San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Literature
ENGL 71, Intro to Creative Writing
Spring 2015

Instructor: Nick Taylor
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Office Hours: Mon/Weds 1:30pm - 3:30pm and by appointment.
Class Days/Time: Mon/Weds 12:00pm - 1:15pm
Classroom: BBC 121

Course Description
Introduction to Creative Writing (English 71) is a 3-unit lower-division course offered in accordance with the University’s General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities & the Arts (Area C2).

In this course we will read, discuss, and write poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. The course will be taught using a combination of discussion and writing workshops. In the discussion, published works of creative writing will be closely read and analyzed. In the writing workshops, creative work by class members will be analyzed and critiqued for revision.

Student Learning Objectives
SLO 1 - Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
SLO 3 - Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.

Required Texts
- Reed Magazine, Volume 67 (2014 edition). Reed is the campus literary journal and will be available to purchase in class from a Reed staff member.

Writing Assignments
[SLO #3]

Poetry
- A self-portrait poem
- A poem containing sensory images and concrete details
- A list poem
- A conceit (metaphor) poem
- A villanelle

Fiction
- Character sketch (2pp)
- Scene (2-4pp)
• Short story (4-10pp)

**Creative Nonfiction**
• Memoir (2-4pp)
• Humor or Work essay (2-4pp)
• Travel essay (2-4pp)

**Final Portfolio**
• Revised versions of all writing assignments
• Responses to attendance at two Bay Area literary readings

**Assignment Format**
All material handed in (except the journal/notebook) should be **typed and double-spaced with page numbers**. Multi-page assignments must be **stapled**. Your name, the assignment title, and the date should be included at the top of the first page.

**Attending Readings / Lectures**
Besides reading published work, you are required to attend **two readings** by poets and/or prose writers presented on the SJSU campus or elsewhere. The Bay Area is one of the world's great literary regions, where seven days a week one can attend a reading by a renowned writer at a bookstore, college, community center, or library. Readings are listed in the Sunday editions of the *San Jose Mercury News* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and in *Metro* weekly. After attending each reading, you will write a brief response (1-2pp) to include in your final portfolio. You may respond to any aspect of the reading: the speaker, the venue, the material performed, the Q&A with the audience, etc.

Here are some of the readings being offered on campus this semester:

**Jan 29, 6pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center)** – MFA Program Open House featuring readings by SJSU Creative Writing Faculty, Lurie Visiting Writer Andrew Lam, and former California Poet Laureate Al Young.

**Feb. 4, 7pm, MLK 225/229** - Bay Area Doubleheader with bestselling novelist and short-story writer Michelle Richmond (*Golden State, The Year of Fog*) and award-winning poet Randall Mann (*Straight Razor, Breakfast with Thom Gunn*).

**Feb. 25, 7pm, MLK 225/229** - Literary Spouse Tag Team with fiction writer and memoirist Bich Minh Nguyen (*Stealing Buddha’s Dinner, Short Girls*) and novelist Porter Shreve (*The End of the Book, When the White House Was Ours*).

**March 4, 7:00pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center)** - Former Steinbeck Fellow Charles McLeod reads from his new collection of short stories, *Settlers of Unassigned Lands*.

**March 18, 7pm, MLK 255** - Poet, essayist, fiction writer and translator Kazim Ali. Presented by Persian Studies, Middle East Studies, Dept. of English and Comparative Literature, and the CLA.

**April 2, 7pm, MLK 225/229** - 2015 Lurie Distinguished Visiting Author Andrew Lam. Presented by the Creative Writing Program, the Dept. of English and Comparative Literature, and the CLA.
April 7, 7pm, MLK 225/229 - Santa Clara County Poet Laureate David Perez (*Love in a Time of Robot Apocalypse*).

April 15, 7:00pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center) - 2014-2015 Steinbeck Fellows Cara Bayles, Yalitza Ferreras, and Reese Okyong Kwon, read from work in progress.

April 22, 7pm, MLK 225/229 - The 2015 Martha Heasley Cox Lecture with novelist Susan Choi (*American Woman, My Education, A Person of Interest*).

April 23, 1pm, MLK 225/229 - Susan Choi in Conversation with CLA Director Andrew Altschul.

May 4, 6:00pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center)

**Extra Credit Assignments**
For extra credit you can attend at up to two more fiction readings and write responses to include in your final portfolio.

