Class code

Instructor Details
Veronika Bednářová
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+420 606 66 10 72
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.
- Understanding that it is the people we meet along the way that make for unique stories
- Finding your own voice; using humor, dialog and other creative devices in nonfiction writing.

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<tr>
<th>Assessment Components</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>10 %</td>
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<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, short profile</td>
<td>10 % (due February 25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term article, travel feature</td>
<td>20 % (due March 15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short article II, food feature</td>
<td>10 % (due April 15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final travel reportage</td>
<td>25 % (due May 22)</td>
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All written assignments will be (in great details) specified in class:

**Short article I** A 500-word short profile. Due February 25.

**Mid-term article** A 1000-word travel feature. Due March 15.

**Short article II** A 700-word food feature. Due April 15.

**Final:** A 1500-word in-depth piece of travel magazine reportage. Due May 22.

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**

A=94-100
A-=90-93
B++=87-89
B=84-86
B-=80-83
C+=77-79
C=74-76
C-=70-73
D+=67-69
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 absences 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.

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

Late Submission of Work

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)

Required Text(s)

Supplemental

Additional handouts will be given in class.
Monday, February 11

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.

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Wednesday, February 13

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.

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Friday, February 15

(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,

Karel Čapek (*Old Masters*), p. 47-51 (5 pages).

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, February 18**

**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).


### Session 5

**Wednesday, February 20**

**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).
Session 6
Monday, February 25

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

Session 7
Wednesday, February 27

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; prepare 2 questions for the guest speaker

Session 8
Friday, March 1 (make up for Wednesday classes)

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:

Alexi Mostrous. Lonely Planet writer, Thomas Kohnstamm, claims he fabricated guidebook, Times Online, 14. april 2008

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.

Session 9
Monday, March 4

Workshop of Short Articles I & Discussion of Midterm Topics / Group I

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

Session 10
Wednesday, March 6

Workshop of Short Articles I & Discussion of Midterm Topics / Group II

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

Session 11
Monday, March 11

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 nonfiction: 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**

**On the Road III – Interviewing**

Wednesday, March 13


**Recommended Readings:**


*Additional handouts will be given in class.*

**Session 13**

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

Friday, March 15 (make up for Wednesday classes)

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

**MID-TERM ARTICLE DUE**

**Session 14**

**People and Their Voices – Dialogue**

Monday, March 18

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 it is crucial to talk to them? How do we make them trust us?

**Recommended Readings:**


**Session 15**

**Humor**

Wednesday, March 20

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.

Session 16

Workshop of Midterm Articles GROUP I & Discussion of Final Topics

Friday, March 22

(reading of Midterms required – approx. 40 pages)

Session 17

Workshop of Midterm Articles GROUP II & Discussion of Final Topics

Monday, March 25

(reading of Midterms required – approx. 40 pages)

Session 18

A Cook’s Tour

Wednesday, March 27

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.

Spring Break

April 1 - 5

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

Session 19

Monday, April 8

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/)

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<tr>
<th>Session 20</th>
<th>OUTLINE FOR THE FINAL TRAVEL REPORTAGE DUE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, April 10</td>
<td>DISCUSSION ABOUT THE FINAL TOPICS</td>
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<th>Session 21</th>
<th>23 April – Class 20</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, April 15</td>
<td><strong>A) What Makes Good Writing</strong></td>
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<td>Word usage and misusage, show instead of tell, credibility. Work routine.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommended Readings:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>I. Hunter Thompson: The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Deprived, p. 195-211 (17 pages).</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>B) Travel Writing Ethics and Standards</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Recommended Readings:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Session 22</th>
<th><strong>SHORT ARTICLES 2 DUE</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, April 17</td>
<td><strong>The Journalist in Conflict Areas</strong></td>
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<td>Guest Lecturer</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>Workshop of Short Articles II / GROUP I &amp; Discussion of Final Reportages</td>
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<td>(reading of Short Articles II required – approx. 30 pages)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Session 23</th>
<th>Workshop of Short Articles II / GROUP II &amp; Discussion of Final Reportages</th>
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<td>Monday, April 22</td>
<td>(reading of Short Articles II required – approx. 30 pages)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Session 24</th>
<th><strong>The Future of Travel Writing</strong></th>
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<td>Wednesday, April 24</td>
<td>Updated handouts to be given in class</td>
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<th>National Holiday</th>
<th>May 1</th>
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<td>no classes</td>
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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.

**National Holiday**

May 8
no classes

**Session 27**

Monday, May 13

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

**Session 28**

Wednesday, May 15
(last day of classes)

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

**Session 29**

Monday, May 20

Final exam

Editing of your final articles - email, individual consultations, etc.

**Session 30**

Wednesday, May 22

Final exam

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

Deadline 11:00 am.

**Classroom Etiquette**

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

N/A

**Required Co-curricular Activities**

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