

INT187AO – The Art and Science of Autobiographical Storytelling
Discovery@UCSB Seminar
Winter 2026
Tuesdays 9am – 10:50AM (PHELPS 1440)
Course Syllabus

Instructor Introductions

Nicole Alea Albada – Psychological and Brain Sciences (PBS)

Welcome! I am one of your instructors for the course, Dr. Albada. I am an Associate Teaching Professor in the PBS Department. I received my BS in Psychology from the University of Florida. I continued at the University of Florida, earning my PhD in Developmental Psychology, with an emphasis on adult development and aging. I am the director of the [Thinking About Life Experiences \(TALE\) Lab](#), which explores why and how people remember events from their life, the implications of sharing autobiographical stories with others, and the links between remembering the personal past and psychosocial well-being across adulthood and cultures. I am also the Director of Education and Outreach for the [Center for Aging and Longevity Studies \(CALS\)](#). I teach mostly research methods and statistics for psychology pre-majors. I will be teaching you about the Science behind autobiographical remembering and storytelling.



Dr. Nicole Albada (she/her)
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Ellen O'Connell Whittet – Writing Program

I am the other instructor for this course, Prof. Whittet. I received my BA in Literature and French from UC Santa Barbara, my MFA in nonfiction writing from Sarah Lawrence College, and I am currently working on my PhD in English at Trinity College Dublin, with an emphasis in literary practice and medical humanities. I have published essays and journalism in The Cut and Vulture, Vogue, Time, The Paris Review, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and BuzzFeed. I am the author of a memoir, *What You Become in Flight* (Melville House 2020) and a forthcoming novel, *Book of Hours* (Dzanc, 2026). My research interests include trauma-informed pedagogy, literary practice, creative writing studies, reproductive humanities, and arts writing. I teach classes in the Writing Program and CCS Literature & Writing. I will be teaching you the Art behind autobiographical storytelling.



Ms. Ellen Whittet (she/her)
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Course Overview and Learning Objectives

This seminar will bring together the science behind remembering the personal past and the implications of remembering for psychological outcomes, and the process of writing autobiographical stories. Writing autobiographical stories provides us with a chance to make meaning from the raw materials of our life. These raw materials are not verbatim recollections but are versions of an event that are reconstructed in an effort to meet the psychological goals of the self. Over the quarter, we will study different writers' crafts, looking at the writing decisions they have made, gathering a repertoire of tools to practice on our own and put those tools to use. We will then explore the process that psychological science uses to find themes in these works that say something about human personality and behavior by reading empirical articles and content-coding written narratives. We will look at every piece, both published and written by peers, with the aim of understanding the motives of the storyteller, and learn

how to develop our own unique voices and a stronger sense of narrative rhythm and pacing necessary for effective storytelling.

Communication with the Instructors

The best way to reach us throughout the quarter is via email. Our email addresses are at the top of the syllabus (under our pictures). You can also use the *Canvas* email system for the course. The instructors will stay around for a few minutes after class to answer any questions. Office hours that require lengthier discussions are available by request and an appointment. Please do not hesitate to contact us!

Teaching and Learning Strategies

Our seminar will meet on Tuesday from 9:00-10:50am. The Instructors will be alternating weeks. You are expected to be there during the scheduled seminar time. The first hour or so of each class will be devoted to an interactive lecture on that week's lesson, which will deliver content and go through examples and questions. We may spend some of this time in discussion as well, or watching videos or reading material related to the lecture content. Any work for this course will be completed during the class session.

The second half of the class will be for group or independent work. We will create learning communities. These communities will consist of the same 4-5 students throughout the quarter. The purpose of these communities is to help you better digest and think through some of the lecture content, to provide a space for drafting your own autobiographical stories and giving feedback to your peers, as well as a place for you to begin analyzing autobiographical stories like a psychologist might. It is also our hope that through these learning communities students will get to know one another.

Course Resources

Course Website

All information pertaining to and required for this course will be made available on *Canvas*. This will include the syllabus, course announcements, links for the lectures, and links to outside resources, like videos and readings. This will be our first quarter transitioning to *Canvas* so please be patient with me and the TAs as we learn this new system (and we will be patient with you, if you are new to it).

Internet and Computer

This course will be fully in person. However, you will need access to the internet and *Canvas* since this course is where all of the needed information for the course will be posted.

AI Use Policy

In this course, you will be writing - in class activities and for a Final Writing Assignment. Any submitted written work **MUST** be your own. This means that, unless otherwise explicitly stated or permission is explicitly given, you should not be using AI-generated text for written work in this course. Thus, **ANY** written work that you submit must be written by you and only you, without any contributions from AI-powered tools. Not following this policy would constitute a form of plagiarism, which is a form of academic misconduct (see this policy below). Further, in this class you will be thinking and writing about your own personal experiences, which means that it does not make much sense to rely on AI-powered tools to help you digest, think, and write about your own life!

