ENGLISH 261.001
INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING
Spring 2016
Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 9:00-9:50AM
Ferguson 177

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Office Hours: 11-12PM (MWF), 1-2:00 (TTH), and by appointment.

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION (from the university bulletin):
An introduction to the writing of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction with opportunities for practice and peer workshop.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:
This semester I’m experimenting by not using a handbook or text for you to purchase. I will supply you with multiple handouts for readings and assignments. This should save you some expense, but you will spend money photocopying your original work for distribution to your classmates for group workshops. You will need lots of paper, inkjet cartridges, and dedication.

You will also need a journal—nothing fancy—for your creative ideas. If you don’t own a dictionary, you should buy one of those as well. And then promise to use it. Dictionaries do no good if they are never opened.

OBJECTIVES
The purpose of this course is to get you started writing skillful poetry and short fiction. There are two ways to improve your craft. The first is to write, which you will be doing frequently—with an emphasis on technique and revision. The second way to become a better writer is to read and analyze the strategies of other writers. With that in mind, you will be reading, discussing, and dissecting multiple examples of poetry and prose. You will also be sharing your work with your classmates and engaging in peer workshops. Be open-minded, willing to offer constructive criticism, and always remember that you are the writer and have the prerogative to accept or ignore any suggestions you receive (though it is probably best to heed any advice I give you—feel free to ignore me all you want after the semester is over). The course demands regular attendance and participation, frequent assigned readings, two craft-analysis papers, a portfolio of original poetry and short fiction, and the keeping of an ideas journal. This should be a fun class but come prepared to think, act, and behave as if you were a professional writer, eager for deadlines and helpful advice.
Since this class counts for both the Creative Writing major (the BFA) and the minor, our Program Learning Outcomes are as follows:

1. The student will demonstrate close reading skills and recognize strategies used by professional creative writers.
2. The student will employ techniques and strategies for crafting carefully composed, competent creative work in a variety of genres (for this course, that means fiction and poetry).
3. The student will articulate useful, critical editorial advice for peer writers.
4. The student will demonstrate strategic revision on completed creative work.

The Student Learning Outcomes (boy, that’s a bureaucratic phrase, isn’t it?) are based on those goals. Let’s put it in plain language: you’re going to read a lot of professional examples and pay attention to the craft; you’re going to write your own original poetry and fiction; you’re going to actively engage in workshop discussions; and you will turn in a portfolio of revised work at the end of the semester.

Since you all want to get a good grade, too, here’s the breakdown:

**GRADING:**

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<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Workshop Editing</td>
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<td>Poetry paper</td>
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<td>Fiction paper</td>
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<td>Collected Poetry</td>
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<td>Story 1</td>
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<td>Story 2</td>
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**ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION**

If you want to do well in this course, you should attend every class period. There will be numerous discussions, some quizzes, group activities, and assorted in-class assignments. Your eventual grade will benefit from high attendance and active participation. If you are going to be absent, I expect you to let me know in advance. If you are sick or otherwise unable to attend class, I expect you to leave a message at the above number or e-mail me. I give everyone three free absences. (That’s a week worth of class.) After that, absences will mar your final grade by a half letter grade per absence. Miss nine or more days and you automatically fail the class, regardless of your other work.

Absence is not an excuse for missing assignments. You should either call a classmate or talk to me and find out what went on in class if you were not able to attend.
DON'T MISS DAYS ON WHICH YOU HAVE WORK DUE OR WHEN YOUR ART IS THE FOCUS OF DISCUSSION. THAT WILL FURTHER HARM YOUR GRADE.

I don't accept late work. Ever. And I never give extra credit.

Caveat: This semester each of you will get one “Chaos Coupon” to use in case you aren’t able to turn in one assignment by the deadline (not including workshop assignments—those must be turned in on time). Should you use that coupon, that’s it. You’re not allowed any more late work.

The effort you put into assignments, group work, and class discussion will count toward your grade. If you are absent for either class discussion days or group work, your grade will be affected. If you doze, pass notes, check your cell phone, text message, or act in a disruptive manner (specifically, talk while others are talking), expect your grade to suffer accordingly.

Tardiness is rude and annoys me more than you imagine. Be punctual. Every time you’re late for class, you lose points. No kidding.

READINGS
Most of the assignments (and any pop quizzes) relate to the stories, poems, and articles you’ll read for class discussion. Keep up with the readings; they are very important. We will be analyzing them carefully. I expect you to have read and thought about them before you come to class.

HOMEWORK
There will be a variety of exercises assigned. Do them and you’ll improve your writing and your grade. Don’t do them and both will suffer. I also expect you to keep a creative journal this semester. That’s a notebook where you jot down ideas for stories or turns of phrase you want to use later. It’s not a personal journal or diary. I will be collecting your journals occasionally, randomly, just to make sure you’re doing it. Keeping a work journal is one of the best ways to hang on to your good ideas and have them bear fruit later. If you think good ideas will stick with you and you won’t forget them, you’ll forget them. Write it down. Make it a habit. Frequent journal keeping keeps writer’s block at bay. Trust me on this.

