Class code: (JOUR-UA 9302-002)

Instructor Details
Veronika Bednářová
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Richtrův dům, Malé náměstí 11, Wednesday 10:20-11:20 am

Class Details
The Beat: Travel Writing
Mondays and Wednesdays 9:00-10:20 am
Location to be confirmed.

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
“I was trying to write... and I found the greatest difficulty was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced... the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always.”

Ernest Hemingway

The course focuses on combining the creative techniques of fiction with the rigor of journalistic travel writing to produce stories that move beyond the constraints of the news and feature story: stories that engage, resonate with readers, provide insight – stories which “produce the emotion”.

The course proceeds by the reading and analysis of important contemporary journalism and classic travel pieces: examination of the narrative; fictional and literary devices used in travel writing; examination of and practice with various information gathering strategies; humor; point of view; unique voice.

It focuses on the creative process from the first idea to the identification of sources, choice of appropriate style and form, revisions, editing and the presentation of short works. You will be encouraged to attempt a variety of forms to examine your own writing processes, to try methods used by professional writers (such as journal writing). You will also continually develop stories from your own travel experiences. The regular assignments will prepare you for the final project: a substantial travel narrative of your own.

At specific times during the semester, we will use the workshop process and class discussion to help you develop your pieces. Please note: you are expected to read and evaluate each others’ papers as part of this process.
Lectures, workshops

**Desired Outcomes**
- Presenting an accurate and compelling evocation and assessment of a place.
- Bringing that place at the writer’s experience to life so vividly that the reader is transported there.
- Finding a unique voice; using humor, dialog and other creative devices in nonfiction writing.

**Assessment Components**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation &amp; readings</td>
<td>15 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel journal</td>
<td>10 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short article I, historical monument</td>
<td>10 % (due September 17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term article, profile</td>
<td>20 % (due October 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short article II, feature</td>
<td>10 % (due November 12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final travel reportage</td>
<td>25 % (due December 12)</td>
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All written assignments will be (in great details) specified in class:

**Short article I** A 500-word historical monument. Due September 17.

**Mid-term article** A 1000-word profile. Due October 10.

**Short article II** A 700-word food feature. Due November 12.

**Final** A 1500-word in-depth piece of travel magazine reportage. Due December 12.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** Exceptional level of creative and structured journalism writing, publishable.

**Grade B:** Very good level or creative and structured written work, with some editing needed.

**Grade C:** Satisfactory and sufficiently clear and structured written work.

**Grade D:** Adequate level of written work but weakly creative, vague, unstructured.

**Grade F:** Unfinished, poorly structured, vague, unclear written work.

**Grade Conversion**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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Grading Policy

NYU Prague aims to have grading standards and results similar to those that prevail at Washington Square. At the College of Arts and Sciences, roughly 39% of all final grades are in the B+ to B- range, and 50% in the A/A- range. We have therefore adopted the following grading guideline: in any non-Stern course, class teachers should try to ensure that no more than 50% of the class receives an A or A-. A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that—it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.

Attendance Policy

Each unexcused absence will result in your final grade being reduced by 3%. Absences only for medical reasons will be excused. To obtain an excused absence, you are obliged to supply either a doctor’s note or corroboration of your illness by a member of the housing staff (either an RA or a Building Manager). Absences due to travel will not be excused.

Late Submission of Work

If late, without a valid reason, your grade will be lowered by 5%. (5% per day? Overall?) Keeping to a deadline is absolutely crucial in the profession.

Plagiarism Policy

According to the Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook, plagiarism is defined as follows:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work as though it were one’s own. More specifically, plagiarism is to present as one’s own a sequence of words quoted without quotation marks from another writer, a paraphrased passage from another writer’s work; facts or ideas gathered, organized and reported by someone else, orally and/or in writing. Since plagiarism is a matter of fact, not of the student’s intention, it is crucial that acknowledgment of the sources be accurate and complete. Even where there is no conscious intention to deceive, the failure to make appropriate acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism.

The College of Arts and Science’s Academic Handbook defines plagiarism similarly and also specifies the following:

“presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written), writing a paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea without a reference to the source of the idea, or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both teachers have given their permission in advance).
Receiving help on a take-home examination or quiz is also cheating – and so is giving that help – unless expressly permitted by the teacher (as in collaborative projects). While all this looks like a lot to remember, all you need to do is give credit where it is due, take credit only for original ideas, and ask your teacher or advisor when in doubt.”

“Penalties for plagiarism range from failure for a paper, failure for the course or dismissal from the university.” (Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Required Text(s)</th>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Internet Research Guidelines</th>
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<th>Additional Required Equipment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pen and paper (Travel Writing Journal)</td>
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### Session 1

**Introduction, Course Outline**

“We travel, initially, to lose ourselves; and we travel, next, to find ourselves. We travel to open our hearts and eyes and learn more about the world than our newspapers will accommodate."


