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**CST 460 — *Communication and Ethnography: Writing Life* (Writing Intensive)  
Summer 2007 Session 1  
M-T-Th 10:40-1:10 p.m. in Curry 332  
Dr. Chris Poulos**

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“You *are* your stories. You are the product of all the stories you have heard and lived — and many you have never heard. They have shaped how you see yourself, your world, and your place in it.”

— Daniel Taylor

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**Professor:** Dr. Christopher Poulos  
**Office:** Ferguson Building #107  
**Office Hours:** Tuesday & Thursday, before and after class, and by appointment  
**Contact:** cnpoulos@uncg.edu; 336.686.2514 (cell); 336.316.1010 (home, before 10 p.m.)

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### **Communication Department Mission**

The mission of the Communication Department at UNCG is to "teach students the study of strategic and ethical uses of communication to build relationships and communities." That mission will guide our work in this course, forming the foundation of our pursuit of the study of ethnography, and of my evaluation of your learning.

### **Course Description**

In this summer course, we will study and practice the methodologies of personal (auto) and narrative ethnography, while we craft the stories of our lives. As a learning community, we will read and write compelling ethnographic tales, probing them deeply to see what they can teach us about life, about storytelling, about communication, and about ethnography as a research methodology. We will explore how our stories build, form, develop, and transform our lives, by writing and talking about the stories of our lives. Your class project will be to write the story of your life, in five stages:

1. Origins and early years...
2. Family, friends, and culture...
3. Rough times, breakthroughs, and turning points...
4. Here and now...
5. The Future: Hopes, dreams, and aspirations...

Along the way, we will participate in various writing exercises and in open dialogue and critique of various ethnographic tales. The course will be taught in a collaborative seminar/workshop format, with an intensive focus on reading, dialogue, and writing.

### **Course Purpose**

The purpose of this course is to develop your vision, your passion, and your practice as a communicative writer and storyteller. We will focus attention on developing and expressing your voice and on engaging and enacting your ethos, your pathos, your personal mythos, and your sense of the logos as it plays out in the written and spoken word. Specifically, we will engage in the launching, development, and extension of a

focused auto-ethnographic (self-narrative) writing project in a community of learner-writers. Along the way, we will collaboratively construct meaning as we speak our stories into the life of the classroom. We will also read and critique selected auto-ethnographic works.

## Course Objectives

### *You will:*

- Write performatively, autoethnographically, and evocatively;
  - Develop a richer understanding of the value of story in everyday communicative life;
  - Engage in a daily storying praxis (in writing and in speech);
  - Analyze your own and a partner's life storying praxis;
  - Develop/expand your repertoire of communication styles, approaches, and skills;
  - Read and respond critically and reflectively to ethnographic and other storied writing;
  - Develop and use an expanded theoretical and practical vocabulary, drawing upon the ethnographic study of communicative life;
  - Learn and expand methods of journal writing; and
  - Speak and write intelligently about communication, about the practice of writing and telling life stories, and about writing as a method of inquiry.
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## Course Requirements

- **READING:** Reading is an **essential** component of this course. **YOU MUST READ IN ORDER TO SUCCEED!** The readings will form the springboard for our class dialogues.
- **PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:** This is a summer course, so we only meet 15 times. I expect you to be here every day. Class participation constitutes **30% (300 Points)** of your grade. We must all participate actively in class discussions in order to have genuine dialogue.
- **TARDINESS:** Class begins at 10:40 a.m. Arrive on time. To do otherwise is disrespectful and disruptive.
- **IN-CLASS BEHAVIOR:** Please, no cell phones, side conversations, or newspapers in class. Water bottles with lids are acceptable. Please arrive on time, and do not leave the classroom except during our regular breaks. On the first day of class, we will have a discussion about further parameters of in-class conduct.

## Assignments

- **Speaking** — You will have many opportunities to speak both informally and formally. Each week you will be expected to present a status report and a performative reading of your project in class. You will also offer a final presentation/performative reading of your project (on the final exam day).
- **Writing** — You will be responsible for keeping a daily journal. These journal entries will be checked weekly. In addition, you will complete one major writing project for this course, which will be completed in five stages (chapters):
  1. Origins and early years...
  2. Family, friends, and culture...

3. Rough times, breakthroughs, and turning points...
4. Here and now...
5. The Future: Hopes, dreams, and aspirations...

**Keys to success**

- We learn to write stories by reading stories. Read one story every day.
- We learn to write stories by writing every day. Write at least a journal entry every day.
- We learn to tell stories by telling stories. Tell at least one story every day.

**Academic Integrity <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/>**

*“An academic community of integrity advances the quest for truth and knowledge by requiring intellectual and personal honesty in learning, teaching, research, activities, and service. Cultivating honesty lays the foundation for lifelong integrity, developing the courage and insight to make difficult choices and accept responsibility for actions and their consequences, even at personal cost.”*

There is more! Read and acquaint yourself with the student code of conduct and the university’s academic integrity policy. It is your responsibility to know and abide by the academic integrity policy of this university.

**Disability**

If you have a disability or special need that I should be aware of or for which special accommodations need to be made, please see me privately during my office hours (or make an appointment).

