

# CRWR 210A.01

## Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction

Fall 2016

### Instructor Information

- **Instructor:** Mackenzie “Max” Boyd
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- **Mailbox:** Liberal Arts 133
- **Office:** Corbin Hall 258 **Office Hours:** Tuesday 12:30 – 3:30pm or by appointment
- **Classroom:** Liberal Arts 303 **Class Meeting Time:** Tuesday & Thursday 3:30 – 4:50pm
- **Course Website:** <https://sites.google.com/site/crwr210>

### Course Description

Literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall says, “We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.” But how can we capitalize on this human tendency toward fictionalizing, and how can we take memorable moments of our lives (both real and imaginary) and form them into a coherent and fascinating whole? How can we turn our mental and physical experiences into narrative art?

This course (Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction) is designed to challenge you to learn the skills you’ll need to become a creative writer, and throughout the semester you will learn to analyze and discuss writing in ways that will ensure you become more confident in both your critical-reading and fiction-writing abilities. We will focus on revealing the skills, processes, and techniques essential to the short story, and as we study the craft of short fiction, we will observe and analyze (and perhaps emulate) the ways in which such authors as George Saunders, Julie Otsuka, Mark Richard, and Wells Tower have attempted to illuminate both the worlds they are writing about and our own. We will look at the short story’s compression of time and space and its supposed moment of revelation that contains within it (as Wallace Stegner says) the “whole of the world.” We will become expert readers, ever-improving literary analysts, and beginning writers. We will try our hands at producing a polished short story of our own, and we will come to know the joys and sorrows (as every writer should!) of the writing workshop and revision.

Together we will learn more about how to read critically and write creatively. Significantly, we also will discover how to effectively communicate our opinions about written works through both verbal and written means. Listening to each other openly will be vital, so the expectation is that we will all receive each other’s questions and ideas with curiosity, care, and respect. Any comments or actions that are perceived by the instructor or a member of the class as discriminatory or impeding anyone from joining the discussion are not welcome in our classroom. Please feel free to speak with me if you have any questions regarding this policy.

### Learning Outcomes

- Acquire foundational skills in reading, discussing and writing short fiction
- Demonstrate an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to fiction
- Practice the art of writing and revising short fiction
- Learn to critique the quality of their own work and that of fellow students

### Course Texts

- Janet Burroway, et al., *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (ISBN: 978-0-321-92316-5)  
[Either the 9<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> edition will be fine; a copy of each will be on reserve in the UM library]
- Various handouts and weekly short stories
- Course website: <https://sites.google.com/site/crwr210>

### Required Materials

- Notebook and pen/pencil for in-class writing and notetaking
- Folder for collecting handouts, stories, photocopies
- Folder for final portfolio

## Course Requirements

- **Writing Assignments and Exercises:** Writing assignments and exercises will be given to you almost every week over the course of the semester. Although we may not examine all of your written work in class, you are still required to perform and submit all assignments on time.
- **Readings and Responses:** You are responsible for completing the assigned reading for each class. Frequently, you may be asked to write a short reflection in response to the reading. Please read the assigned stories at least twice in order to be able to talk about them easily.
- **Stories:** You will draft one work of fiction this semester and have it workshopped once. Required length: 10 – 15 double-spaced pages. You will also significantly revise this story for your final portfolio.
- **Written Workshop Comments:** Provide at least 500 words of single-spaced, typed comments and feedback to the students being workshopped in each class. This will take the form of a 3-paragraph letter that includes: 1) an objective story summary, 2) specific examples of effective elements, and 3) detailed, concrete suggestions for further improvements. Please bring two copies of your feedback—one for the writer, and one to submit to the instructor. In addition to writing at least the 500-word, 3-paragraph letter, please make line edits on the story and give the author comments/responses in the story's margins.
- **Final Portfolio:** Your final for this course will be a portfolio that includes the first draft of your story along with a second draft of the same story that incorporates significant revisions. You will also include a final one-page reflective piece that discusses how your revisions went and why you made these changes.

## Class Policies and Procedures

### General Expectations

- **Workshops:** If your story is to be workshopped you will be expected to provide hard copies to everyone in the class period one week before you're to be workshopped. For example, beginning around Week Ten (depending on class enrollment), you will need to submit your story on Tuesday 11/8 if you're going to be workshopped on *next* Tuesday 11/15 (the same goes for Thursday class sessions). Bring enough copies of your story for everyone, including yourself and me. If you have not read a workshop story, do not read it during class time—be respectful of your classmates' hard work and time. Come prepared.
- **Stories and Assignments:** All of your manuscripts must be typed and titled. Please double space and use 12-point Times New Roman font. Keep backup copies of all of your work, and always bring all of your writing assignments to class.
- **Conferences:** Please make use of my office hours—I am more than happy to talk, to answer questions, to discuss your writing, to agonize, to commiserate. If you cannot meet during my office hours, feel free to send me an email and we can schedule an alternate time to meet.
- **Late Work:** Will not be accepted or given credit.