DETAILS
Pay particular attention to each assignment description. This should give you a good idea what I am looking for in each piece and the sort of errors I will mark. I will also go over this in class. Please note that if you fail to turn in a major assignment (a poem, a story, a craft analysis, or the final portfolio), you will fail the course.

FORMAT
All in-class assignments must be written neatly in ink. Out-of-class work must be
printed by computer or word processor; no handwriting for those. Staple sequential pages. Your work must be presented in a neat and professional manner.

**PAPERS**
You will need to write 2 analysis papers, one on an assigned poem and one on an assigned short story. You will analyze work we have not discussed in class. The papers should be approximately 2-3 pages and discuss some element(s) of each as you see it relating to yourself as a writer. The papers should be written in MLA format—and follow all rules of an essay (essay form, excellent grammar and spelling, etc.).

**POETRY**
You are going to write six finished poems this semester (five for class, one more for your portfolio), varying in style and form. If you consider yourself a budding poet, wonderful. You will enjoy creating striking images, the lure of alliteration and rhyme, the challenge of forms such as sonnets and sestinas. If you see yourself as a fiction writer and don’t like poetry, I promise the skills you develop as a poet can only improve your fiction. Go into every assignment with enthusiasm and an open mind and you’ll be surprised what you can create.

**FICTION**
You’re going to write at two stories this semester, a full-length story (2000 to 4000 words) and one short-short story (under 1000 words). I don’t forbid genre work (horror, sci fi, mystery, romance), but I prefer if you try your hand at literary fiction first. (We’ll talk more about what I mean by that.) I do ask that you avoid gratuitous sex or violence. Notice the word *gratuitous*. Sometimes sex and violence have their place in accomplished fiction, but it takes skill. This semester we’re here to hone our initial skills; if you want to write slashers after you’ve mastered the basics, go for it, but not for this class. This semester I’d avoid characters that eat human brains or are serial killers. If you really want to write a disturbingly graphic story, see me. Perhaps you’ll convince me that your skills are up to it and we’ll let the class decide if you succeeded.

**PORTFOLIO**
The last thing you hand in this semester will be an anthology of the work you produced this semester. I expect it to be revised work; nobody produces their sharpest stuff first time out. The work you write in January and February will reappear in May, but it must be in a more polished form. Save your early draft. I want to see multiple versions, so I can compare how your manuscript has improved. We’ll talk more about this as the semester progresses, but my warning now is you must be prepared to revise. Writing is revision. (Say it again: writing is revision. It should be one of your mantras.) I also want a brief self-analysis of your work: your strengths, your weaknesses, your intentions, etc.

**GRADING**
How will I grade creative work? It’s subjective, of course, but I give you some ground rules in both format and content that should clarify what I’m looking for.
Effort counts, too. I don’t know who said it, but art really is 98% perspiration, 2% inspiration. Perspire a little—no, perspire a lot—and you’ll get an A. If you are spectacularly gifted and turn in sloppy work, you won’t get an A. The race isn’t won by the naturally swiftest; it’s won by the runner who trains the most productively. This course is for the writer-in-training. Consider me a coach.

Oh, the University has asked us all to include information on the WH grade. I rarely use it; the circumstances would have to be extreme.

**Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54)**
Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**
Please contact me if you are having any difficulties with the material due to a documented disability. I’m more than willing to accommodate you in a reasonable manner to help you succeed in this course. Many, many writers have blossomed despite physical, mental, and/or emotional hurdles. Just let me know and we can figure it out with the help of the University’s various and impressive resources. Here’s SFA’s official information on it:

*To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/**.

**AND NOW FOR SOME GRUMPY WARNINGS:**
I will fail the following...
Missing your own workshop discussion
Incomplete work
Poems and stories not typed in expected format
Work with an abundance of uncorrected misspellings or typos (more than 2 per page)—professional editors have no patience with thoughtless errors.
Neither do I.

Always keep copies of what you write for your own protection in the event your work should be lost or misplaced. It probably won’t be, but the general rule is
save everything just in case.

**ACCEPTABLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR (UNIVERSITY POLICY)**
Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.

**PLAGIARISM**
I don’t know why anyone would take a creative writing class and then not use that as an opportunity to do their own work, but, hey, stranger things have happened. So, just to remind you, claiming something as your original work when someone else wrote it is called PLAGIARISM, which means using without credit the ideas or expressions of another. The penalty for plagiarism will include failure of the plagiarized assignment and possibly failure for the course. In all cases, it will include notification of the Dean’s office. SFA takes it seriously and so do I. Here’s there official word on it:

**Academic Integrity (A-9.1)**
Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

**Definition of Academic Dishonesty**
Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at:
WHEW. DONE WITH THE GRUMPY STUFF. BUT SOME LAST WORDS...

If you don't know, ask. If you can't remember, ask. If you panic, talk to me before the night before. Most importantly, relax.

Lose yourself in your art. That’s the best way to create something astounding. I have faith that each of you can write interesting, well-crafted, perhaps brilliant poems and stories this semester. Throw yourself into this course. It will pay off in artistic gratification, I guarantee. You’ll get a better grade and have more fun.