**Grading**

EVALUATION CRITERION	POINTS
Active participation in class dialogues	300 points
Journals	100 points
Chapter 1 (Origins)	100 points
Chapter 2 (Family, friends, and culture)	100 points
Chapter 3 (Rough times and turning points)	100 points
Chapter 4 (Here and now)	100 points
Chapter 5 (Hopes, dreams, aspirations)	100 points
Final presentation	100 points
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1000 points</b>

**GRADE BREAKDOWN**

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|--------------|--------------|
| 930-1000 = A | 730-769 = C  |
| 900-929 = A- | 700-729 = C- |
| 870-899 = B+ | 670-699 = D+ |
| 830-869 = B  | 630-669 = D  |
| 800-829 = B- | 600-629 = D- |

770-799 = C+

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**Course Materials**

Lamott, A. (1994). *Bird by bird*. New York: Anchor Books.

Various **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}** Readings

A hard-bound journal notebook (examples will be shown day 1)

**NOTE: ALWAYS BRING THE ASSIGNED TEXT TO CLASS!**

**YOUR NOTES:**

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

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### Thursday, May 17

Course introduction

Overview of the project

A reading and discussion (example)

In-class storytelling + In-class writing

Assignment: Download **BLACKBOARD E-RESERVE** readings and purchase book!

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### Monday, May 21

Theme: The sound/love of story

Family story day!

Writing exercise: Building steam...and entering the stream...

Read: Lamott, pp. 1-32 + **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Taylor, pp. 1-22: *Tell Me a story: The life-shaping power of our stories* (Introduction + *The Sound of Story*) + King, *Truth and Bright Water* (excerpt)

Film clip/reading: *A River Runs Through It*

Due: Draft of Chapter 1 (Origins)

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### Tuesday, May 22

Theme: What do you know when you know a story?

Joke day!

Writing exercise: Muddling through

Group exercise: Story circle

Film clip: *Smoke Signals*

Read: **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Taylor, *Tell Me a story: The life-shaping power of our stories* (*What do you know when you know a story?*), pp. 23-40 + Richardson, *Speech lessons*

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### Thursday, May 24

Theme: Character

Character day!

Writing exercise: Character sketching

Class exercise: Big and small characters

Film clip: *Citizen Kane*

Read: Lamott, pp. 44-53 + **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Ellis, *With mother/with child: A true story* + Ellison, *Invisible Man* (excerpt)

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### Monday, May 28

Themes: Memory

No class: Celebrate Memorial Day by visiting memory!

Read: Lamott, pp. 54-63 + 85-92 + **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Trujillo, *In search of Naunny's Grave*

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## Tuesday, May 29

Theme 1: Plot and structure/family, friends, culture

Writing exercise: Write on!

Class exercise: Plotting along

Theme 2: Rough stuff...

Rough story day!

Writing exercise: Writing through pain...Re-storying and re-storing...

Read: **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Chester, *Mother/Unmother: A storied look at infertility, identity, and transformation* + Fox, *Silent voices: A subversive reading of child sexual abuse*

**Due: Draft of Chapter 2 (Family, friends, culture)**

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## Thursday, May 31

Theme: Writing as process

Storymaking and secrets

Read: Lamott, pp. 103-130 + **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Tillmann-Healy, *A secret life in a culture of thinness* (all) + **email**: Poulos, Excerpts from *Accidental Ethnography* (Secrets)

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## Monday, June 4

Theme: Storyseeing...

New story day!

Writing exercise: Seeing the world around you

Class exercise: Observation/participation

Film clip: *American Beauty*

Read: Lamott, pp. 97-102 + Handout (excerpt from *Deep Play*)

**Due: Draft of Chapter 3 (Rough times and turning points)**

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## Tuesday, June 5

Theme: Dialogue and story

Dialogic story day!

Writing exercise: Writing speaking and listening

Class exercise: The ties that bind us...

Film clip: *13 Conversations about One Thing*

Read: Lamott, pp. 64-73 + **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Pelias, *A methodology of the heart*, pp. 71-93 + **email**: Poulos, Excerpts from *Accidental Ethnography* (*Accidental Dialogue*)

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## Thursday, June 7

Theme: Writing from the heart, here and now...

Being here/now day!

Writing exercise: Here, now

Class exercise: Where am I?

Film clip: *Pleasantville* or other (TBA)

Read: **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Poulos, *Spirited Teaching: A pedagogy of courage* + Pelias, *A methodology of the heart* pp. 1-15

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### **Monday, June 11**

Theme: Hope

Stories of hope day!

Writing exercise: What's next?

Class exercise: My future story...

Read: **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Parker, *Virginia Lovers* (excerpt)

Film clip: *The Truman Show*; *Forrest Gump*

Due: Draft of Chapter 4 (Here and Now)

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### **Tuesday, June 12**

Theme: Dreams

Dreamstory day!

Writing exercise: What dreams may come?

Class exercise: Dream story

Film clip: *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

Read: **{BLACKBOARD E-RESERVES}**: Poulos, *The ties that bind us, the shadows that separate us: Life and death, shadow and (dream)story* + Chappell, *Brighten the corner where you are* (excerpt)

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### **Thursday, June 14**

Theme: Everyday Stuff

Everyday story day!

Writing exercise: Field notes (revisited)

Class exercise: Talking field notes into stories

Film clip: *Stand by Me*

Read: Lamott, pp. 195-207 + email: Poulos, Excerpts from *Accidental Ethnography*

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### **Monday, June 18**

Theme: Coming Home

Open writing workshop...

Final Presentations...

Due: Draft of Chapter 5 (Hopes, Dreams, Aspirations)

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### **Tuesday, June 19 (exam period)**

Last day of class — Final presentations!

Celebration!

Due: "Final" draft (all five chapters)

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