### Grading

Grading is difficult and subjective. This especially applies to fiction. You will be graded on your active participation in class, your writing exercises, your improvement from draft to revision, and your attendance.

I encourage you to talk with me at any time to better understand my comments or to discuss your overall progress and success in the class.

- ★ **40%** of your grade is based on active participation. Show up prepared, comment on readings, provide written and verbal comments on your peers' stories, and contribute to the classroom community.
- ★ **30%** of your grade is based on successful completion of all writing assignments. Turn in these weekly exercises and reading responses on time, put some thought into the work, and type and double-space all out-of-class work. You will receive credit for exercises, but not a letter grade.
- ★ **30%** of your grade is based on your written fiction. Turn in the first draft of your story on time, and significantly revise your story for your final portfolio.

### Grading Policy

Students enrolled in CRWR 210A are graded by the traditional letter grade A, B, C, D, F, or are given NC for no credit. The NC grade does not affect grade point average. It is reserved for students who have worked unusually hard, attended class regularly, and completed all assignments but whose skills are not at a passing level at the end of the semester.

## Attendance

Attend class. In a workshop environment, we work on stories as a group and we need everyone present to provide a full, well-discussed critique of each story. More than 2 absences will compromise your grade, and 5 or more absences will result in a failing grade. Here's the breakdown:

- ★ 3rd absence: final grade drops one letter grade
- ★ 4th absence: final grade drops one additional letter grade
- ★ 5th absence: final grade is an F

**Do not arrive late to class.** I will mark the number of minutes late any student has arrived, and if any student's ongoing tally reaches or exceeds 50 minutes over the course of the semester, he or she will be marked as absent for one class period. Additionally, late arrival to class will count against your participation grade.

Here's the reasoning behind the attendance policy. Without attending class (or by arriving late), you cannot perform your role as a student involved in learning, planning, inventing, drafting; discussing reading and writing; learning and practicing concepts; or collaborating with your instructor and classmates. Personal situations and required university events may arise that, on a rare occasion, make it impossible for you to be in class. Remember, however, that this is why a few absences are allowed; please reserve those for emergencies.

I reserve the right to adjust the policy in cases of significant, documented illness or emergency. Please note that instances of poor time management on your part do not constitute extenuating circumstances. If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class from a classmate. Make sure you talk with me in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.

If you must miss class, **you are responsible** for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class. Make sure you talk with me **in advance** if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.

## Participation

Participation includes coming to class prepared and on time, taking part in class discussions, asking questions, contributing your knowledge and insights in whatever form is appropriate, and striving to make all your contributions excellent. It also includes completing the required reading for each class and writing responses to your peers' stories. **Note: Please come to class on time.** Lateness will hurt your grade because it is an unnecessary interruption and because latecomers are likely to miss valuable information. Please see *Participation Letter Grade Descriptors* for more information.

## Workshop Etiquette

Becoming a good reader is an important part in your development as a writer. Learning how to identify the strengths and weaknesses in others' fiction will help you recognize the strengths and weaknesses in your own. When I'm critiquing someone's work, I like to read the piece twice—the first time through, I read for pleasure and an overall sense of the work. The second time through, I know enough to begin asking questions and paying attention to specific issues. Besides commenting on the issues I've described above, I'd like you to describe what makes the story memorable, then articulate its underlying ideas, and finally make specific suggestions for revision. Remember: your job isn't to tell the writer to write a different story; rather, by using the power of your imagination, you should attempt to describe what the story could be in its best incarnation and then provide detailed suggestions for how the writer could realize the best incarnation of her project.

Be kind. Be generous. Read another's work as you would like your own work to be read. Don't shy away from making suggestions. (Being too nice is its own kind of irresponsible workshop behavior.) Comment with an eye toward helping another writer write the best short story possible. Barbara Kingsolver once said that the wonderful thing about being a writer is that everyone can win! It's not like running a marathon where only one person breaks the tape at the finish line.

This is a class in which we will be sharing creative work with each other. It is essential to this class that we maintain a respectful attitude toward each other personally and toward each other's work. While it is important that we be critical at times, the point is not to knock down anybody's stuff. Obviously, respect and open-mindedness are required from all of us. Hopefully it goes without saying that discrimination or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in our classroom community.

