

ENWR 200: Introduction to Creative Writing

Instructor: Dr. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett

E-mail: susan@susansw.com

Class information: UN 3011, MTWTh 12:30-3:55

Office: Dickson Hall 316

Summer 2010

Office hours: By appt. before/after class

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 also tackle each genre specifically, honing the raw material generated from exercises into a poem, a dialogue, and a scene. 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 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 composition notebook used solely for this class

Grading

40% Writing journal

40% Final portfolio

20% Participation and attendance

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.

Deadlines, Attendance, and Participation

Workshop drafts, as all assignments, **are due at class time on the date posted** (not that evening). Please be aware that you may run into printing problems if you wait until the last minute. 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 workshopped, you will receive no credit for your participation that week and you may, at the discretion of the instructor, miss your turn at workshop.

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 (if available in electronic format).

Attendance and participation are required in this course, and both will affect your grade. Because of the intensive nature of a summer course, and because we are already losing a class due to the Memorial Day holiday, **anything less than 100% attendance will result in a grade deduction.**

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.

Grading Policies

Summer 2010

Dr. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett

The purpose of having a full range of grades (A through F) is to represent true levels of academic achievement. Although I'm sure everyone would like to make As or Bs on their class assignments, chances are that not everyone will receive them.

When receiving graded assignments, it may help to keep in mind these descriptions of different levels of student achievement:

- F – Represents failure (or no credit) and means that work was either completed at a level not worthy of credit, or not completed at all.
- D – Achievement worthy of credit, but which does not meet assignment/course requirements fully.
- C – Achievement that meets the assignment/course requirements in every respect and shows adequate understanding and application of the course material.
- B – Achievement *significantly above* the level necessary to meet assignment/course requirements. Such work demonstrates good application of instructional material and makes some successful and original connections beyond it.
- A – achievement that is *outstanding and unique* relative to the assignment/course requirements. Such work demonstrates clear and accurate independent thought and goes well beyond the application of instructional material to make new scholarly or creative connections and understandings. The student's voice is polished and clearly original.

Please remember that a "C" is not a bad grade, merely an average one; that Bs represent good, above-average work; and As represent excellent work that achieves the very best in undergraduate thinking and writing. Also remember that in paper-writing assignments, length is independent of quality; a long paper does not necessarily indicate a good paper.

I will occasionally retain copies of student writing to serve as samples in future semesters or for a teaching portfolio. Please be assured that if I choose your paper as a sample, I will remove any identifying information from it and use it for instructional or administrative purposes only. If you prefer that your writing not be used for this purpose, please let me know.

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SYLLABUS (subject to change)

Week 1

Introduction to the Writing Practice

M 5/17 Class intro and discussion of policies
Handouts & discussion: "Song" and "Popular Mechanics"; Graham and Somers-Willett
Self-Portraits
Self-Portrait writing exercise
HW: Tomorrow's reading

Image & Metaphor

T 5/18 Read *Invitation to the Reader* (xxi-xxvii), Ch.1 *Image* (3-15) and Dillard, "Water Bug" (15-16); Gordimer, "Diamond Mine" (20-26); Collins, "Snow Day" (27-28); Komunyakaa, "Facing It" (28-29)
In class: Image and metaphor exercises
HW: Tomorrow's reading and one "Try This" exercise of your choice from Chapter 1

Poetry

W 5/19 Read Ch. 9 *Poetry* (309-326) and Plath, "Stillborn" (326); Kowit, "The Grammar Lesson" (326-7); Wilbur, "The Pardon" (330-1); Olds, "Language of the Brag" (331-2); Berryman, "Dream Song 14" (332-3)
Replacement poem exercise
HW: Tomorrow's reading and a poem to hand in

Character

Th 5/20 **Poem Due**; signup for workshops
Read Ch. 3 *Character* (79-93) and Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies" (100-117); Oles, "Stonecarver" (118); Ginsberg, "To Aunt Rose" (119); Jennings "One Flesh" (120); Gallaher, "Brother" (122-128)
HW: Monday's reading and a 3-4 page dialogue in which a secret is revealed

Week 2

Fiction

M 5/24 **Dialogue Due**; Poems returned, discussion of work
Read Ch. 8 *Fiction* (273-284) and Baxter, "Snow" (284-293); Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (296-299); Carlson, "Bigfoot Stole My Wife" (300-303)
Assignment: Fictional Scene
HW: Tomorrow's reading and one "Try This" exercise of your choice from Chapter 8

Voice

T 5/25 Read Ch. 2 *Voice* (36-50) and Walker, "Beauty" (50-56); Trowbridge, "Kong Looks Back" (70); Hamby, "Language of Bees" (72-73)
Persona exercise
HW: Tomorrow's reading and one "Try This" exercise of your choice from Chapter 2

Story

W 5/26 Read Ch. 5 *Story* (163-174) Read Butler "Missing" (176-182); Hass, "A Story about the Body" (191); Goldbarth, "Columbine" (192-193); Lee, "The Hammock" (195-6)
Flash Fiction exercise
Handout: "Popular Mechanics" in revision
HW: Tomorrow's reading and a 3-5 page scene or story

Revision

Th 5/27 **Scene due; Workshop group 1 copies due**
Read Ch. 6 Development and Revision (207-222), White, "Ring of Time" (16-20) and Hughes, "The Hawk in the Rain" (26-27), handout "Popular Mechanics" in revision
Final Portfolio & self-evaluation assigned
HW: Read & comment on Workshop group 1

Week 3

Memorial Day Holiday

M 5/31 NO CLASS

Workshop-Group 1

T 6/2 **Journals Due; Workshop Group 2 copies due**
Workshop Group 1 (scenes)
HW: Read & comment on Workshop group 2; Work on revisions

Workshop-Group 2

W 6/3 **Workshop Group 3 copies due**
Workshop Group 2
HW: Read & comment on Workshop group 3; Work on revisions

Workshop-Group 3

Th 6/4 Workshop Group 3
HW: Final Portfolios

Final Portfolios & self-evaluations due Friday 6/5 at Noon in my office, Dickson 316