CRWR 210A Section 01

Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction

Fall 2015

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Office Hours: TBD
Classroom: LA 303
Class Meeting Time: Tuesday, Thursday 3:40-5:00

About the course:

Like most people, you probably don’t know how to read. It’s a bold assertion. Still, most people can’t read, not really. That is, most people can’t read at the level great fiction often requires. Or, to put it another way: it is perfectly acceptable to state outright and in public, “I’m bad at math.” Consider saying, “I can’t read.”

The good news is we’re going to learn how to read—this is barely a sixteen-week course, so let’s be reasonable. First, we’ll read. We’ll read, and with short, discretionary exercises, imitations and prompts, we’ll learn how to read fiction.

Think of the course this way: Read (listen), write (listen), (listen) rewrite. Always be listening. Or, Read and admire, write and suffer, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite. Always be revising.

Course Objectives:

CRWR 210 is an introductory fiction writing class. We will focus on understanding the craft of fiction writing and the components required for a successful short story. We will explore methods for developing plot, form, structure, and essential elements such as believable, interesting characters, dialogue, scenes and consistent point-of-view. Initial writings will include character sketches, dialogue exercises, and description. The focus of this class will be on realist literary fiction, which we will be reading and writing primarily.

In the second part of the semester we will continue to read published texts, but the primary focus of the class will shift to your own work. You will be responsible for carefully and thoughtfully considering the work of your peers and responding both through classroom discussion (workshop) and written comments. The workshop is a place to discover feedback from readers in a formal way, but also a place to learn to give productive feedback so that you can turn that lens on your own work with equal thoughtfulness and precision. The comments you write to your classmates might be just as useful to your own work. To learn to analyze the many working parts of a short story is to discover how to write one yourself. By Thanksgiving, all students will have been workshoped, and in this class students are only workshoped the one time. Our month of September’s craft, to generate new material. October, November’s, workshop, December’s revision.
Course Texts:
- Selected contemporary short stories
- Other supplemental readings
- ITunes; The New Yorker Fiction Podcast

Materials:
Subscribe to The New Yorker Fiction Podcast. It’s free. You’ll need Itunes, which is also free. Keep a journal, folder, or three-ring binder. Compile all in-class and out-of-class assignments. We will mostly deal in photocopies and handouts. Be responsible for keeping track of all papers and materials distributed during class, I expect you to bring hard copies of your written exercises and assignments to class. You will also be responsible for photocopying and distributing a copy of your workshop story to each of your classmates the class before you’re to be workshopped.

Course Requirements:
Writing Assignments and Exercises:
Writing assignments and exercises will be given to you almost every week over the course of the semester. Though we may not examine all of your work in class, you are still required to perform and submit all assignments on time.

Working Journal:
You should keep one. Keep a journal of all the things that catch your eye, bits of conversation that intrigue you. Learn to be a good eavesdropper and record your efforts here. Pay attention to how people carry themselves, what they wear, their language, their partners. Sketch things, take notes, start stories and end them. Write down how you feel, how others close to you feel. How strangers might feel. Learn to pay attention to everything.

Readings and Responses:
Of course, you are responsible for doing the assigned reading for each class. Occasionally you might 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.

Written Comments:
Provide at least 300 words of typed comments (single-spaced) and feedback to the students being workshopped in each class in the form of a letter to the writer. These do not necessarily need to be extensive, but you must make some kind of comments on the story itself and write a brief note to the author. Please bring two copies of your feedback – one for the writer, and one to turn in to me. Make line edits, give them responses in the margins, and write a summary of your ideas and feedback for the story in that typed page.

Stories:
You will draft and revise one work of fiction over the course of this semester.
Page length: 12 pages total.
Grading Criteria:
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.

- **40%** of your grade is based on active participation. Show up prepared, comment on readings and the work of your peers, and contribute to the community of the classroom.
- **30%** of your grade is based on successful completion of all writing assignments. Turn these exercises in 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 fiction. Turn in your drafts on time, and revise at least one stories for your final portfolio.

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. Missing more than two (2) days of class will count against your grade in this class (3rd absence drops a letter grade, 4th drops again, 5th is an automatic failure of the course). Personal situations and required university events may arise that, on a rare occasion, make it impossible for you to be in class. However, remember that’s why a few absences are allowed – please reserve those for emergencies.

Class Policies:
- **Workshops:** *If your story is to be workshopped you will be expected to provide hard copies to everyone in the class period before you’re to be workshopped.* Beginning Week Five, Thursday will function as our “submit for workshop” day. Stories submitted for workshop on Thursday will then be workshopped the following Tuesday. Bring copies of your story for everyone, yourself, and me. If you have not read a workshop story, do not read it in class. 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 a 12-point font and 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 office hours – I am more than happy to talk, to answer questions, to discuss your writing, to agonize, to commiserate. If you cannot make it to office hours, feel free to send me an email and/or schedule an alternate time to meet.
- **Late Work:** Will not be accepted or given credit.

Final portfolio:
Your final for this course will be a portfolio of full revisions. You will turn in a final one page reflective piece discussing how your revisions went, and why you made the changes that you did.

Workshop Etiquette:
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 towards each other personally and towards 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.

**Academic Conduct:**
All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. 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

**Students with disabilities:**
Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me after class or in my office hours, and please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

*This syllabus is subject to change.*

**Genre, Death, and Laptops, What We’re Banning**
- Genre Fiction; Speculative Fiction
- Death\(^1\)
- Also laptops. No laptops.

**Stories, What We’re Reading**
1. James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”
2. Richard Bausch, “All the Way in Flagstaff, Arizona”
4. Raymond Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,”
   - “Chef’s House,” “Why Don’t You Dance?” “Cathedral”
5. John Cheever, “Goodbye, My Brother,” “Reunion”
8. Ernest Hemingway, “Snows of Kilimanjaro,” “Indian Camp”
9. Amy Hempel, “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried”
11. Lorrie Moore, “You’re Ugly, Too”
12. Flannery O’ Connor, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” “Good Country People”
15. Joy Williams, “The Farm”
Stories, What We’re Listening To

1. The New Yorker Fiction Podcast
   a. Richard Ford reads John Cheever, “Reunion”
   b. Sam Lipsyte reads Thomas McGuane, “Cowboy”
   d. Matthew Klam reads Charles D’Ambrosio, “The Point”
   e. T. Coraghessan Boyle reads Tobias Wolff, “Bullet in the Brain”
   f. ZZ Packer reads Stuart Dybek, “Paper Lanterns”
   g. Lorrie Moore reads Julie Hayden, “Day Old Baby Rats”

2. The New Yorker online
   a. Kevin Canty reads, “Story with Bird”

3. First Draft from Aspen Public Radio

And Workshop, How This is Going to Work

Summarize the story. If you have an hour, plug yourself into the World Wide Web and find Charles Baxter’s interview from the University of Minnesota English Department. Hear his approach to workshop.

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1 You are hereby forbidden to allow anyone to die in the course of the story’s present action. Death is cheap. It’s manipulative. People can have already died, sure, but death cannot be the climax of your story.