**Class Workshop Procedures**
For each unit (poetry, fiction, nonfiction) I will divide the class into four groups of approximately six students each. Your workshop group will consist of different students each unit, so you will get to read work by all of your classmates. Every time you turn in a piece of writing, you will bring enough copies for everyone in your workshop group and your teacher and yourself (eight copies, usually). We will critique the pieces at home (writing directly on the manuscripts) and discuss them in workshop groups during the following class period. At the end of the discussion, you will get to keep the seven or so marked-up copies of your work.

So what do you comment on? You have two responsibilities. The first is to indicate what you got out of the story, poem, or essay. What's your interpretation of it? If the piece were in the textbook, what would you say about it? This helps the writer understand what came across and what didn't. The second responsibility is to suggest avenues for improvement. How can the writer make this story better? Often this requires putting yourself in the writer's shoes. Remember that you can help a fellow writer with thoughtful commentary even if you would not have chosen the same topic or style in your own work.

In a workshop, writers must feel safe sharing their work with the group. Please keep your critiques confined to the work, not the author. Hostile, threatening, or personal criticism will not be tolerated.

**Grading**
Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered during the workshops and class discussions.

Creative writing, though subject to the instructor's individual subjectivity, can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective
use of grammar, syntax, rhythm; also meter, rhyme, and other elements of poetic style and form.

8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

- Poetry 20%
- Non-fiction 20%
- Fiction 20%
- Final Portfolio (incl. literary events) 20%
- Class participation (incl. reading quizzes) 20%

Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT GRADING STATEMENT: In English Department courses, instructors comment on and grade the quality of writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All your writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

Schedule and Assignments

This class meets every Monday and Wednesday from 12:00PM to 1:15PM, starting on Monday, January 26. The last class is Wednesday, May 13. Class will not be held on March 23 or 25 (SJSU Spring Recess).

All reading assignments are in Imaginative Writing unless otherwise indicated.

Mon, Jan 26

Topic
Introduction; still write

Wed, Jan 28

Topic
Self portrait poems

Reading Due
Adam Zagajewski, “Self Portrait” (handout)
Linda Pastan, “Self Portrait” (handout)
Yusef Komunyaka, “Facing It” (42)

Mon, Feb 2

Topic
More on self portrait poems

Reading Due
Elizabeth Jennings, “One Flesh” (129)
Li-Young Lee, “The Hammock” (189)
Suzanne O’Connell, “A History of Breasts” (Reed, 144)

**Writing Due**
Self portrait poem

**Wed, Feb 4**

**Topic**
Workshop self portrait poems; sensory images and concrete details

**Reading Due**
“The Workshop” (208)
Sherman Alexie, “At Navajo Monument Valley Tribal School” (154)
Robert Hass, “A Story About the Body” (187)
Meredith Wise, “Santa Clara” (Reed, 141)

**Mon, Feb 9**

**Topic**
More on imagery

**Reading Due**
Holly Day, “Spelunker” (Reed, 151)
Jonathan Travelstead, “Prayer of the Halligan Tool” (Reed, 154)
Jonathan Travelstead, “Prayer of the Flat Head Axe” (Reed, 155)

**Writing Due**
Imagery poem

**Wed, Feb 11**

**Topic**
Workshop imagery poem; using lists

**Reading Due**
Billy Collins, “Snow Day” (41)
Barbara Hamby, “Ode to American English” (86)

**Mon, Feb 16**

**Topic**
More on list or catalogue poems

**Reading Due**
Sharon Olds, “The Language of the Brag” (324)
Suzanne Ondrus, “For You, Who Have No Desire for Me” (Reed, 139)

**Writing Due**
List poem
Wed, Feb 18

*Topic*
Workshop list poem; conceit poems

*Reading Due*
“Metaphor, Cliché, and Conceit” (308)
Sylvia Plath, “Stillborn” (319)

Mon, Feb 23

*Topic*
Conceit or “metaphor” poems

*Reading Due*
Tony Hoagland, “There Is No Word” (320)
Michelle Bonczek, “Corpus Christi Cathedral, Krakow” (*Reed*, 148)

*Writing Due*
Conceit poem

Wed, Feb 25

*Topic*
Workshop conceit poem; villanelle

*Reading Due*
Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art” (213)
Steve Kowit, “The Grammar Lesson” (320)

Mon, Mar 2

*Topic*
FICTION UNIT BEGINS; character; listen to Russell Banks, “Sarah Cole, A Type of Love Story”

