

## ENWR 200: Introduction to Creative Writing

Instructor: Dr. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett  
Class information: DI 113, T Th 1-2:15  
Fall 2009

E-mail: [susan@susansw.com](mailto:susan@susansw.com)  
Office: Dickson Hall 316  
Office hours: T 4-5:30, Th afternoon by appt.

### COURSE POLICY STATEMENT

#### Course Description

This course is designed to teach students the basic tools for writing creatively in several genres. Through reading and practice, we'll begin by exploring aspects of writing craft that verse and prose share—image, voice, character, story. We'll then tackle each genre specifically, honing the raw material generated from exercises into a non-fiction essay, a scene or short story, and a poem. We will also practice how to give and receive writing criticism through workshops. As we progress, we'll discuss approaches to revision, and you will complete a final portfolio that includes your writing journal and revised projects in each genre. In emphasizing practice over personal expression, this course aims to help students find their prose and poetry *through* the writing process rather than as a result of it. Your attendance and participation are critical to your success in this class. Prerequisites: ENWR 106 or HONP 101.

#### Required Texts and Materials

*Imaginative Writing*, Second Edition, Janet Burroway  
A journal or notebook used solely for this class

#### Grading

40% Writing journal  
40% Final portfolio  
15% Participation and attendance  
5% Revisions and workshop assignments

#### Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is defined by the university as “any attempt by a student to submit as his/her own work that which has not be completed by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment, i.e., plagiarism” (please view the entire policy at <http://www.montclair.edu/deanstudents/regulations1.html>). This can include “double-dipping,” or using one piece of writing to satisfy the requirements of more than one course. Since our focus in this course is literary production, work you turn in for this class is to be new, original writing created specifically for this workshop (except in the case of revision exercises). Please ask if you have any questions about this policy.

#### Workshop Etiquette

The purpose of our workshops is not to “fix” stories and poems but rather to help the author discover his or her piece of writing through process. In this regard, our comments in workshop should aim toward the neutral, descriptive, and interrogative—in the words of Janet Burroway, not *What I like* but *What this piece is like*. Only then can we critique whether or not the writing is successful in what it wants to achieve and offer constructive criticism to guide the piece in that direction.

As guides, our goal should be to find a balance in the tenor of our comments; too much praise can be just as poisonous as too much criticism. Finding this balance is the most difficult part of a workshop, but it also can be the most rewarding.

As authors, it is our responsibility to not just to listen to but to *hear* how our readers describe our writing in a non-defensive way. This openness is part of the writing process, and entertaining the suggestions of others—even as they may seem to counter our own senses—may be just the thing that gives the writing flight.

In order to encourage this openness, we will for the most part follow the gag rule in workshop: While a piece of writing is being discussed in class, the author should remain silent. Of course, in all things you are expected to behave with maturity and respect for others. If you exhibit behavior that is threatening or that disrupts the learning experience, disciplinary action will be sought according to university policy.

### **The Logistics of Responding to Peer Writing**

When we begin workshoping, you will be expected to turn in and retrieve each other's stories, poems, and essays via BlackBoard (instruction on this process will happen later in the semester). You should print these out and before arriving to each workshop, you will write commentary on your peers' hard copies and return your written commentary to them in workshop. Commentary in the neighborhood of 2-5 sentences is appropriate.

### **Deadlines, Attendance, and Participation**

Workshop drafts, as all assignments, **are due at class time on the date posted** (not that afternoon or evening). Because assignment deadlines are posted with ample advance notice, extensions for assignments will not be granted. If you miss a due date for a piece of writing to be workshoped, you will receive no credit for your participation that week and you may, at the discretion of the instructor, miss your turn at workshop. **Please do not e-mail your writing to the instructor or the entire class after it is due.** This not only creates headaches for each of your class members, it is disrespectful and taxes your classmates' time and resources.

**If you are absent on a day when an assignment is due, you are still responsible for meeting that deadline.** If non-workshop assignments are due (i.e., a paper or review) and you must be absent, you may e-mail it to the instructor. You are also responsible for picking up any handouts that you missed before our next class meets. These will be available in a box outside my office (Dickson Hall 316) and on BlackBoard.

Attendance and participation are required in this course, and both will affect your grade. Missing **more than four classes** constitutes missing a significant part of the course and will affect your final grade.

### **E-mail and BlackBoard**

We will, on occasion, communicate via e-mail during the semester. For this reason, students are required to have a working e-mail address that they check regularly. For the most part, this communication will announce campus activities related to our course topic. However, in the event that last-minute changes to our class schedule have to be made, these changes will be communicated via e-mail. All class assignments, schedules, etc. will be posted on BlackBoard should you ever need another copy.

