ENGLISH 463.090 – Elements of Craft  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11-12:15 PM  
Spring 2016  
Ferguson 177

Dr. John A. McDermott  
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e-mail: mcdermotja@sfasu.edu (note the single “t” in my address)  
Office hours: 11-12PM (MWF), 10:00-11AM (TTH), and by appointment.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:  
City of Thieves, David Benioff  
This is How You Lose Her, Junot Diaz  
Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self, Danielle Evans  
Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk, Ben Fountain  
The Sixteenth of June, Maya Lang  
Get In Trouble, Kelly Link  
Everything I Never Told You, Celeste Ng  
Where’d You Go, Bernadette?, Maria Semple

You should also have no hesitation with using dictionaries, guides to literary terms, and other reference resources. A writer who doesn’t love words is a musician who doesn’t love notes.

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION (from the General Bulletin):  
Analysis of selected examples (either prose or poetry) with emphasis on technical, generic, and aesthetic features.

OBJECTIVES:  
This course is designed to help fiction writers improve their craft by reading novels and story collections by established writers. Creative writing, like any art form or sport, is based on mastering a host of skills. In this course you will read like a writer—looking at elements such as (but not limited to) setting, dialogue, point of view, and characterization. We will primarily analyze literary fiction, but we will also be looking at the limitations and freedoms authors face when working in a genre (such as horror or comedy). You may not like every book you read for this course—odds are you won’t—but you will see a range of strategies for storytelling which will help you develop your own skills as fiction writers. Assignments include a presentation, two craft analysis papers, and two short stories. There will also be a midterm and a final. When you leave the course, you should be a more attentive reader, a more precise writer, and fully appreciative of the choices that fiction writers are faced with on every page. This will, I guarantee, make your own fiction stronger.
Here are the official Program Learning Outcomes for this course. Your Student Learning Outcomes (beautiful bureaucratic language, isn’t it?) are based on these goals:

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.
3.) The student will articulate useful, critical editorial advice for peer writers.
4.) The student will demonstrate strategic revision on completed creative work.

GRADING:
Your grade in this course will be broken down like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grading Scale:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100-90 = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>89-80 = B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Analysis</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>79-70 = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Analysis</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>69-60 = D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>59-0 = F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Story #1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Story #2</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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ATTENDANCE (5%)
Attendance and active participation in this course are absolutely necessary. I give every student two excused absences. More than two absences will affect your grade. Each additional absence beyond the excused two will lower your grade half a step (for example, from a B to B-). If you accrue more than eight absences, you will automatically fail the course regardless of your other work. If you are sick or otherwise unable to attend class, please get in touch with me. Being absent is not an excuse for missed information or assignments. You should either contact me or a classmate to find out what went on in class if you are not able to attend. You are responsible for the material discussed in class on the days you were absent.

Warning: I do not accept late work or give extensions on papers or stories. I will give you each ONE “Chaos Coupon” to use at your discretion, should you have an emergency that prohibits you meeting a deadline. Should you use it, then there will be no excuses for subsequent assignments.

Please do not be late for class. One or two late arrivals is excusable; consistent tardiness is rude and will affect your grade.
PARTICIPATION (5%)  
Class participation is incredibly important in a course designed like this. I prefer to conduct my classes as an open conversation. I will ask questions and you will be expected to respond. That should launch us into a discussion about the works. I hope that you will engage not only with me but also with others in the class. I grade class participation in 2 main ways:

Discussion: Be prepared to talk about the readings on the day we discuss them in class. If you do not understand the readings, feel free to ask questions about what they mean. Let me stress that I’m not looking for "right" answers. I want you to tell me what you think and defend it with reasonable examples from the text. If you do not wish to talk in class, know that your grade (as long as you appear attentive) will be no higher than a C. Try to talk at least once a discussion.

Active Listening: I expect you will listen to your classmates when they are discussing aspects of the literature we read. There is always a chance that you will think that the person talking is a complete idiot, but then again, they may say something brilliant. Always treat people with respect and try to gain the most from what they are saying and you will be treated in the same way.

EXAMS (40%):  
There will be two exams in the course, one covering the first half of the course and the other covering the remainder of the readings. Each exam will have 3 parts: identification, short answer, and a long essay. You will have 75 minutes for the mid-term exam and two hours for the final. There may be a creative option on the last exam or I may make the final entirely creative. It depends on what I think will be best to improve your skills as writers.

PRESENTATION (10%):  
Each of you will choose an author and work and give a brief 10 minute presentation to the class about some aspect of the work you have researched outside of class discussion. I’m not looking for biographical information here unless it directly relates to a specific technical choice the author makes. We’ll talk more about this assignment as the semester progresses.

PAPERS & STORIES (40%):  
You will write 2 Analysis Papers this semester and 2 Short Stories. The essays will analyze a single element or technique employed by the author for a particular effect which you will explain clearly and succinctly. 3-4 pages is ample for those assignments. The stories will be anywhere from 2000-4000 words and you will be expected to write a brief preface to your fiction which explains how the reading you have done in the course has affected the decisions you made as an author. I expect you to use techniques that you see in action in the readings or you may react against an author and employ a polar effect. It’s up to you to determine the choice, but you must explain your choice and I must see your choice at work in the fiction you create for the course. This is not a workshop course, so only I will be reading your fiction.
All essays must be typed, double-spaced in MLA format, which will be explained in class. You will be required to use parenthetical citation any time you cite anything from any text. All essays should have a standard heading on the top left corner of the page (your name, class title, my name, the date). Each paper should have an original title. Please use good quality, white paper. Staple or paper clip all papers. This lowers the risk of a page of your paper being misplaced.

