

ENGL 241: Graduate Fiction Workshop

Spring, 2015 – Tuesday 7:00-9:45pm
Boccardo Business Center #128

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Office Hours: Tues. 4-5:30 p.m.

Course Description

A graduate-level workshop in fiction writing, designed for MFA students with a primary or secondary focus in Fiction. Intensive workshop experience. Repeatable for credit.

Course Goals

A good workshop benefits the writer in two ways. First, by receiving the careful feedback of a community of writers with varied perspectives and aesthetics, she may start to *see* her work from the outside and begin to *re-vise* her original ideas and strategies. Second, by closely reading the work of the other writers in the group and articulating responses – artistic, emotional, intellectual – the writer hones her own analytic skills and strengthens her instincts about what makes a good story.

Work submitted to a workshop is by definition “in progress,” and the most valuable discussion is one which enables a writer to understand her work more fully. Our discussions will focus on readers’ encounters with a fictional text and understanding of its structure; its technique; its artistic, emotional, and intellectual aims. To the extent that these aspects of an early draft are not yet fully realized, we will introduce various ideas about how to develop them, but we will avoid the “diagnostic workshop,” i.e. a mere listing of what’s wrong with a text, what “isn’t working,” or what individual readers “don’t like.” Instead, I hope you’ll focus on your experience of the text, and make extensive notes about your immediate reactions to what has been written, as well as your understanding of *why* it has been written.

We will also have frequent, far-ranging discussions about why we have chosen to be writers and what we want our work to accomplish. Some of these discussions will emerge from our reading of James Wood’s *How Fiction Works*, others from student manuscripts themselves, still others from our observations of the culture in which we live. At the end of the semester, every student will write a personal essay describing his or her evolving thoughts on such matters.

Required Texts/Readings

- Wood, James. *How Fiction Works*. ISBN 9780312428471
- *Other readings to be provided by the instructor and students.*

Student Learning Objectives [SLO]

1. Improved ability to discuss the structure, technique, and themes of a work of fiction;
2. Significant production of new, original fiction;
3. Improved ability to offer constructive and supportive criticism to other writers;
4. Increased attention to the goals and strategies of revision;
5. Deepened understanding of the profession and culture of working writers.

Requirements and Grading [SLOs]

- Two **original submissions** [1, 2, 4]. Typed, double-spaced, single-sided, and stapled or clipped, turned in at the class meeting prior to your assigned workshop discussion. If you submit a novel excerpt that is not the first chapter(s), please provide a brief (1-page) synopsis that contextualizes the selection and focuses readers on particular issues about which you'd like feedback. Please bring enough copies for all students plus the instructor. *Note: Late or emailed submissions are unacceptable.*

- Careful, thorough **responses** [1, 3, 4] to all submissions, including technical comments on the manuscript itself and a 1-2pp. letter to the writer which addresses global issues. Please bring **two copies** of these letters to the workshop.

- A short (3-4pp.) **self-analytical essay** [3, 4, 5] in which you interrogate your motivations for being a writer and your goals for your work. I am not interested in bromides about the “power of art” or the desire to “express yourself to the world” – I want you to look carefully at yourself, your choices, your ambitions, and your aesthetics and justify your decision to pursue a career as a writer. Due any time after Spring Break.

- **Participation** [1, 3, 4, 5]. A workshop is not a “class,” per se – it is an ongoing discussion that functions best when it draws on a variety of perspectives, reactions, aesthetics, etc. Simply put, your level of energy will determine the success of this group. I expect you to do all assigned readings, participate regularly in discussions, be on time, and miss class only in cases of emergency, acts of God, etc. Disrespectful or aggressive comments have no place in the workshop. Behavior of this kind will not be tolerated.

Grading

I don't grade based on “talent,” only on your dedication to your own work and your commitment to the workshop community. Your submissions equal 60% of your final grade. Your participation in the workshop – including your response letters and your level of engagement in the discussions – equals 25% of your final grade. Your self-critical essay equals 15% of your final grade.

Schedule

Date

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| Jan. 27 | Introduction. Scheduling. Discussion of student submissions. |
| Feb. 3 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Narrating." |
| Feb. 10 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Flaubert and Modern Narrative." |
| Feb. 17 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Flaubert and the Rise of the Flaneur." |
| Feb. 24 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Detail." |
| Mar. 3 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Character." |
| Mar. 10 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "A Brief History of Consciousness." |
| Mar. 17 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Sympathy and Complexity." |
| Mar. 24 | SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS |
| Mar. 31 | CESAR CHAVEZ DAY – NO CLASS |
| Apr. 7 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Language." CLASS BEGINS AT 8:30. |
| Apr. 14 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Dialogue." |
| Apr. 21 | Discussion of student submissions. Read Wood, "Truth, Convention, Realism." |
| Apr. 28 | Discussion of student submissions. |
| May 5 | Discussion of student submissions. |
| May 12 | Discussion of student submissions. Course conclusion. |

Readings

I strongly encourage you to attend literary readings, both on campus and off. Here are some you might consider.

- Feb. 4** – Randall Mann and Michelle Richmond. MLK 225/229. 7pm.
- Feb. 11** – Joyce Carol Oates. Stanford University Cemex Auditorium. 8pm.
- Feb. 25** – Bich Minh Nguyen and Porter Shreve. MLK 225/229. 7pm.
- Mar. 2** – Ellen Bryant Voigt. Stanford University Levinthal Hall. 8pm.
- Mar. 4** – Charles McLeod. Steinbeck Center (MLK 5th Floor). 7pm.
- Mar. 18** – Kazim Ali. MLK 255. 7pm.
- Apr. 2** – Andrew Lam. MLK 225/229. 7pm.
- Apr. 7** – David Perez. MLK 225/229. 7pm.
- Apr. 15** – Steinbeck Fellows Reading. Steinbeck Center (MLK 5th Floor). 7pm.
- Apr. 22** – Susan Choi. MLK 225/229. 7pm.
- Apr. 23** – Susan Choi in Conversation with Andrew Altschul. MLK 225/229. 1pm.
- Apr. 27** – Thomas McGuane. Stanford University Encina Hall. 8pm.
- May 4** – Daniel Arnold. Steinbeck Center (MLK 5th Floor). 6pm.
- May 13** – Geoff Dyer. Stanford University Levinthal Hall. 6:30pm.

Course Policies

- Submissions *must* be turned in on the date assigned. Please do not ask for extensions, or to email manuscripts to the class. If you miss a scheduled submission, you will forfeit your turn in the rotation.
- If you miss a class, *you* are responsible for acquiring notes, handouts, etc. I will have extra copies of handouts in my office, but I will not be available to go over what you missed in the discussion. It is your responsibility – not the writer submitting work – to make sure you get the manuscripts, and to deliver your comments/responses to him/her.
- Use of cell phones in class for any reason is not allowed. If you use your cell phone in class you will receive a failing grade for the day.
- Use of email, IM, web-surfing, etc. in class are not allowed and will result in a failing grade for the day.
- Please see below for the university policy on academic integrity, and rest assured that all cases of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be pursued. If you submit work that is not your own, you will fail this class.
- You are welcome to email me with questions about the class – however, you should not expect a reply for *at least* 24 hours.
- I do not accept written assignments by email under any circumstances.

University Policies

Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc., including deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes. Information on add/drops is available at <http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-298.html>. Information about late drop is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/>.

Academic integrity

Students should know that the University's Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf. Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require 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 website for Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html. Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make 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 requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.