Course Description

In this course, we will explore ways in which writers have experienced, described, and conveyed the idea of memory. With the help of autobiographies, memoirs, science fiction, and essays, we will examine these writers' tactics while asking ourselves questions about the purpose and meaning of invoking the concept of "memory" in texts. Some questions we will consider include the role of a writer in recording memories, how trauma affects the creation and sharing of memory, what it means to use memories as political testimony, what happens to our identities when we suppress memories, and why people say that memory lies. These questions, coupled with analysis of the techniques our chosen authors use to engage with the concept of memory, will help students in the production of their own projects of writing memory. Through essays and in-class writing assignments, we will explore the mechanics of recording memories, theorizing about memories, and engaging in academic arguments about the meaning of memory. In this way, we will come to understand our academic work as part of a dialogue with other writers whose work ensures that we remember them.

Course Objectives

1) To introduce students to the conventions of academic writing.  
2) To familiarize students with academic research methods and resources.  
3) To equip students with the tools of critical assessment, close reading and critical thinking.  
4) To impart an understanding of writing as a process of careful choice, construction, articulation and revision.

Required Texts

Most of the readings will be available through our course blog, memory110.qwriting.org. *Autobiography of a Face* by Lucy Grealy, *Pedro and Me* by Judd Winick, and the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th Edition) will be at the school bookstore. All readings are due on the date they appear on the syllabus.

Essay Assignments

**Essay #1: (5 – 7 pp.):** Drawing on the theories of trauma we have studied in this course, develop a nuanced argument about how Lucy's cancer shaped her
memories of her childhood. Your argument should not merely demonstrate that trauma affected her memory, but explore the specific ways in which it did so.

**Essay #2: Literary / Musical / Visual Analysis (5 – 6 pp):** Literary, musical and visual artists have long sought to capture the subjective experience of consciousness, especially that of memory. Choose either one literary text, song or film and make an argument as to how effectively the author (or director, or musician) grapples with one aspect of the experience of remembering (or *not* remembering) in comparison with the work of one of the authors we have studied so far this term.

**Essay #3: Research Project (5–6 pp):** Write a piece in which you explore and make an argument about how Judd Winick's *Pedro and Me* compares with at least one other work about AIDS published around the same time (within five years of Pedro and Me’s publication date). You must use two to three outside sources (aka, sources not used in this class) to bolster your argument.

**Essay #4: Mnemonic Interpretation (4 – 6 pp):** Think of a single, defining experience from your life and, drawing on John Rechy's memoir, *About My Life and the Kept Woman*, recreate this experience from memory in as detailed and vivid a prose as you can muster (2 – 4 pp). Then, using some of the theories of memory we've discussed thus far, develop your own theory as to why you remember the details of this experience the way that you do (2 – 3 pp). Some questions to consider: Why can you remember some details and not others? What events took place in this space? What emotional associations do you have with this space? What else do you remember from this time in your life?

**Essay Expectations**

All essays are due IN CLASS at the beginning of class unless you have a documented emergency or previously made other arrangements with me. I do not accept late work without prior permission; all extensions must be arranged at least 48 hours in advance (though the "documented emergency" clause applies here as well). Your essays must be in doublespaced Times New Roman, size 12. Margins must not exceed 1 inch. I will notice if you increase the size of all the punctuation marks in an effort to take up space or if you triplespace. I also know that most people have a maximum of four grandparents and that it is unlikely that all four will die during one term.

**Grading**

15%: Class participation. Class participation demands that students thoughtfully respond to readings and their classmates in discussion, ask questions, and otherwise demonstrate their engagement with the class.

15%: In-class writings. Throughout the class, we will be engaging in short in-class writing exercises as part of our writing workshop series. Some of the writing workshops
are marked on the syllabus, but you should always come to class prepared for spontaneous writing exercises.

15%: Pop quizzes.

30%: First three essays. While the first three essays assignments are individually important, students should also see them as learning opportunities that can be applied towards the final paper.

25%: The final paper.

