Overview

If you’re looking at this course, it means you have something you want to express, a unique perspective on life and the world that you feel compelled to share with others through language. This course will help you develop the skills to best express that point of view. We will read a variety of exemplary literature with a careful, analytical eye in order to build a vocabulary for understanding the craft of writing, and we will apply this vocabulary to better understand our own work in a workshop setting. This course will include an introduction to the writing of both poetry and fiction, and we will find that many of the technical concerns and skills we develop in one genre will carry over to the other. We will begin with poetry in the first half of the semester before shifting to study fiction after spring break.

This is a reading and writing intensive course. Each week we will have one class session devoted to the development of an aspect of craft through deep engagement with and discussion of assigned reading, supplemented by creative exercises that respond to the reading. The other class each week will be spent workshopping new poems and short stories submitted by members of the class. The semester will culminate in the production of an original portfolio of revised poems and short stories.

Grading

The final grade will be determined from the following categories:

- **Class Participation** – 30%
  
  Participation in this course entails active and substantive contribution to in-class discussions, as well as the timely completion and submission of supplementary writing and workshop materials.

- **Final Portfolio** – 20%
  
  At the end of the semester, you will be required to produce a portfolio consisting of pieces revised after workshop, additional writing, and a two-page statement of craft.

- **Creative Assignments** – 25 %
  
  This includes both the timely distribution of workshop pieces to the class and the completion of exercises arising from our craft discussions.
Reading Responses – 25%

For our craft sessions each week, you will be required to write a response of 250 words to the reading, to be submitted via hardcopy at the end of the class. These responses are intended to help you formulate your ideas and to serve as preparation for the discussion in class.

Attendance Policy

The success of a writing workshop depends in large part on the formation of a community. For that reason, it is of paramount importance that students be present and on time for each class. Unavoidable absences may be excused if they are communicated to the instructor in advance, or, in the case of illness, accompanied by a doctor’s note. Each unexcused absence after the second will result in a lowering of the student’s final grade (i.e., from A to A-, A- to B+, etc.)

It is also important that we maximize the use of class time. Tardiness of greater than 10 minutes will count as half of an absence.

Late Work

All assignments are to be turned by the expected time. Except in extraordinary circumstances and by arrangement prior to the deadline, late work will not be accepted.

Electronics

Except in the case of accommodating university-recognized disabilities, we will refrain from the use of electronics such as cell phones and laptops in the classroom.

Food Policy

Small snacks are permitted as long as they are not creating a disruption in the classroom.

Plagiarism Warning

There is zero-tolerance for plagiarism in this class. It is against the spirit of creative writing and will result in a failing grade and referral to the appropriate authorities.

Conferences

Each student will be required to meet with the instructor at least two times during the semester in office hours to discuss their writing and progress in the class. Additional conferences may be scheduled at any time by email.

Guidelines for Workshop

The core of this class is the creative writing workshop. To ensure that everyone is able to get the most out of the workshop experience, there are several important provisions to keep in mind:
• Pieces for workshop must be distributed in a timely fashion so that the rest of the class has enough time to consider drafts before discussion. This means that **students should bring sixteen hard copies of their drafts to the craft class before they are being workshopped.**

• Before the workshop, the author should also think about what difficulties they have encountered in the draft and what questions they would like to have answered during the discussion.

• The rest of the class should prepare for the conversation by reading each piece carefully multiple times and preparing written feedback in advance of the discussion. This feedback should be typed up and consist of commentary on both successful aspects of the draft and areas that could be strengthened. **Two copies of this feedback should be brought to the workshop,** one for the author one to be submitted to the instructor.

• In general, remember that everyone is here to make their writing better, and our comments should be made from this perspective. Rather than simply remarking on things that we like or dislike in the draft, we should focus on strategies for revision.

• Unless we are told otherwise, we will treat writing submitted to the workshop as fictional and the “I” of a piece of writing as a speaker separate from the author of the piece. This perspective will help us to zero in on the writing as writing. Related to this, we will approach drafts with an eye towards helping the writing more successfully accomplish its aims, rather than critiquing the goals or content of the writing as such.

**Sensitive Content**

Because of the nature of creative work, we may encounter challenging or disturbing content in readings or in workshop pieces. If at any time you are struggling with any of the texts we are studying, please do not hesitate to reach out with your concerns. If disturbing content appears in your own work, as stated in our workshop guidelines, we will assume that it is fictional. However, in the case that a piece suggests the possibility of violence or the occurrence of a crime, I may reach out by email to check up on you and if necessary connect you with the appropriate university resources.

**Tentative Schedule**

**Monday January 22 Introductions and Why We Write**
• Introductions, workshop guidelines, and housekeeping

**Poetry**

**Wednesday January 24 Experienced Image**

• Exercise: Create five embodied images.
Monday January 29 Workshop Group A

Wednesday January 31 Form: Sonnet Intensive

- Exercise: A sonnet or a crown of sonnets.

Monday February 5 Workshop Group B

Wednesday February 7 Form II: Ghazal, Villanelle, Sestina, Pantoum, Palindrome

- Exercise: Choose a subject for a poem, and attempt to write a poem on that subject in two or even three of the forms we’ve discovered. OR Write a poem in a form we have not discussed.

Monday February 12 Workshop Group C

Wednesday February 14 Form III: Discovery and Reinvention

- Exercise: Constrained form developed in class.

Monday February 19 NO CLASS *note change in rhythms of class*

Wednesday February 21 Workshop Group A

Monday February 26 Poetry Looking Inwards
- Exercise: Write a poem of interiority.

**Wednesday February 28 Workshop Group B**

**Monday March 5 Poetry Looking Out**

- Exercise: Write a poem that engages with the state of the world.

**Wednesday March 7 Workshop Group C**

**March 12-18 SPRING BREAK NO CLASS**

**Monday March 19 Translation Practicum**
- Excerpts from five translations of *Inferno*

- Exercise: Translation and mistranslation

**Fiction**

**Wednesday March 21 Changing Gears: Prose: Opening Lines**
- Handout: Opening passages from Woolf, Tolstoy, Kafka, Lee, Calvino, Whitehead, Nabokov, Marquez, Plath, etc.

- Exercise: Write the opening lines or paragraphs to seven different stories.

**Monday March 26 Workshop Group A**

**Wednesday March 28 Plot I: The Fundamentals of Desire**

- Exercise: Use Propp’s tale types to structure the action of a story in a contemporary setting.

**Monday April 2 Workshop Group B**

**Wednesday April 4 Plot II: Complications**
• Gaiman “Other People”

• Exercise: Come up with three brief outlines for conceptual narratives.

Monday April 9 Workshop Group C

Wednesday April 11 Place I: Southern Gothic Case Study

• Faulkner “A Rose for Emily”, O’Connor “Everything That Rises Must Converge” “Good Country People”

• Exercise: Write a two-page description of a familiar place, then write a two-page description of a place you have never been.

Monday April 16 Workshop Group A

Wednesday April 18 The Collection and Place II: Mariana Enriquez’s Argentina

• Things We Lost in the Fire

• Exercise: Think of seven ideas for stories that might take place in your hometown.

Monday April 23 Workshop Group B

Wednesday April 25 Voice and Autobiography

• Excerpts from Batuman, Coates, Smith

• Exercise: Write a short story from true experience.

Monday April 30 Workshop Group C

Wednesday May 2 Revision Roundtable

• Howl Drafts

• In-class radical revision exercises

Monday May 7 Final Portfolio Reading and Celebration