**Special assignment for the whole course**: Start an “old-fashioned” travel journal (in can be a blog) and write at least one paragraph in it every day. Occasional class readings from your journal will be expected.

### Session 2

**The Art of Christopher Columbus: Discovering Place**

Differences between holiday traveling and traveling for work. What makes TW distinctive from other genres of journalism? Does travel have news? Basic travel genres. Skills needed: reporting, investigative journalism, and interviewing. Why destination is not yet a story.

**Recommended Readings:**


Special Assignment 1

Bring your travel journal with you. Write neatly one short paragraph about a surprising phenomenon you observed since arriving in Prague. What is different here? Why? Try to be clear and innovative. Class discussion.

Session 3
Friday, September 7
(make up for Monday classes)

Travel Stories: Technique, Style, Unique Voice

Why travel books are inspirational. Exploring the techniques of non fiction used – introducing the work of the great Czech novelist, short-story writer, playwright, and essayist who also created the word “robot” :-).

●Recommended Readings:


Karel Čapek (In the Natural History Museum), p. 41-50 (10 pages).

Selected chapters in: Letters from Holland, Faber & Faber,


Selected chapters in: Letters from Spain, Buttler & Tanner Ltd., 1931.

Karel Čapek (Posada de la Sangre, Velázquez o la Grandeza) p. 34-41 (8 pages).

Session 4
Monday, September 10

Writing About Place: Captivating Theme, Dramatic Scenes. Developing a Clear Narrative, Concrete Details. Travelogue. The angle. The hook.

The secrets of a good lead. The hardest part: what to leave out. Show instead of tell. Ways to put literary devices into practice: overly descriptive/minimally descriptive, every word matters, capturing the moment in space and time, discovering insight/judging, mobilizing the imagination (you have been there, the reader may not have been).

●Recommended Readings:


Peter Hessler (Wheels of Fortune), p. 107-121 (15 pages).

**Wednesday, September 12**

**Point of View**

Pros and Cons of Narrating in First Person. Important task: try to define your unique point of view. Why is it crucial? How do you avoid making observations that have already been made? Cultural identity/stereotyping. Introducing Slavenka Drakulic, a noted Croatian writer and journalist.

*Recommended Readings:*


*Pizza in Warsaw, Torte in Prague*, p. 11-20 (10 pages).

*Make-up and Other Crucial Questions*, p. 21-32 (12 pages).

*A Communist Eye, or What Did I See in New York?*, p. 113-122 (10 pages).

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**Session 6**

**Monday, September 17**

Watching REPORTER (2009). It is a feature documentary about Nicholas Kristof, the two-time Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the New York Times, who almost single-handedly put the crisis in Darfur on the world map.

See http://www.reporterfilm.com/synopsis.html

**SHORT ARTICLES 1 DUE**

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**Session 7**

**Wednesday, September 19**

**GUEST LECTURE**

STORIES by Jan Sibik, a World Press Photo Award winning photographer and reporter.

See the books The Devil Within Us, My American Beauty (reserved in the library) and [www.sibik.cz](http://www.sibik.cz); prepare 2 questions for the guest speaker

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**Session 8**

**Monday, September 24**

**On the Road I: Research Before You Go**

New subgenre in travel writing: the Travel Writer Tells All. Thomas Kohnstamm’s case study. What are the best sources for understanding a country and its residents? The importance of cultural identity.

*Recommended Readings:*


[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article3742731.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article3742731.ece)


**Special Assignment 2**

Bring your travel journal with you. What do you know about “us” (the Czech people) so far? Class discussion and readings.
Fall Break
October 22-26

Session 9
Wednesday, September 26
Workshop of Short Articles I & Discussion of Midterm Topics / Group I
(reading of Short Articles required – approx. 30 pages)

Session 10
Monday, October 1
Workshop of Short Articles I & Discussion of Midterm Topics / Group II
(reading of Short Articles required – approx. 30 pages)

Session 11
Wednesday, October 3
On the Road II: Information Gathering Strategies
Research and reporting techniques. Books-Guidebooks-Personal contacts. Why “Around the world in 80 clicks” does not necessarily help in being a travel writer with a unique voice.
Further exploration of techniques of non fiction: sense of mood, atmosphere, place, use of short sentences, direct speech, indirect speech, rhythm, story, sense of conflict or tension and release of tension in writing, moving between past and present tense.

●Recommended Readings:


Session 12
Monday, October 8
On the Road III – Interviewing

●Recommended Readings:


Additional handouts will be given in class.
**Session 13**

**Day:** Wednesday, October 10

**DVD:** Michael Pallin Collection – Hemingway Adventures

Articles to help inspire your final travel reportage will be given out in class.

