
Course Description: This is a writing intensive course in a workshop format. Students will complete various readings in the short story, and attempt to write several stories.

Objectives: Through the workshop method and the study of fiction, students will develop their writing skills in the genre of short fiction, and will complete assigned readings in order to acquire knowledge of some post-modern literary conventions and successful literary writers, and take an oral final exam. Students will also gain the tools and experience necessary to evaluate their own and their classmates’ efforts.

Requirements: Students will be required to write 4 exercises and 4-5 short stories totaling somewhere between 18-20+ pages of work, depending on length of pieces (some wiggle room in there). Students must participate in class verbally (see Workshop Guidelines for specifics). It is advisable that you form a small sub-group of 1-2 peers or so from the class who will provide feedback to you outside of the workshop and before you workshop your stories. Students must hand in a portfolio of work at the end of the semester, attend one literary reading (the student reading at the semester’s end counts), and conference with me at least once during the semester. Graduate students must write 3-4 exercises and 4 short stories totaling 25-30+ pages of work, depending on length of work (some wiggle room).

Grades: Student exercises and stories will not be graded individually for a variety of pedagogical reasons—among them the notion that creative work should almost always be revised after it is first turned in and several more times during the revision process and before it is submitted through the portfolio for a final grade. You are basically competing against yourself for grades, though more developed writers at the beginning of class do usually earn higher grades if they consistently push themselves. A grade on an early draft would not reflect an accurate evaluation of the eventual shape that a story might reach. Generally, I treat this course as a studio art course in terms of grades. You show me your work or workshop it, receive notes and comments, and revise your work according to the feedback you receive (though you will probably disregard some feedback). If you are the type of student who is overly anxious about grades, this course may not be for you. If you are taking this class to meet a requirement and are indifferent to the exploratory, high-risk nature of the process involved with any creative act, I advise you now that this is an unstructured class in many ways, and it may not be designed for you. This is a course in art, and whether or not you can create it. If you are indifferent to art, you might not make a grade over a C+ range, unless you are accidentally brilliant. And although many of us secretly nurse hopes that we are accidentally brilliant, most of us are not. At the end of the semester, each student will turn in a portfolio of his/her work.

Undergraduate grade breakdown:
- Portfolios: 80%
- Attendance/Participation/final reading: 20%

Graduate Student grade breakdown:
- Portfolio 80%
- Attendance/participation/final: 20%
After you miss a class, your grade drops 1/2 letter grade and continues to do so, no matter why you have to miss class—including work and emergencies. If you explain to me that you must miss class and why, I’ll always say “No problem” or “fine.” That does not mean that I will not penalize you for missing a class (I might not, but the option remains open as specified above.) Most A students never miss a class. Three missed classes are grounds for failure.

The reason attendance is so important is because the class format is a workshop, not a lecture. It is verbal-feedback based and much of the feedback given to each writer comes from you and your fellows. You are required to attend class in order to give feedback as well as receive it. Cased closed. A workshop’s success is contingent on the commitment of its members to the workshop process. This process is further explained in the Workshop Guidelines. Therefore, if you run into medical problems that keep you from attending class, you must either drop this class or expect a much lower grade than other students receive who do participate fully in class. There is no such thing as making up workshop time by writing more stories, etc. Exceptions are made for A+ students on occasion, but rarely. (Once in 25 years.)

Final Exam: There is no written final exam. Your writing portfolio will be due any time between the last class and one day after study day. Extra Credit is given for turning the portfolio in early and for attending literary readings of poetry or fiction.

General questions should be handled by coming to my office. I believe students should hunt down faculty members in order to conference with him or her face to face (I’m old-fashioned that way).

Due dates indicate work is due to be work-shopped if called upon, not handed in. If you want me to read material before you workshop it, I will do that only once a semester at the beginning of the semester. Then I want you to use a support sub-group that you “find” or “organize.” If you do want me to comment on a piece you’re working on, come to me during office hours with one or two typed copies of your work, (one for you to look at while I read the other or one for you to read to me while I make comments on the written copy). After that first read-through, you’re on your own unless you want me to look at work you won’t have a chance to workshop. More and more, students want me to read everything before they workshop it. Again, I’ll pre-read once, only. Please be considerate of other students waiting to see me. If you want me to read a five page story in one sitting, that’s do-able, but a 10-15 page story will require several scheduled visits. Think ahead, plan ahead. Never miss a day you are scheduled to workshop—if you do, your grade drops a full grade.

INCOMPLETES: I’ve given one Incomplete in 25 years (car accident); students must be passing class AT TIME OF REQUEST to receive an incomplete in those rare cases; I never give them to students who simply come in towards the end of the semester and beg for one.

Civility Code: A level of civility is expected in my class that is based on the following list of precepts.

1. All participants in the class must be treated with respect including me.
2. When I am talking to the class, conversations between students are not permitted at any time. When working in groups, please be kind and considerate to each other and speak quietly.
3. Cell phones must be turned off upon entrance to class. No talking on cell phones or text messaging during class; no cell phones on desks or tables; they must be put away and out of sight during class time.
4. No use of laptops without a learning disability note from counseling and testing that requires for psychological or physiological reasons that you use a laptop. If that note is forthcoming, students must sit up front near me so that screen is partially or easily visible to me.

5. By remaining in this class, you indicate your agreement to the terms above and below: you have been forewarned about civility expectations and workshop guidelines.

Assignments: Fiction workshop

Note: please realize that all the short fiction in our anthology is worth reading and I strongly urge you to read it all. I make selections based on some biases, like everyone else who must make selections of anything. Please be advised that, in effect, the entire anthology is the recommended reading for this course.

Sept 24: Wk 1 Class 1: syllabi, handouts, guidelines, etc. Read Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” and Chekov’s “At Sea” (handout), Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl” and “Mother” by Lydia Davis.

Wk 2 August 31: dialogue, character and place descriptions due.

Wk 3 Sept 7: Labor Day—NO CLASS so read “An Interval” by David Foster Wallace & O’Connor’s “Good Country People.”

Wk 4 Sept 14: Read Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist”

Wk 5 Sept 21: Due: First story. 1st person pt of view. At least 2-6 full pages of double spaced lines (minimum—can be longer).

Wk 6 Sept. 28: And read Gogol’s “The Overcoat,” and Mansfield’s “Bliss.”

Wk 7: Oct. 5: 2nd story due. 3rd person pt of view

Wk 8: Oct. 12: No class. Read: R. Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.”

Wk 9: Oct 19: 3rd story due

Wk 10: Oct. 26: Read: Tim O’Brien’s “The Things They Carried.”

Wk 11 Nov. 2: Read Lorrie Moore’s “How to Become a Writer.”

Wk 12 Nov. 9. 4th story due

Wk 13. Nov. 16: Edith Wharton’s “Roman Fever.”

Wk 14. Nov. 23: Junot Diaz “How to Date . . .”

Wk 15. Nov. 30: extra Grad student story due and Frank O’ Connor “Guests of the Nation.”

Wk 16 Dec. 8 Portfolios due