### **Final Portfolios**

**Please save all drafts of your writing** for this class, and take care not to lose your writing journal. They will determine the vast majority of your grade and you will be asked to include them in your final portfolio.

### **Information for Students with Disabilities**

Both the university and I are committed to keeping this classroom and course material accessible. If you have a learning or physical disability, please inform me at the beginning of the course either after class or in office hours. In the rare case where a class assignment is not accessible, an alternative assignment requiring the exercise of equal skill and knowledge can be arranged.

## ENWR 200: Introduction to Creative Writing

Instructor: Dr. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett  
Class information: DI 113, T Th 1-2:15  
Fall 2009

E-mail: [susan@susansw.com](mailto:susan@susansw.com)  
Office: Dickson Hall 316  
Office hours: T 4-5:30, Th afternoon by appt.

### SYLLABUS (subject to change)

#### WEEK 1: Intro

Th 9/3            Class intro and discussion of policies  
                    Handouts: "Song" and "Popular Mechanics"

#### WEEK 2: The Writing Practice

T 9/8            Read *Invitation to the Reader* (xxi-xxvii)  
                    Discussion of "Song" and "Popular Mechanics"  
                    Handouts: Self-Portraits (Graham and Somers-Willett)  
Th 9/10        Discussion of Graham and Somers-Willett Self-Portraits  
                    Self-Portrait writing exercise

**\*\*\* HOMEWORK NOTE: Beginning with Week 3, you will be graded on your completion at home of at least two writing exercises per chapter in your journals.** This is in addition to any writing exercises we complete in class. Please date and label your entries (e.g.: "Try This 3.4, pg. 87, 9/29/09"). Remember not to fall behind, as you will be asked to turn in your journal periodically to check on your progress. \*\*\*

#### WEEK 3: Image

T 9/15            Read Ch.1 *Image* (3-15)  
Th 9/17        Read Dillard, "Water Bug"; Gordimer, "Diamond Mine"; Collins, "Snow Day";  
                    Komunyakaa, "Facing It"

#### WEEK 4: Voice

T 9/22            Read Ch. 2 *Voice* (36-50)  
Th 9/24        Read Walker, "Beauty;" Crawford, "Ginko Tree;" Trowbridge, "Kong Looks Back;"  
                    Hamby, "Language of Bees"

#### WEEK 5: Character

T 9/29            Read Ch. 3 *Character* (79-93)  
Th 10/1        Read Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies;" Oles, "Stonecarver;" Ginsberg, "To Aunt Rose;" Jennings "One Flesh"

#### WEEK 6: Story

T 10/6            Read Ch. 5 *Story* (163-174)  
Th 10/8        Read Butler "Missing;" Hass, "A Story about the Body;" Goldbarth, "Columbine;"  
                    Voigt, "Short Story;" Lee, "The Hammock"

**WEEK 7: Revision**

- T 10/13 Read Ch. 6 *Development and Revision* (207-222)  
**Hand in a typed revision of a scene (up to 3 pages) or poem using one or more techniques outlined in today's reading.**
- Th 10/15 Read "Ring of Time" (16-20) and "The Hawk in the Rain" (26-27)  
 Model Workshop

**WEEK 8: Non-Fiction**

- T 10/20 Read Ch. 7 *Creative Nonfiction* (237-246)
- Th 10/22 **Non-fiction essays (4-6 pages) due**  
 Read Atwood, "The Female Body"; Pemberton, "Do He Have Your Number, Mr. Jeffrey?"; Selzer, "The Knife"

**WEEK 9: Non-Fiction Workshops**

- T 10/27 Workshop
- Th 10/29 Workshop

**WEEK 10: Fiction**

- Tu 11/3 Read Ch. 8 *Fiction* (273-284)
- Th 11/5 **NO CLASS**

**WEEK 11: Fiction & Workshop**

- T 11/10 **Fictional Scene/Story due (4-6 pages)**  
 Read Baxter, "Snow;" Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," Carlson, "Bigfoot Stole My Wife"
- Th 11/12 Workshop

**WEEK 12: Fiction Workshop/Poetry**

- T 11/17 Workshop
- Th 11/19 Read Ch. 9 Poetry (309-326)

**WEEK 13: Poetry**

- T 11/24 **Poems due**  
 Read Plath, "Stillborn," Kowitz, "The Grammar Lesson;" Wilbur, "The Pardon," Olds, "Language of the Brag;" Berryman, "Dream Song 14"
- Th 11/26 **NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Holiday**

**WEEK 14: Poetry Workshops**

- T 12/1 Workshop
- Th 12/3 Workshop

**WEEK 15: Closing Sessions**

- T 12/8 Peer review of portfolios
- Th 12/10 **Portfolios and Journals due**  
 Course evaluation and course wrap-up