

ENGL 241: Graduate Fiction Workshop

Fall, 2012 – Tuesday 4:00-6:45pm

Faculty Offices 104

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Course Description

A graduate workshop in fiction writing, designed for MFA students with a primary or secondary focus in Fiction. Intensive workshop experience. Repeatable for credit.

Course Goals

A good workshop benefits the writer in two ways. First, by receiving the careful feedback of other writers, she may start to *see* her work from the outside and begin to *re-vise* her original ideas and strategies. Second, by closely reading the work of other writers and articulating responses – artistic, emotional, intellectual – the writer hones her own analytic skills and strengthens her instincts about what makes a good story.

Our discussions will focus on readers' encounters with a fictional text and understanding of its structure; its technique; its artistic, emotional, and intellectual aims. To the extent that these aspects of a first or second draft are not yet fully realized, we will discuss ways to develop them, but we will avoid the "diagnostic workshop," i.e. a mere listing of what's wrong with a text, what "isn't working," or what individual readers "don't like." Instead, we'll focus on our experiences of the text, and give notes about our immediate reactions to what has been written, and our understanding of *why* it has been written. Work submitted to a workshop is by definition "in progress," and the most valuable discussion is one which enables a writer to understand her work more fully.

Each student will submit three manuscripts – two new pieces and one revision. We will also discuss a number of published stories, with student presentations built around various craft topics. These stories and presentations are not offered as "instruction" in the correct way to write but instead as a way to develop a common vocabulary we can refer back to, and push against, as we look at student writing during the semester.

Required Texts

Course Reader – Available for purchase at Maple Press, 481 E. San Carlos St.

Requirements and Grading [SLOs – see below]

- Two **original submissions** [1, 2, 5]. Typed, double-spaced, single-sided, and stapled or clipped, turned in at the class meeting prior to your assigned workshop discussion. If you submit a novel excerpt that is not the first chapter(s), please provide a brief (1-page) synopsis that contextualizes the selection and focuses readers on particular issues about which you'd like feedback. Please bring enough copies for all students plus the instructor. *Note: Late or emailed submissions are unacceptable.*

- A significant **revision [1, 2, 5]** of one of these pieces, accompanied by a brief discussion of your revision process, and a set of issues you would like readers to focus on.
- Careful, thorough **responses [3, 4, 5]** to all submissions, including technical comments on the manuscript itself and a 1-2pp. letter to the writer which addresses global issues. Please bring **two copies** of these letters to the class meeting at which the story is being discussed. Late responses up to one week will receive half credit; after one week will receive one quarter credit.
- A **presentation [3, 4]** of an assigned text. These presentations are *not* general appreciations - they should be technical, detailed discussions of craft, using the creative pieces as concrete illustration of concepts in the essays. You are encouraged to include questions or exercises for the class, to bring in other examples, or direct us to other resources which illustrate crucial points or seem otherwise relevant. You have 15 minutes, no more. Use them well.
- **Participation [3, 4].** A workshop is not a “class,” per se – it is an ongoing discussion that functions best when it draws on a variety of perspectives, reactions, aesthetics, etc. Simply put, your level of energy will determine the success of this group. Therefore, I’ll expect you to do all assigned readings, participate regularly in discussions, be on time, and miss class only in cases of emergency, acts of God, etc. If you are more than five minutes late, you will receive half credit for participation that day. If you are absent, you will fail that day’s participation. If you receive more than two (2) days of failed participation, you will not pass the course. *Do not make the mistake of thinking you will automatically get full credit for participation.*

Grading

I don’t grade based on “talent,” only on your dedication to your work and your commitment to the workshop. Your submissions equal 50% of your final grade. Your participation in the workshop – including your response letters and your level of engagement in the discussions – equals 40% of your final grade. Your presentation equals 10% of your final grade.

MFA Student Learning Objectives [SLO]

1. Students will demonstrate a high-level of ability to write and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration.
2. Students will demonstrate high-level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration.
3. Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
4. Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to: a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion; b) formulate and defend original arguments; c) employ effectively the language of their discipline; d) write under time constraints.
6. Students will demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.

Schedule

Aug. 28	Introduction and scheduling
Sept. 4	Discussion of 2 student submissions. Read: Barth, "Incremental Perturbations," Fitzgerald, "Babylon Revisited," and Steinberg, "Isla." (Kelly Curtis, Peter Carvalho)
Sept. 11	Discussion of 2 student submissions. Read: Beattie, "Where Characters Come From," Baxter, "Digging the Subterranean," Braverman, "Tall Tales from the Mekong Delta," Jones, "Old Boys, Old Girls." (Mike Adams, Jessy Goodman)
Sept. 18	Discussion of 2 student submissions. Read: Miller, "A Container of Multitudes," Williams, "And Eyes to See," Anderson, "Death in the Woods," and Bowles, "A Distant Episode." (Sara Totten, Marta Wallien)
Sept. 25	Discussion of 2 student submissions. Read: Watanabe, "A Mystified Notion," Phillips, "Blind Girls," and Wallace, "Octet."
Oct. 2	Discussion of 2 student submissions. Read: Russo, "Location, Location, Location," and Bass, "Fires."
Oct. 9	Discussion of 2 student submissions. Read: Johnson, "Pesky Themes," and Moore, "Real Estate."
Oct. 16	Discussion of 3 student submissions.
Oct. 23	Discussion of 3 student submissions.
Oct. 30	Discussion of 3 student submissions.
Nov. 6	Discussion of 3 student submissions.
Nov. 13	Discussion of 2 revisions. Class meets until 5:45pm.
Nov. 20	Discussion of 3 revisions.
Nov. 27	Discussion of 4 revisions.
Dec. 4	Discussion of 3 revisions.

Readings

I strongly encourage you to attend literary readings, both on campus and off, as a way of further immersing yourself in the culture of living writers. Here are some you might consider.

Sept. 12 – Karen Tei Yamashita. ENGR 189. 7pm.

Oct. 3 – Nick Flynn. ENGR 189. 7pm.

Oct. 4 – Nick Flynn in Conversation with Tom Barbash. MLK 225/229. 1pm.

Oct. 5-13 – Litquake. Various venues in San Francisco. www.litquake.org.

Oct. 24 – Michael Ryan. MLK 225/229. 7pm.

Nov. 5 – Natasha Trethewey. Stanford University, venue TBA. 8pm.

Nov. 13 – Stephen Elliott. MLK 225/229. 7pm.

Dec. 5 – L. Rebecca Harris and Marian Palaia. MLK 225/229. 7pm

Course Policies

- Use of cell phones in class for any reason is not allowed. If you use your cell phone in class you will receive a failing grade for the day.
- Use of email, IM, web-surfing, etc. in class are not allowed and will result in a failing grade for the day.
- If you miss a class, *you* are responsible for acquiring notes, handouts, manuscripts, etc., for delivering your written responses to the writers whose work was under discussion, or for distributing to all students materials you were supposed to have distributed in class.
- Please see below for the university policy on academic integrity, and rest assured that all cases of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be pursued. If you submit work that is not your own, you will fail this class.
- You are welcome to email me with questions about the class – however, you should not expect a reply for *at least* 24 hours.
- I do not accept written assignments by email under any circumstances.

University Policies

Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on add/drops are available at http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-298.html](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-298.html). [Information about late drop is available at http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/](http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/). Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

Academic integrity

Students should know that the University's Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf. Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html. Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.