CRWR 210: Intro to Fiction
Autumn 2017

Instructor: Pia Baur
Class: Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30-1:50, NAC 103
Email: pia.baur@umontana.edu
Office Hours: Corbin 349; Tuesdays 2-4:00pm

Texts
- *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life* by Natalie Goldberg (optional)
- Other supplemental texts to be distributed by the instructor through email and/or in class

Other Materials
- Notebook and Pen

Overview

*Do I dare disturb the universe?*
- T.S. Eliot

Like J. Alfred Prufrock, we are here to ask big questions and part of this class is uncovering those questions. How do we transcribe life into stories? How do we breathe life into stories? What makes stories compelling? There are millions of questions you can consider when thinking about fiction. In this class, we’ll study the elements of fiction and read the work of other writers while exploring our own minds and finding wells of creativity. The class is based on the belief that:

1. Your voice matters.
2. You have important things to write about and share.

*What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere, it hides a well.*
- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Never feed yourself the idea that your mind is an uninteresting place. Vibrant images inhabit your mind in unexpected places. Approach this class with the belief that you can write. Everyone has a unique suitcase of ideas they’ve carried around with them. As we progress throughout the semester, we’ll learn to parse out our ideas and turn them into resonating works of fiction.
Prescribed Course Outcomes
This course, Introduction to Fiction, is designed to challenge you to learn about the craft of fiction writing, primarily within the format of short stories. During the semester you’ll:

- acquire foundation skills in reading, discussing, and writing short fiction
- develop an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to fiction
- hone your own craft by practicing the art of writing and revising your own work

As a class, you will also learn to critique the quality of both your and your peers’ work and apply feedback that enables your growth as a writer. Ultimately, you’ll end the semester by turning in a portfolio that includes your original work, created over the course of the semester.

Class Structure
During the first half of the semester, you’ll be reading different works by various authors sourced from many different works of fiction. Generally, each week will focus on one or two cornerstones of fiction writing and the readings, homework, and class activities will be focused on exploring these elements.

The second half of the semester will be structured around class workshops where you will read your peers’ work carefully and learn to give thoughtful feedback and helpful critiques. You will turn in a story to be workshopped which will become the basis of your final portfolio.

Readings and Assignments (“Homework”)
Readings are assigned every Thursday to be completed by the following Tuesday. Assignments of varying length will generally be assigned on Tuesdays to be completed by Thursday. All written work should be typed and double-spaced unless otherwise noted. Responses submitted over email will not be accepted. Late work will not be accepted.

During the first part of the semester, you’ll be reading various short stories posted to the class website. For every story I ask you to read, be sure to make notes on the text and write down “Three Points of Interest” that you noticed about each story or excerpt, related to form, style, or effects of each piece related to craft and authorial intent. There is no minimum length requirement for these responses, but they should be thoughtful and demonstrate that you read the piece. I strongly prefer typed responses but will accept handwritten ones with the caveat that they must be legible.

Workshops
During the second half of the semester you’ll be reading each others’ original work and providing feedback to help you revise your work in preparation for your final portfolio. You have several responsibilities during workshops, including a typed response to your peers’ work as well as a short write-up to turn in to me giving me an overview of your own writing that demonstrates purposeful creative choices you made. More guidance on workshops will be included once we progress to the second half of the semester.
**Attendance Policy**
A general piece of advice regarding this course: remember that you have *chosen* to enroll in this course, meaning you are agreeing to meet the standards expected of this class. Remember that this class meets only 28 times over the course of this semester (in other words, if we had all class meetings back-to-back, it still wouldn’t be enough to fill a drive across the continental U.S.). Therefore, missing a class period has a deep impact. I allow 2 unexcused absences before attendance compromises your grade. By the third absence your grade will be lowered a full letter grade for each additional absence.

I reserve the right to adjust the policy in cases of significant, documented illness or emergency. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to consult with classmates on work you may have missed. If you anticipate having to miss class, notify me as soon as possible.

**In-class Conduct**
I expect all individuals to remain respectful of their fellow students and of all work submitted in class. Our classroom should be a safe space that inspires creativity and enables all students to express themselves without feeling the need for personal censorship. Feel free to share your opinions and disagree in the context a fruitful discussion, but be mindful of offensive speech. No one in our class should feel that they are being personally attacked. Our critical responses should come from a place of compassion and empathy.

Additionally, you must abide by the rules for academic conduct described in the University of Montana 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 Council of Writing Program Administrators describes plagiarism as follows: “plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.” Academic honesty is highly valued in the University community and acts of plagiarism will not be tolerated. Consequences include failing an assignment, failing a course, or even expulsion.

**Final Portfolio**
On the last day of class you will turn in a final portfolio that includes the original short story you wrote for workshop and a thoughtful final revision. You should include a short address to me explaining your work to me, giving context, details you’d like me to pay attention to, and purposeful authorial choices you made.

**Grading**
Students enrolled in CRWR 210 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.
Participation: 30%
Assignments: 30%
Portfolio: 40%

- Participation consists of punctuality, engaging and contributing during class time, general conduct (including enthusiasm!).
- Assignments include Weekly Points of Interest and all work intended to be completed outside the classroom.
- Portfolios will consist of the original piece of fiction you complete and workshop in class along with a short composition about your writing and revision processes (portfolios will be explained in further detail later in the semester).

