Goals of the course: We will examine queer life writing in the U.S. from the early twentieth century to the present, exploring the range of life writing genres (memoir, letters, autobiography, personal essay) and the ways that queer writers use these genres to express and construct sexual, racial, ethnic, class, gender, and national identity. We will pay particular attention to the literary strategies these writers use to both reinforce and challenge conventional representations of gender and sexuality.

Readings
Books (available in the University of Oregon bookstore, 13th and Kincaid):
Mariana RoMo-Carmona, Speaking Like An Immigrant
Jane Heap, Dear Tiny Heart: Letters of Jane Heap and Florence Reynolds
Audre Lorde, Zami, A New Spelling of My Name
Cherrie Moraga, Waiting in the Wings, Portrait of Queer Motherhood
Daphne Scholinski, The Last Time I Wore a Dress
Paul Monette, Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story

Short pieces (available on Blackboard):
Excerpt from Gender Outlaw by Kate Bornstein
Excerpt from Restored Selves
“Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood,” by James Baldwin

Requirements
Attendance is mandatory. Each student is allowed two unexcused absences. After that, absences may affect your grade. I always appreciate an email if you know you will miss class. Please come to class having read the text listed for that day. This course will be discussion-based, so please come to class having thought about the reading ahead of time. Essays should be double-spaced, printed out, and stapled. Please turn them in as hard copies; bring essays to class on the due dates listed. Please don’t send essays via email. Here are the assignments:

1) Reading responses: Every Monday, a 1-page printed reading response to one text from that week’s reading is due in class. The response can take the form of questions or statements or a combination; it does not need to have a thesis. Each response should include at least one quotation from the text along with some close reading of the quotation.

2) Discussion leading: Every student will help lead discussion during ONE Friday class during the term. Students will lead discussion in groups of four. Your group should communicate outside of class to decide on what questions to ask and how to get students involved. Each discussion leader should bring in at least one quotation from a text being discussed that day. Your grade for discussion-leading will consist of the average between a grade for the whole group and an individual grade. Your individual grade will be based on both your contributions on the discussion day and notes for the discussion that you turn in after class. These notes may be printed or handwritten.

3) 3-4-page essay on an aspect of literary forms and strategies in life writing: Your essay should focus on one text, performing a close reading of the interplay between form and subject matter. Due in fifth week.

4) Final essay (6-7 pages) on a topic of your choice, due Monday of Finals Week. You must turn in a thesis statement by Friday of Week Nine at the very latest. We will have these back to you by Monday. Creative alternative: 4-5-page life writing piece (genre and content of your choice), plus 2-3-page essay analyzing your piece in comparison to a work read in class.
Schedule

Week One—Who Is “Queer” and What is Life Writing?
Monday, March 28th—Introductions. What and Who is “Queer?”
Friday, April 1st—Begin Jane Heap, Dear Tiny Heart.

Week Two—Letters as Life Writing: Queer Modernism
Monday, April 4th—Jane Heap, continued.
Wednesday, April 6th—Jane Heap, continued.
Friday, April 8th—Begin Audre Lorde, Zami.

Week Three—Audre Lorde: Why Biomythography?
Monday, April 11th—Lorde, continued.
Wednesday, April 13th—Lorde, continued.
Friday, April 15th—Lorde, continued.

Week Four—Rewriting Gender and Sexuality, Writing Identity
Monday, April 18th—Bornstein, Gender Outlaw
Wednesday, April 20th—Baldwin, “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood.”
Friday, April 22nd—Begin Monette, Becoming a Man

Week Five—Coming of Age in the Fifties: Why “Half a Life Story”?
Monday, April 25th—Monette continued.
Wednesday, April 27th—Monette continued.
Friday, April 29th—Monette continued.

Week Six—Writing Queer Parenthood
Monday, May 2nd—Moraga, Waiting in the Wings
Wednesday, May 4th—Moraga, continued
Friday, May 6th—Moraga, continued

Week Seven—Queer Migrations
Monday, May 9th—Romo-Carmona, Speaking Like an Immigrant
Wednesday, May 11th—Romo-Carmona, continued
Friday, May 13th—Romo-Carmona, continued

Week Eight—Gender, Sexuality, Diagnosis
Monday, May 16th—Scholinski, Last Time I Wore a Dress.
Wednesday, May 18th—Scholinski, continued.
Friday, May 20th—Scholinski, continued.

Week Nine—Rewriting the Bildungsroman: Queer Self in Conversation
Monday, May 23rd—Scholinski, continued.
Friday, May 27th—selections from Restoried Selves

Week Ten—Queer Self/Political Self
Monday, May 30th—Restoried Selves continued
Wednesday, June 1st—Restoried Selves continued
Friday, June 3rd—Conclusions