Course Requirements

Your grade in this course will be based on: attendance in the seminars on Tuesday, participation in the course, which is self-evaluated, and a final brief writing assignment. The details for each are described below.

Attendance

There will be 10 seminar meeting times throughout the quarter. Attendance at the seminar is mandatory. Each attended seminar will count for 3 points. Thus, totaling 30 points towards your overall grade in the course.

The attendance policies are as follows:

- One absence is allowed, without penalty. Thus, if you attend 9 out of the 10 seminars you can still earn all the points for your Attendance grade (30 points). Each additional missed class will lower your grade by $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade.
- 5-20 minutes late is tardy. More than 20 minutes late is an absence (same with leaving more than 20 minutes early).
- Two tardies is an absence.
- Three absences or more will result in an automatic No Pass grade.

You can decide how and when to use your absences. You get one without penalty, and do not have to tell us how you use it—you can use it for illness or to sleep in or to study for another class. There is no such thing as an “excused” or “unexcused absence.” This course requires group work, discussions, and in-class work, so participation is important. If you are absent, please find a classmate who can fill you in, and let us know if you have questions about anything specific.

Self-evaluation of Participation

Participation in the class activities, discussion, and general engagement in the course throughout the quarter is expected. People participate in class in different ways (e.g., some might speak up in lectures, some are more inclined to make contributions in their learning communities, others are participating in the class by engaging with the material often and deeply, etc.). Thus, to understand the way that you are participating in this class throughout the quarter, a self-assessment of your class participation will be due the final day of lecture, **Tuesday, March 10th at 11:59pm** on *Canvas*.

However, you must keep track of your participation throughout the quarter on a weekly basis. This weekly log is to be the evidence of your class participation. Details about how to keep track of your class participation will be discussed in class, and the form that you will submit at the end of the quarter is available on *Canvas*.

Inconsistencies between the evaluation that you have of yourself regarding class participation, and the evaluation that your instructors have of your participation, will be discussed prior to calculating your participation grade. In cases where inconsistencies are found to exist (i.e., your participation in the class was demonstrated to be less than your self-evaluation), your grade will be lowered by $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade. Class participation counts 30 points towards your overall grade in the class.

Final Brief Writing Assignment

Throughout the quarter in the lectures, discussions, and learning communities you will work on writing a short autobiographical essay about a specific topic. A portion of this essay will be submitted as Part A of your Final Brief Writing Assignment in the course. The writing assignment will be submitted via a Discussion Forum on *Canvas*. Part B of the essay is to read and comment on ONE other students' written essay in the Discussion Forum. This response will incorporate concepts that were learned in the 'science' part of the course and include evaluations of how psychology might evaluate or use the autobiographical essay to explore something about human behavior.

Further details about the Final Brief Writing Assignment will be posted on *Canvas* mid-quarter. ***It will be due by Friday, March 13th at 11:59pm.*** The assignment counts 40 points towards your overall grade in the class and will be graded P/NP.

Course Grading

Your grade for the course will be based on: attendance (30 points), participation (30 points), and the final writing assignment (40 points). Discovery seminar courses are graded Pass (P)/No Pass (NP). Based on UCSB policy, P grades will be assigned only for coursework equivalent to a C or better on the letter-grade basis (73%/73 points or above). NP grades will be assigned for work equivalent to a C- or below (72%/72 points or below). No credit is given for courses graded NP.

No extra credit is offered in this course.

All grades are final. Every effort will be made to ensure that your grade has been calculated correctly. ***A grade will only be changed if work was incorrectly graded or your points were miscalculated.*** Grades are not given, they are earned. There are numerous opportunities to earn points in this class. Use them all to your advantage: every point counts!

Student Resources

Are you experiencing...	Then you need...	You can find them...
Challenges as a first-year, first generation, or minority student?	ONDAS Student Center (Opening New Doors to Accelerating Success)	1150 Kerr Hall (805) 893-5009
Mental health or relationship issues?	Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)	CAPS Office (Building 599) (805) 893-4411
Difficulty with financial aid, loans, or work study?	Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships	SAASB, Room 2103 (805) 893-2432
Physical health issues?	Student Health Services	Student Health Building (805) 893-3371
Facing drug or alcohol abuse issues?	Alcohol and Drug Program (ADP)	Student Health Building (805) 893-5013