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.

How to get an “A” in Pia’s Class
- Show up on time with a copy of the readings and written assignments due that day
- Participate. Share your Points of Interest, engage in class discussions and workshops
- Come prepared for workshops
- Contribute insightful comments that demonstrate careful reading of class texts
- Create a portfolio that truly exemplifies the best of your work
- Stay open to feedback
- Keep an open line of communication with me. If you have concerns or questions, I’m always available. Address matters before they become problems.
- Put your phone away. It should be on silent (not vibrate) and out of sight. I ask only eighty minutes of your time away from a screen. **Note: students seen violating this policy must bring cookies for everyone the next class period
## CRWR 210: Week-by-Week**

### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS

**THU 8/31**

**Homework:** Review the class syllabus, Read “The Rules of Writing Practice” by Natalie Goldberg and “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood. Bring 3 POI for Atwood’s story into class for Tuesday.

### WEEK 2: FORM & STRUCTURE

**TUE 9/5**

**Reading Discussions**

**Homework:** Rather than recount what happened to you this summer, consider what you wish your summer had been like. Be radically honest. Mine your imagination and bring that ideal, perfect summer to light. 1-2 pages double-spaced and typed.

**THU 9/7**

**Homework:** Read “Shitty First Drafts” by Anne Lamott. Read “The Moths” by Helena Maria Viramontes. Bring 3 POI for Viramontes’ story into class for Tuesday. Especially consider concrete details you found revealing or compelling.

### WEEK 3: SHOWING VS. TELLING / POWER OF CONCRETE DETAILS

**TUE 9/12**

**Reading Discussions**

**Homework:** Write a description of your routine that morning (or whenever you got up). Include as much detail as possible (1-page double-spaced, typed).

**THU 9/14**

**Homework:** Read “A Different Road” by Elizabeth Strout and “Delicate Edible Birds” by Lauren Groff. Bring 3 POI for each story into class for Tuesday.

### WEEK 4: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

**TUE 9/19**

**Reading Discussions**

**Homework:** Go on dearcoquette.com and find an advice posting that reveals something about the person who submitted it. Print and bring it to class.

**THU 9/21**

**Homework:** Read “Introduction” by J. Robert Lennon and “My Last Attempt to Explain to You What Happened with the Lion Tamer” by Brendan Matthews and “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff. Bring 3 POI for each story into class for Tuesday.

### WEEK 5: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT CONT’D & POV

**TUE 9/26**

**Reading Discussions**

**Homework:** Consider a recent tense or emotionally-wrought conversation you’ve had. Imagine that you are a third party non-entity watching this conversation happen and write about it. Re-create the scene and challenge yourself to bring it to life. You may include a mix
of direct dialogue and summary (1-page double-spaced, typed).

**WEEK 6: SETTING**

**THU 9/28**  
**Point of View**
**Homework:** “The Company of Wolves” by Angela Carter and “This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen” by Tadeusz Borowski

**WEEK 7: BENDING TIME**

**THU 10/5**  
**Homework:** Read “Job History” by Annie Proulx and “Boys” by Rick Moody. Bring 3 POI into class for Tuesday.

**WEEK 8: WORKSHOP GROUP 1**

**THU 10/12**  
**What to expect in workshops.**
**Homework:** Read Group 1’s Short Stories and bring two copies of typed feedback for each story (1 copy for Pia, 1 for the author)

**WEEK 9: WORKSHOP GROUP 2**

**THU 10/19**  
**Homework:** Read Group 2’s Short Stories and bring two copies of typed feedback for each story (1 copy for Pia, 1 for the author)

**WEEK 10: WORKSHOP GROUP 3**

**THU 11/2**  
**Homework:** Read Group 3’s Short Stories and bring two copies of typed feedback for each story (1 copy for Pia, 1 for the author)

**WEEK 11: WORKSHOP GROUP 4**

**THU 11/9**  
**Homework:** Read Group 4’s Short Stories and bring two copies of typed feedback for each story (1 copy for Pia, 1 for the author)

**WEEK 12: WORKSHOP GROUP 5**

**THU 11/16**  
**Homework:** Read “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemmingway and “And So On” by Kiese Laymon.

**WEEK 13: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**TUE 11/21**  
**TBD**
THU 11/23 | NO CLASS

**WEEK 14: REVISION**

| TUE 11/28 | Group Workshops (tentative) |
| THU 11/30 | Group Workshops (tentative) |

**WEEK 15: REVISION CONT’D & READINGS**

| TUE 12/5 | Group Workshops (tentative) |
| THU 12/7 | Share and turn in portfolios |

* This syllabus and weekly schedule are subject to change at any time.

**Further References**

Texts sourced from:

* *Pieces for the Left Hand* by J. Robert Lennon
* *Close Range* by Annie Proulx
* Various issues of *McSweeney’s*
* *The Story and Its Writer* edited by Ann Charters
* *Olive Kittredge* by Elizabeth Strout
* *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* by Angela Carter
* *The Best American Short Stories, 2010* edited by Richard Russo
* *Hellgoing* by Lynn Coady
* *Delicate Edible Birds and Other Stories* by Lauren Groff

**Recommended Reading**

* *What It Is* by Lynda Barry
* *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction* by Charles Baxter
* *Wild Mind* by Natalie Goldberg