**Grading Criteria** (by Professor Jason Tougaw, Queens College, Dept. of English)

When I evaluate your formal assignments, I am looking for inventive ideas expressed in engaging prose. Your writing should both please and enlighten readers and give them a sense of why your project is important—why what you have to say needs to be said. I evaluate the words on the page, rather than potential, improvement, or effort. The work you put into an assignment will most certainly be evident in the completed essay. The grading criteria below reflect the general standards to which I hold essays. Plusses and minuses represent shades of difference. However, no description can capture the full range of elements that make a piece of writing strong (or weak). My feedback on your writing will give you both more concrete and more thorough explanations of the standards by which I evaluate it.

An “A” range essay is both ambitious and successful. It presents and develops focused and compelling set of ideas with grace, confidence, and control. It integrates and responds to sources subtly and persuasively.

A “B” range essay is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. A “B” essay must contain focused ideas, but these ideas may not be particularly complex, or may not be presented or supported well at every point. It integrates sources efficiently, if not always gracefully.

A “C” range essay has significant problems articulating and presenting its central ideas, though it is usually focused and coherent. Such essays often lack clarity and use source material in simple ways, without significant analysis or insight.

A “D” range essay fails to grapple seriously with either ideas or texts, or fails to address the expectations of the assignment. A “D” essay distinguishes itself from a failing essay by showing moments of promise, such as emerging, though not sufficiently developed or articulated ideas. “D” essays do not use sources well, though there may some effort to do so.

An “F” essay does not grapple with either ideas or texts, or does not address the expectations of the assignment. It is often unfocused or incoherent.
Writing Center

Located in Kiely Hall 229, tutors there are trained to help you revise your writing at various stages. If you believe you need additional help with your writing, or if I ask you to set up a regular meeting with a tutor, you should make an appointment at least one week prior to when an assignment is due. You can also get online help by visiting their website at [http://qcpages.qc.edu/qcwsw](http://qcpages.qc.edu/qcwsw).

Note About Special Accommodation: If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation in this class, contact the Office of Special Services in 171 Kiely Hall at 718-997-5870 and please inform me.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves passing off someone else's work as your own. We will discuss plagiarism and methods of avoiding it in class. You will fail any assignments in which you plagiarize, so please make sure to ask if you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism.

Course Calendar

1/31: Introduction

Memory, Autobiography, and Trauma


  Writing Workshop: Thesis, Motive

2/7: Badenhausen. "Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community..."


  Writing Workshop: Structure, Context


  Writing Workshop: Audience, Evidence, Analysis

2/16: Grealy. *Autobiography of a Face*

  Writing Workshop: The First Essay

2/21: NO CLASS

2/28: FIRST PAPER DUE

**Memory and Witnessing**


  Writing Workshop: Close Readings

3/7: NO CLASS


  Writing Workshop: Applying Theory

3/14: Winick. *Pedro and Me*

  Writing Workshop: The Second Essay

3/16: Winick. *Pedro and Me*

3/21: SECOND PAPER DUE

**Memory, Identity, and Forgetting**

3/23: Connerton. "Seven Types of Forgetting"

  Writing Workshop: Fine-tuning Your Work

3/28: NO CLASS

3/30: Walker. "Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life"

  Walker. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"

4/4: Borges. "Funes, His Memory"

  Writing Workshop: The Third Paper

4/6: Rechy. *About My Life and the Kept Woman*, Chapters 1-3
4/11: Rechy. *About My Life and the Kept Woman*, Chapters 4-7

4/13: THIRD PAPER DUE
In class: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

4/18: NO CLASS

4/20: NO CLASS

4/25: NO CLASS

**Memory, Fiction, and Falsehood**

4/27: Dick. "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale."

5/2: Newman and Baumeister. "Toward an Explanation of the UFO Abduction Phenomenon"

5/4: Sturken. "The Remembering of Forgetting: Recovered Memory and the Question of Experience"


5/11: Writing Workshop: Final Paper

5/16: Writing Workshop: Final Paper

5/18: LAST CLASS. FINAL PAPERS DUE.

Note: I reserve the right to alter this syllabus as need be.