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

WEEK ONE
1/20 W Introduction to course; go over syllabus, policy statement. **HOMEWORK**: Review handouts. Go buy text & journal and write first entry. Bring journal to class.

1/22 F Get to know each other. Discuss readings/journals and poetic terms. **HOMEWORK**: Read handout on poetic terminology.

WEEK TWO
1/25 M Discuss terms. **HOMEWORK**: Read poems in handout. Consider *image*.

1/27 W Discuss poems. **HOMEWORK**: Read assigned poems. Think about *voice*.

1/29 F Discuss readings. **HOMEWORK**: Read assigned poems. Think about *character*.

WEEK THREE
2/1 M Discuss poems. Discuss workshopping/line editing. **HOMEWORK**: Write a narrative image-based poem, Poem #1. Bring five copies to class to share.

2/3 W Workshop Poem #1 (image poem) **HOMEWORK**: Read sonnet handout.

2/5 F Workshop #1 cont’d. Discuss sonnets. **HOMEWORK**: Start work on your own sonnet.

WEEK FOUR
2/8 M Discuss sonnets. **HOMEWORK**: Finish Poem #2, a sonnet. Bring five copies to class.
2/10 W  Exchange sonnets with peer groups. Discuss editing.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read classmates sonnets and write up editorial suggestions/comments.

2/12 F  Workshop Poem #2 (the sonnet).  
**HOMEWORK:** Read assigned poems. Write Poetry Analysis paper.

**WEEK FIVE**

2/15 M  Turn in Poetry Analysis paper. Let’s talk about what you discovered.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read poems in handout.

2/17 W  Discuss poems.  
**HOMEWORK:** Bring your journals to next class. Have you been using it regularly?

2/19 F  Discuss journals.  
**HOMEWORK:** Write Poem #3 (freestyle). Bring five copies to class.

**WEEK SIX**

2/22 M  Exchange Poem #3. Let’s talk about process.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and edit workshop poems.

2/24 W  Workshop Poem #3 (freestyle)  
**HOMEWORK:** Read sestina handout.

2/26 F  Discuss sestinas. Let’s talk about repetition.  
**HOMEWORK:** Write a sestina, Poem #4. This might take a while. Bring in 5 copies for workshop.

**WEEK SEVEN**

2/29 M  Exchange Poem #4.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read poems (185-189). Explore and write in your journal all possible ode topics.

3/2 W  Sestina Workshop.  
**HOMEWORK:** Begin an ode in any style, Poem #5.

3/4 F  Discuss odes.  
**HOMEWORK:** Finish ode. Bring in five copies for workshop.

**WEEK EIGHT**

3/7 M  Exchange odes. Group Workshop Poem # 5.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on peer poems.

3/9 W  Last poetry workshop (cont’d).
HOMEWORK: Read handout on fiction terminology.

3/11 F  Fiction lecture.
HOMEWORK: Read story handout over break: Michael Cunningham’s “White Angel,” Amy Bloom’s “By-and-By” and Z.Z. Packer’s “Brownies.”

WEEK NINE
3/14 M  Spring Break

3/16 W  Spring Break

3/18 F  Spring Break

WEEK TEN
3/21 M  Discuss Cunningham and Bloom.
HOMEWORK: Review Packer.

3/23 W  Discuss Packer.
HOMEWORK: Write Fiction Analysis.


WEEK ELEVEN
3/28 M  No Class.

3/30 W  Turn in Fiction Analysis. Let’s talk about what you wrote.
HOMEWORK: Eavesdrop. Transcribe conversation. Bring transcription to next class.

4/1 F  Let’s talk about dialogue.
HOMEWORK: Begin writing Story #1.

WEEK TWELVE
4/4 M  Discuss editing & workshopping.
HOMEWORK: Keep writing Story #1.

4/6 W  Exchange stories with group. Discuss concerns.
HOMEWORK: Read first two stories for workshop.

4/8 F  Workshop Story 1.
HOMEWORK: Continue reading and commenting on stories.
**WEEK THIRTEEN**

4/11 M Workshop Story 1 continued.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read first stories in flash handout.

4/13 W Discuss flash.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read handouts and consider the short-short story form.

4/15 F Discuss stories.  
**HOMEWORK:** Write short-short story.

**WEEK FOURTEEN**

4/18 M First group of 2 turn in stories for class distribution.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on peer stories.

4/20 W Full class workshop  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on peer stories.

4/22 F Full class workshop  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on peer stories.

**WEEK FIFTEEN**

4/25 M Full class workshop  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on peer stories.

4/27 W Full class workshop  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on peer stories.

4/29 F Full class workshop  
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on peer stories.

**WEEK SIXTEEN**

5/ 2 M Last workshop day  
**HOMEWORK:** Revise fiction

5/4 W Let’s discuss literary journals  
**HOMEWORK:** Revise

5/6 F Last discussion.  
**HOMEWORK:** Polish your portfolio.

There is no final exam for this course.  
Portfolios are due in my office on Wednesday, May 11th by noon.

** I do not accept late portfolios under any circumstances. **

Congratulations. You’re done. Have a wonderful summer!