**MID-TERM ARTICLE DUE**

**Session 14**

**Day:** Monday, October 15

**Topics:** People and Their Voices – Dialogue

Describing people and places with dialogue. How do you get good dialogue? How to let the situation play out? What kind of people do we manage to meet? Why is it crucial to talk to them? How do we make them trust us?

**Recommended Readings:**


**Session 15**

**Day:** Wednesday, October 17

**Topics:** Humor

What is humor, irony, wit?

Exploring different types of humor: irony, the joke, the story, dialogue. Culture and humour. How to create an engaging tone. Balance between entertaining and informative writing.

**Recommended Readings:**

- II. Bill Bryson: *Notes from a Small Island*, p. 142-151 (10 pages).

**Special Assignment 3**

Bring your travel journal with you. Choose a paragraph you find humorous. Where is the humor? Class discussion and readings.

**Fall Break**

**Day:** October 22-26

**Session 16**

**Day:** Monday, October 29

**Topics:** Workshop of Midterm Articles GROUP I & Discussion of Final Topics

(reading of Midterms required – approx. 40 pages)
Wednesday, October 31

Workshop of Midterm Articles GROUP II & Discussion of Final Topics
(reading of Midterms required – approx. 40 pages)

Session 18
Friday, November 2
( make up for Wednesday classes)

A Cook’s Tour
Experiencing cultural difference/similarities/humor/personal experience through food.

**Recommended Readings:**

Special Assignment 4
Bring your travel journal with you. Share some of your drinking/eating experiences in Europe that may one day be a seed for a travel story.

Session 19
Monday, November 5

Deconstructing the Adventure Story. Travel Essay. Travelogue as a personal genre.

DVD Mark Cousins: "What Is This Film Called Love?"
“What Is This Film Called Love” is a passionate, 77 minute poetic documentary about the nature of happiness. Filmed in Mexico over three days, for just £10, it begins as a film about the soviet director Sergei Eisenstein, and then, using his ideas, opens up to look at memory, landscape and the pleasures of walking. It is a personal film and aims to be very cinematic, using three visual dream sequences, and the music of PJ Harvey, Simon Fisher Turner, Johnny Cash and Bernard Hermann. The film draws from a range of filmmakers and writers – principally Chris Marker, but also Virginia Woolf, Frank O’Hara and others – but aims to touch on themes that are relevant to a wide range of people – where joy comes from, the emotions involved with travel and homecoming, and the nature of solitude.” ([http://whatisthisfilmcalledlove.co.uk/](http://whatisthisfilmcalledlove.co.uk/))

Session 20
Wednesday, November 7

OUTLINE FOR THE FINAL TRAVEL REPORTAGE DUE

DISCUSSION ABOUT THE FINAL TOPICS

Session 21
Monday, November 12

23 April – Class 20

A) What Makes Good Writing
Word usage and misusage, show instead of tell, credibility. Work routine.

**Recommended Readings:**
- I. Hunter Thompson: The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Deprived, p. 195-211 (17 pages).

B) Travel Writing Ethics and Standards

**Recommended Readings:**


**SHORT ARTICLES 2 DUE**

**Session 22**

The Journalist in Conflict Areas

**Guest Lecturer**

IGOR BLAZEVIC, the founder of the Human Rights Film Festival ONE WORLD, is a Bosnian human rights campaigner who works for the Foundation People in Need in Prague. He has just returned from Burma.

**Session 23**

Workshop of Short Articles II / GROUP I & Discussion of Final Reportages

(reading of Short Articles II required – approx. 30 pages)

**Session 24**

Workshop of Short Articles II / GROUP II & Discussion of Final Reportages

(reading of Short Articles II required – approx. 30 pages)

**Session 25**

The Future of Travel Writing

**Updated handouts to be given in class**

**Session 26**

Writing Which Matters

Cultural identity. Social responsibility. World since 911. How is the crisis changing us? How to get “inside” the media world – is it an ivory tower? Concluding discussion of course.

**Recommended Readings:**


Visit to a bohemian coffee shop near NYU.

**Session 27**

NO CLASS. Students to work on papers. 10-15-minute individual consultations (previously scheduled) are compulsory.
December 3

**Session 28**

NO CLASS. Students to work on papers. 10-15-minute individual consultations (previously scheduled) are compulsory.

Wednesday, December 5

**Session 29**

**Editing Your Final Product**

Ultimate goal: tight, insightful writing. What if there is no time? How many times should you rewrite and why? How important are word counts?

“Its funny – the harder I practice, the luckier I get” – Tiger Woods

“Courage is the act that exceeds confidence” — Schonberg

Monday, December 10

**Session 30**

**FINAL REPORTAGE DUE** (hard copy in Veronika Bednarova’s mailbox).

Wednesday, December 12

**Classroom Etiquette**

Cell phones and laptops should not be used in class except for emergencies.

**Required Co-curricular Activities**

n/a

**Suggested Co-curricular Activities**

NYU field trips will help you to find topics for your travel writing articles.