Stories will also have strict format requirements. Double-spaced, appropriate font, with left header and word count. I expect professional presentation of your fiction.

Always keep copies of what you write for your own protection. Do not give me the only copy of anything. In the event that your work should be lost, or misplaced, you want to make sure you have a back-up copy.

**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.

The university asks us to include this information on all course policies:

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/

**Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54)**
I rarely use WH—the circumstances have to be extreme—but the university has asked all faculty to include the official policy on withheld grades:

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
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will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:
I will FAIL the following:
   Late essays & stories (Writing must be ready at the beginning of class)
   Incomplete work
   Work not typed in standard format
   Work with an abundance of spelling/grammatical errors (more than 2 per page)

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 his or her 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. The penalty for plagiarism on any assignment is failure for the course. I will also notify the Dean’s office of any documented case. Plagiarism is theft and it’s a particularly egregious offense to writers. I can’t imagine why anyone would want to plagiarize in a creative writing course, but if you’re ever tempted, just remember, even if no one catches you, you’ll end up with bad, bad karma.

Here’s the university’s official statement on the subject:

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:
http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp

KEEP ME INFORMED
Please keep me informed about anything you feel I should know about you, particularly if you feel it affects your performance in class. If you are having any difficulty with the material, please know that I will be more than happy to confer with you regarding it.

In this course you are all fiction writers. I will treat you as writers. Read like writers and learn from those who’ve come before you. Like dancers at the barre or musicians playing scales, you can learn to write fiction by imitating—and then departing from—the art that you ingest. Be attentive. Be precise. Be original.

Good luck.

English 463, Spring 2016
Tentative Syllabus

WEEK ONE
19 Jan. Tuesday. Introduction to the course.
What do you want from the course? What can you get? What
do I expect from you?
HOMEWORK: Read course policy statement and syllabus.
Read handouts: Chekhov’s “The Short Story” and Carver’s “A
Storyteller’s Shoptalk.”

makes a contemporary short story? What makes a
collection?
HOMEWORK: Read Evans

WEEK TWO
26 Jan. Tues. Discuss Evans
HOMEWORK: Read Evans.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK THREE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Feb Tues.</td>
<td>Discuss Evans.</td>
<td>HOMEWORK: Read Semple, first sections.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK FOUR</strong></td>
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<td><strong>WEEK FIVE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Feb. Tues.</td>
<td><strong>First Analysis Due.</strong></td>
<td>Discuss Lang.</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK SIX</strong></td>
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<td>HOMEWORK: Read Lang.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK SEVEN</strong></td>
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<td>1 Mar. Tues.</td>
<td>Discuss Lang.</td>
<td>HOMEWORK: Read Fountain</td>
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<td>3 Mar. Thurs.</td>
<td>Discuss Fountain</td>
<td>HOMEWORK: Read Fountain.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK EIGHT</strong></td>
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<td>6 March Tues.</td>
<td><strong>Presentation Day. Second Analysis Due.</strong></td>
<td>Review for Mid-Term</td>
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<td>HOMEWORK: Study for exam.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 March Thurs.</td>
<td><strong>Mid-Term Exam on Evans, Semple, Lang, &amp; Fountain.</strong></td>
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HOMEWORK: Read Benioff.

WEEK NINE
15 March Tues. Spring Break
17 March Thurs. Spring Break

WEEK TEN
22 March Tues. Discuss Benioff.
HOMEWORK: Read Benioff.

24 March Thurs. Easter Break

WEEK ELEVEN
29 March Tues. Discuss Benioff
HOMEWORK:

31 March Thurs. Discuss Benioff.
HOMEWORK: Read Diaz. Finish Story #1.

WEEK TWELVE
5 April Tues. First Short Story due. Discuss Diaz.
HOMEWORK: Read Diaz

7 April Thurs. Discuss Diaz
HOMEWORK: Read Ng.

WEEK THIRTEEN
12 April Tues. Discuss Diaz.
HOMEWORK: Read Ng

14 April Thurs. Discuss Ng.
HOMEWORK: Work on second story.

WEEK FOURTEEN
19 April Tues. Discuss Ng.
HOMEWORK: Work on Story #2.

21 April Thurs. Discuss Ng.
HOMEWORK: Read Link

WEEK FIFTEEN
26 April Tues. Discuss Link
HOMEWORK: Read Link

28 April Thurs. Discuss Link
HOMEWORK: Prepare presentations.
WEEK SIXTEEN

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 May Tues</td>
<td>Presentation day. Second Story due.</td>
<td>Come in with questions about the test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 May Thurs</td>
<td>Possible Presentations/Review for Final Exam.</td>
<td>Study for final exam.</td>
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</tbody>
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Final Exam on Tuesday, May 10th, 10:30-12:30 pm.

Happy Summer!