Food insecurity? Hunger?	Associated Students Food Bank	University Center (UCen), Room 3167 A (805) 893-2276
Sexual assault, interpersonal violence, or stalking?	Campus Advocacy Resource & Education (CARE)	Student Resource Building (SRB), Room 1220 (805) 893-4613
Need for accommodations for learning or mobility disabilities?	Disabled Students Program (DSP)	Student Resource Building (SRB), Room 2120 (805) 893-2688
Need for tutoring, study skills?	Campus Learning Assistance Services (CLAS)	Student Resource Building (SRB), Room 3210 (805) 893-3269
Challenges as a first generation student?	Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)	Student Resource Building (SRB), Room 2210 (805) 893-4785
Challenges as an international student?	Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS)	Student Resource Building (SRB), Room 3130 (805) 893-4785
Challenges as a transfer student?	Transfer Student Center (TSC)	Davidson Library, First Floor (805) 893-2038

Departmental and University Policies

[Academic Misconduct Policy](#)

Instructors who have reasonable evidence of academic misconduct both report misconduct to the UCSB Office of Student Conduct. This allows the OJA to conduct an evidentiary hearing that may clear the student or may compellingly establish misconduct. If academic misconduct is established, the OJA, not the Instructor, decides the consequences other than the course grade, which is conferred by the Instructor. Any work (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill an academic requirement must represent a student's original work. Any act of academic dishonesty, such as ***cheating, plagiarism, or the unauthorized use of AI-powered tools***, will subject a person to Department and University disciplinary action. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, looking at another student's examination, referring to unauthorized notes or other sources of information during an exam, providing or receiving test or exam or paper answers, and having another person take an exam or write a paper for you. Representing the words, ideas, or concepts of another person without appropriate attribution is plagiarism. Whenever another person's written work is used, whether it is a single phrase or longer, quotation marks must be used and sources cited. Paraphrasing another's work, i.e., borrowing the ideas or concepts and putting them into one's "own" words, must also be acknowledged. Thus, submitting work that is similar to another students' work in the class is considered plagiarizing. Submitting your own work for multiple assignments is also a form of plagiarism.

[Reproduction of Course Materials](#)

All course materials (class lectures and discussions, handouts, examinations, Web materials) and the intellectual content of the course itself are protected by United States Federal Copyright Law, and the California Civil Code. UC Policy 102.23 expressly prohibits students (and all other persons) from recording lectures or discussions and from distributing or selling lectures notes and all other course

materials without the prior written permission of the Instructor. Students are permitted to make notes solely for their own private educational use. Exceptions to accommodate students with disabilities may be granted with appropriate documentation. To be clear, in this class students are forbidden from completing study guides and selling them to any person or organization. This text has been approved by UC General Counsel.

This means that we are the exclusive owners of the copyright in all materials created for this course. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use. You may also share those materials with another student who is enrolled in or auditing this course. However, you may not reproduce, distribute or display (post/upload) lecture notes or recordings or course materials in any other way — whether or not a fee is charged — without our express prior written consent. You also may not allow others to do so. If you do so, you may be subject to student conduct proceedings under the UC Santa Barbara Student Code of Conduct. Similarly, you own the copyright in your original papers and exam essays. If we are interested in posting your answers or papers on the course web site, we will ask for your written permission.

*****See the next page for the course schedule and weekly flow of activities.*****

Class Schedule and Weekly Flow of the Course

<u>Week</u>	<u>Modules and Topics to be Covered</u>	<u>Weekly Flow and Recommendations</u>
<u>Module 1: What is the science and what is the art?</u>		<u>Mondays</u> - Check <i>Canvas</i> page for any work (e.g., watching videos, completing readings, etc.) that needs to be completed before class. <u>Tuesdays</u> - Attend class 9:00-10:50am - Attend office hours after class, as needed <u>Wednesday</u> - Complete Self-evaluation of Participation weekly log
1	An introduction to autobiographical memory and life story in psychology	
2	What makes creative nonfiction “creative,” and what makes it “nonfiction?”	
<u>Module 2: Letting go of accuracy</u>		
3	Reconstruction of autobiographical memories	
4	Creating structure, scenes, and narrative momentum	
<u>Module 3: What do we remember and write about?</u>		
5	The reminiscence bump, and details and emotion when remembering	
6	Adding sensory details, uncanny details, and showing, not telling	
<u>Module 4: Why do we remember and write?</u>		
7	The functions of autobiographical memories	
8	Where is your reader in your autobiography?	
<u>Module 5: Outcomes of thinking and writing about life experiences</u>		
9	Finding the silver lining (redemption) and psychological well-being	
10	Conclusions, cliches, and making the personal universal	
	Self-evaluation of Participation Due Tuesday, March 10th at 11:59pm	
	Brief Writing Assignment due Friday, March 13th by 11:59pm	