## Evaluation

Revision is a crucial (and, in this class, mandatory) part of the writing process. Although I will assign final grades based on your portfolio, which will document your progress as a fiction writer, your weekly writing assignments and workshop drafts will receive a mark on the check spectrum, and will include some written feedback from me. These marks do not have letter-grade counterparts; rather, taken with my feedback, they reflect your performance on a particular assignment, and suggest how much work you might need to do in order to elevate your writing. To give you a sense of the check system I'll be using, please refer to the following descriptors.

- ★ *Check*: A project with a check generally engages its genre, takes successful risks, meets assignment requirements, avoids grammatical and syntactical errors, and uses narrative writing to tell a story.
- ★ *Check minus*: A project with a check minus meets the basic requirements, but would benefit from significant revision and a stronger understanding of the assignment. Written comments will elaborate on strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for revision.
- ★ *Unsatisfactory*: A project with a U does not meet basic standards, and requires extensive development and attention. An unsatisfactory submission may be incomplete or inappropriate to the assignment. Such a submission may receive a request to rewrite within a week in order to receive teacher comments.

## Academic Conduct

You must abide by the rules for academic conduct described in the Student Conduct Code. If you have any questions about when and how to avoid academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, please review the Conduct Code and talk with your instructor. The University policy states, "Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. Consequences include failing an assignment, failing a course, or even expulsion." Academic honesty is highly valued in the University community and acts of plagiarism will not be tolerated. All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course, and all students must practice academic honesty. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code, which is available for review online at [http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student\\_conduct.php](http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php)

## Students with Disabilities

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me privately after class or in my office. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

**This syllabus is subject to change.**

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## **Portfolio Letter Grade Descriptors for CRWR 210A.01**

### **A**

Superior portfolios will contain all requirements listed in the syllabus, and will demonstrate masterful implementation of creative writing techniques in addition to thoughtful and reflective writing practices. The writing will be polished.

### **B**

Strong portfolios will contain all requirements listed in the syllabus, and will demonstrate successful implementation of creative writing techniques in addition to thoughtful and reflective writing practices. The writing will be successful, with some grammatical and syntactical polishing needed.

### **C**

Consistent portfolios will meet the basic requirements listed in the syllabus, and will demonstrate acceptable implementation of creative writing techniques with an effort toward thoughtful and reflective writing practices. The writing will be acceptable, with some revision needed, as well as additional grammatical and syntactical polishing.

### **D**

Weak portfolios may be missing some of the requirements listed in the syllabus, and will demonstrate passable implementation of creative writing techniques, with minimal thoughtful and reflective writing. The writing may require a great deal of revision.

### **F**

Unacceptable portfolios exhibit pervasive problems with purpose, development, audience, or style/mechanics that interfere with meaning and readers' understanding. Unacceptable portfolios are often incomplete. A portfolio will also earn an F if it does not represent the writer's original work.

## **Participation Letter Grade Descriptors for CRWR 210A.01**

### **A**

Superior participation shows initiative and excellence in written and verbal work. The student helps to create more effective discussions and workshops through his/her verbal, electronic, and written contributions. Reading and writing assignments are always completed on time and with attention to detail. In workshop or conferences, suggestions to group members are tactful, thorough, specific, and often provide other student writers with a new perspective or insight.

### **B**

Strong participation demonstrates active engagement in written and verbal work. The student plays an active role in the classroom but does not always add new insight to the discussion at hand. Reading and writing assignments are always completed on time and with attention to detail. In workshop or conferences, suggestions to group members are tactful, specific, and helpful.

### **C**

Satisfactory participation demonstrates consistent, satisfactory written and verbal work. Overall, the student is prepared for class, completes assigned readings and writings, and contributes to small group workshops and large class discussions. Reading and writing assignments are completed on time. In workshop or conferences, suggestions to group members are tactful and prompt, but could benefit from more attentive reading and/or specific detail when giving comments.

### **D**

Weak participation demonstrates inconsistent written and verbal work. The student may be late to class, unprepared for class, and may contribute infrequently or unproductively to classroom discussions or small group workshops. Reading and writing assignments are not turned in or are insufficient. In workshops or conferences, suggestions to group members may be missing, disrespectful, or far too brief and general to be of help.

### **F**

Unacceptable participation shows ineffectual written and verbal work. The student may be excessively late to class, regularly unprepared, and not able to contribute to classroom discussions or small group workshops. This student may be disruptive in class. Reading and writing assignments are regularly not turned in or are insufficient. In workshops or conferences, the student has a pattern of missing, being completely unprepared, or being disruptive.