*Writing Due*
Villanelle

Wed, Mar 4

*Topic*
Workshop villanelle; more on character

*Reading Due*
“Character (Intro)” and “Character As Desire” (95-96)
Jorge Luis Borges, “The Book of Sand” (82)
Edith Pearlman, “Self-Reliance” (285)

Mon, Mar 9

*Topic*
More on character
Reading Due
Tobias Wolff, “Bullet in the Brain” (34)
Philip Jason, “A Blow to the Head” (Reed, 14)

Writing Due
Character sketch

Wed, Mar 11

Topic
Workshop character sketch; conflict

Reading Due
George Saunders, “Victory Lap” (69)

Mon, Mar 16

Topic
More on conflict

Reading Due
Ron Carlson, “Bigfoot Stole My Wife” (290)
Scott Blackwood, “One of Us Is Hidden Away” (181)

Writing Due
Scene

Wed, Mar 18

Topic
Workshop scene; point of view

Reading Due
Jamaica Kincaid, “Girl” (38)
Frank Scozzari, “Too Old for War” (Reed, 33)

Mon, Mar 23
No Class – SJSU Spring Recess

Wed, Mar 25
No Class – SJSU Spring Recess

Mon, Mar 30

Topic
Setting

Reading Due
Michael Caleb Tasker, “Silly Boy” (Reed, 43)
Ursula K. LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (280)
Wed, Apr 1

**Topic**
NONFICTION UNIT BEGINS; listen to David Sedaris, “Santaland Diaries”

**Writing Due**
Short story

Mon, Apr 6

**Topic**
Workshop short story

Wed, Apr 8

**Topic**
Memoir

**Reading Due**
“Memoir and the Personal Essay” (227)
Steven Suiter, “When I Was a Ghost” (*Reed*, 213)
Aleksandar Hemon, “The Book of My Life” (109)
Patricia Hampl, “Red Sky in the Morning” (176)

Mon, Apr 13

**Topic**
More on memoir

**Reading Due**
Alice Walker, “Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self” (62)
Janice Westerling, “Going Home” (175)

Wed, Apr 15

**Topic**
Humorous essay

**Reading Due**
David Sedaris, “Standing By” (29)

**Writing Due**
Memoir

Mon, Apr 20

**Topic**
Workshop memoir; more on humor

**Reading Due**
Margaret Atwood, “The Female Body” (245)
Joseph Eastburn, “The Other ‘F’ Word” (*Reed*, 206)
Wed, Apr 22

**Topic**
Writing about work

**Reading Due**
Benjamin Percy, “Me vs Animals” (112)
Gayle Pemberton, “Do He Have Your Number, Mr. Jeffrey?” (237)

Mon, Apr 27

**Topic**
Hybrid nonfiction forms

**Reading Due**
Cara Spangler, “Split Lives” (*Reed*, 162)

**Writing Due**
Humor or Work essay

Wed, Apr 29

**Topic**
Workshop humor/work essay; travel writing

**Reading Due**
Casey Mock, “Stalinwood Welcomes You!” (*Reed*, 185)
Mark Lewandowski, “On Littering” (*Reed*, 209)

Mon, May 4

**Topic**
More on travel

**Reading Due**
Annie Dillard, from “Heaven and Earth in Jest” (28)
Joan Didion, “At the Dam” (148)
Jan McCutcheon, “A Good Place to Leave” (*Reed* 193)

Wed, May 6

**Topic**
Revision

**Reading Due**
“Revision” (203)
“Editing” (207)

**Writing Due**
Travel essay
Mon, May 11

**Topic**
Workshop travel essay

Wed, May 13

**Topic**
Submitting work for publication

**Writing Due**
Final portfolio

**Academic Honesty**
Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy, requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The Policy on academic integrity can be found at: http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/.

**Avoiding Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of somebody else’s words or ideas and is considered an instance of academic dishonesty that instructors must report. You commit plagiarism by:

- buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper (or story)
- hiring someone to write a paper (or story)
- building on someone’s ideas without providing a citation
- copying from another source or using a source too closely when paraphrasing

In other words, submit only your own work.

**Peer Connections**
Peer Connections is an on-campus center that provides peer tutoring for San José State University students. They offer assistance with writing, and if you feel you need intensive help beyond what I can provide during office hours, please request a writing tutor. Peer Connections has two locations on SJSU’s main campus: in the Student Services Center (SSC) 600, on the corner of 10th and San Fernando (inside the 10th Street parking garage building), and in the Academic Success Center in Clark Hall, on the first floor next to the Computer Lab.

**Disabilities Policy**
If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the DRC to establish a record of their disability.