I am aware that you know each other well by now, but introduce yourselves to me—and tell me about the internship you landed for this semester. If you haven't heard yet about an internship, we will move to Plan B—and I myself will help get you in place asap. We will also make room to discuss application strategies for Spring internships, even as we address the ethics of nonfiction writing.

Reading Assignment: Read Janet Malcolm's *The Journalist and the Murderer*, pp. 1-45. Read Joan Didion's "Why I Write."

Writing Assignment: We'll want to hear about your own on-the-job experiences, but let's wait until everyone is in place. I'd like you to read the beginning of *The Journalist and the Murderer*, and write a couple of paragraphs on Blackboard about what you felt when you read its opening paragraph. Also, in your view, can writing be a hostile act? (After you have read the whole book, we'll revisit your feelings.)

WEEK 2: August 27: Befriend, betray. What does a writer owe a subject?

First let's see where everyone stands with internships. Then let's discuss Malcolm's incendiary first sentence—and Didion's idea that writing is an aggressive, hostile act.

Reading Assignment: Finish *The Journalist and the Murderer*. Read David Ulin's "What Do Writers Owe Their Subjects?": <http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-what-do-writers-owe-their-subjects-20150210-story.html>

Read Linda Joy Meyer's "The Ethics of Truth in Writing Fiction and Nonfiction," on the National Association of Memoir Writers Blog. <http://namw.org/2013/07/the-ethics-of-truth-in-writing-fiction-and-non-fiction-betsy-graziani-fasbinder/>

Writing Assignment: Please define your idea of "essential truth" on Blackboard.

WEEK 3: September 3: **No class.** Labor Day.

WEEK 4: September 10: Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing.

Discuss the process of reporting—and of the unreliability of memory.

Reading Assignment: Three *New York Times* articles about Diane Middlebrook's Biography of Anne Sexton. (I'll post them on Blackboard.) Extra credit if you read some of the book itself. Also, we will read an excerpt from Thomas C. Couser's *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* (Excerpt TBD.)

Writing Assignment: To what extent do you approve or disapprove of Diane Middlebrook's use of Dr. Martin Orne's taped therapy sessions Sexton? In writing that relies on anecdotes or case histories—in, say, the work of Oliver Sacks—to what extent does the anonymity of the subjects need to be protected? Could such writing be considered exploitative? Please comment on Blackboard.

WEEK 5: September 17: **No class.** We'll meet every other week, unless we need to revise this approach.

WEEK 6: September 24: More Sticky Questions

Discuss the issues raised by the assigned reading. Be prepared to give a brief update on your internship.

Reading Assignment: Read Buzz Bissinger's "Shattered Glass" in *Vanity Fair*

<https://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/1998/09/bissinger199809>

On October 8, Margaret Talbot, now a *New Yorker* staff writer will discuss her experience with Steve Glass: She HIRED him when she was an editor at *The New Republic*. I expect you to have read and thought about Bissinger's piece. But you might also have general questions about magazines for Margaret. Here are links to two of her profiles, one on Carrie Goldberg, a lawyer who addresses revenge porn, and one on Elizabeth Smart, a kidnapping victim: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/10/21/gone-girl-2> and <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/05/the-attorney-fighting-revenge-porn>

Writing Assignment: Please imagine that you are an editor and you have to address what might be a Stephen Glass situation. What do you do and how do you do it? If you are a colleague and not the editor, are you obligated to voice your suspicions? Please write about this on Blackboard. And please prepare questions for Margaret on October 8.

WEEK 7: October 1: **No class**, unless we decide one is necessary.

WEEK 8: October 8: Real life

Discuss "Shattered Glass". Then discuss what your own internships have been like so far. If you are doing a pedagogical internship—and you have questions about pedagogy—please bring them to class.

(We could watch HBO's "Shattered Glass" during the class period, though it is 93 minutes, and we'd have to watch part of it in the Wednesday nonfiction class.)

Reading Assignment: Yes, we are going to this dark place. Read Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. I will also post some relevant articles about Capote's relationship with his subjects on death row in Kansas. Please read them also.

Writing Assignment: This is a two-part assignment. 1. Identify some parts of *In Cold Blood* in which the techniques of fiction enhance Capote's storytelling. Then—on Blackboard—address a big moral issue: To what extent did Capote cross a line in his relationship with his subjects? Does the quality of a work ever justify moral ambiguity in its creation?

2. Let's make sure you have plans in place for your Spring internship. Please be prepared in class to identify two internships for which you have applied or plan to apply. Please be prepared to list and share the requirements for application.

WEEK 9: October 15: **No class**, unless we decide one is necessary.

WEEK 10: October 22: Capote. Because We Must.

Discuss the issues raised by *In Cold Blood*.

Reading Assignment: Read Scott Timberg's *Culture Crash*. (I will also post a relevant chapter about the perils of being a writer today.)

Writing Assignment: This is a two-part assignment. 1. Please write 500-words on your internship experience so far. What have you enjoyed? Has anything disappointed you? Has anything exceeded your expectations? This is your written evaluation of your

internship midway through the semester. Please construct it as an essay rather than a Blackboard post. Please mail it to your classmates, as instructed above.

2. Please also post a question for Scott Timberg, who will come to class either on November 5 or later in the term.

WEEK 11: October 29: **No class**, unless we decide one is necessary—or a guest becomes available on this day.

WEEK 12: November 5: Notes from the Trenches

Discuss your internship essays, and some of the issues that Timberg raises—ideally with Timberg.

Reading Assignment: Renata Adler’s “A Court of No Appeal” from *Canaries in the Mineshaft*. I will also post Arlene Croce’s famous piece in *The New Yorker* on her decision NOT to review a certain work.

Writing Assignment: For this meditation on Blackboard, write from the point-of-view of the editor you may become. Discuss how you interpret the idea of “fairness” and “ethics” in the assignment and execution of reviews.

WEEK 13: November 12: **No class**, Veterans Day.

WEEK 14: November 19: It’s the day after Margaret Atwood’s birthday! Yay!

Discuss the issues around reviewing that were raised in your Blackboard posts.

Writing Assignment: Start your final essay on your internship experience.

WEEK 15: November 26: This is our last class.

This is our final opportunity to discuss what happened during the term—or to address other readings suggested by what we have read as a group.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

USC Support and Advocacy (USCSA) – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.