

CREATIVE WRITING COURSE DESCRIPTIONS, 2008-2009

FALL 2008

219—Visiting Writers Series, TBA (Robbins)

This course operates as an independent study of those writers visiting campus for the Good Thunder Reading Series. **Enrolled students will not meet as a class.** Instead, they will work on their own by (1) reading selected works by some of the writers, (2) attending events at which the writers speak or read from their work, and (3) keeping a journal of directed responses. At the end of the course, students will have the choice of an oral or take-home essay final which will deal with all the writers covered.

242-02—Introduction to Creative Writing, MW 8:00-10:00 (Sheffer)

The course entails reading and writing in both poetry and creative prose. The readings provide models for writing assignments, which are staged over a period of two or three weeks, with plenty of opportunities for feedback and revision.

242-04—Introduction to Creative Writing, M 6-9 (Davis)

This is our Introduction to Creative Writing course. We write poetry, fiction and nonfiction, and as a foundation for this we examine the work of masters. This is public writing rather than writing for ourselves alone.

341—Form and Technique in Poetry, TR 12-2 (Black)

British poet Philip Larkin said, "... one doesn't *study* poets! You *read* them, and think, That's marvelous, how is it done, could I do it?" He also said, "First and foremost, writing poems should be a pleasure. So should reading them, by God." This semester we will read several poets closely, paying attention to how they use a variety of technical elements—what Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez calls "secret carpentry"—and poem forms to shape what poet/novelist Stephen Dobyns calls an "emotional-intellectual-physical construct that is meant to touch the heart of the reader...." Our discussions and our explorations in writing (poems in traditional forms, poems written under the influence of the poets we read, poems employing particular technical elements) ought to help us better recognize the writer's pleasure and increase our pleasure—as readers and writers—as well.

Reading List

Clifton, Lucille. *The Terrible Stories*. BOA Editions, Ltd. 1-880238-37-3
Fry, Stephen. *The Ode Less Travelled*. Gotham Books. 978-1-592-40311-0
Hicok, Bob. *This Clumsy Living*. U of Pittsburgh Press. 0-8229-5953-4
Kaminsky, Ilya. *Dancing in Odessa*. Tupelo Press, Inc. 1-932195-12-2
Roripaug, Lee Ann. *Year of the Snake*. Southern Illinois U Press. 0-8093-2569-1

341—Form and Technique in Poetry, M 6-10, Edina (Black)

[same as above]

342—CW: Nonfiction Writing, TR 10-12 (Sheffer)

Students will read selections in many varieties of Creative Nonfiction, as preparation for writing essays of various types. A portfolio of polished work is turned in at the end of the semester.

343—CW: Fiction Writing, MW 12-2 (Joseph)

This is an introductory-level fiction workshop. Through close reading of literary short fiction, we will study elements of craft. Through a variety of writing exercises and prompts, we will practice our craft.

344—CW: Poetry Writing, MW 2-4 (Robbins)

This course is an intensive introduction to the writing of poetry. You'll start poems in class and at home, you'll revise and polish drafts for consideration by small and large workshops, and you'll read and study contemporary poets as a way of learning more about the writing process. Along the way, you'll develop a vocabulary for discussing others' work and for better evaluating your own. This course meets the objectives of the BA and BFA in Creative Writing by helping students gain facility creating and revising new work in two or more creative genres and by continuing to reinforce techniques for self- and peer-editing.

443—Advanced Fiction Writing, MW 12-2 (Sheffer)

Students share their work with other advanced writers, in a workshop format. There are occasional reading assignments to illustrate points of craft. A portfolio of polished work is due at the end of the semester.

640—Form and Technique in Prose, T 6-9 (Joseph)

This course examines the technical underpinnings of fiction and nonfiction genres. Through lectures, readings, class discussions, imitation exercises, and workshops, we will study the relationship between form and content. Specifically, we'll pay attention to issues of craft including point of view, characterization, setting/place, tone, style, imagery, structure, plot and theme.

642—Creative Nonfiction Workshop, W 3-6 (Black)

Creative nonfiction is a large umbrella, covering a variety of subgenres: the personal essay, memoir, travel writing, profiles, humor writing, literary journalism, nature writing. The elements of reportage—accuracy, detail, exposition, research—and the elements of fiction writing—narrative, scene, dialogue, point of view, rounded characters—and the elements of poetry writing—vivid detail/imagery, lyricism, reflection, musicality—often blend in prose that connects the writer, the reader and the

larger world. We will workshop material from students' nonfiction projects, with occasional breaks to read and discuss models. There may be some assigned writings.

This course is open to and designed for MFA students writing in any genre. Graduate students from other tracks and departments may be welcome upon submitting to the instructor a sample of prose of suitable quality.

Reading List

Almond, Steve. *Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America*. Harcourt Trade. 0-15-603293-7

Birkerts, Sven. *The Art of Time in Memoir*. Graywolf Press. 1-55597-496-1

Helget, Nicole. *The Summer of Ordinary Ways*. Borealis Books. 0-87351-588-9

McPhee, John. *The Second John McPhee Reader*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 0-374-52463-7

643—Fiction Workshop, W 6-9 (Davis)

The traditional writing workshop, although we can modify the tradition as we like. We write, show the work to our classmates for their close reading and responses, and we read and respond to their work with care.

644—Poetry Workshop, M 6-9 (Robbins)

Students in this course should have done some poetry-writing already—or, if not, some serious writing in another genre. Ideally, students should be generating their own subject matter for poems and following their own writing regimens. My goals for the course are that it

- prod you to produce new work
- help you develop strategies for creative revision
- help you develop new critical skills and new insights into the writer's craft, and
- provide the supportive workshop atmosphere that will stimulate each individual and the group as a whole.

647—Contemporary Poetry, W 12-3 (Terrill)

In the first half of the term, we will read work by representative major figures in American poetry in the 1950s and 60s: Ginsberg, Roethke, Bishop, Plath, Berryman, and Lowell. After a mid term exam, we will read individual volumes by poets like Adrienne Rich, W. S. Merwin, Li Young Lee, Natasha Tretheway, and Stephen Dunn. Students will complete short take-home reading reactions, and make a seminar presentation on some aspect of the work of one of the poets on our syllabus.

649—Teaching Creative Writing, M 3-6 (Joseph)

This course asks you to explore and consider various approaches to the teaching of creative writing. Discussions of classroom practices and pedagogical theories as well as teaching demonstrations prepare you to plan and develop an introductory-level creative writing course.

Required Texts

Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*.

Carlson, Ron. *Ron Carlson Writes a Story*.

Baxter, Charles. *Burning Down the House*.

Dobyns, Stephen. *Best Words, Best Order*.

Hugo, Richard. *The Triggering Town*.

You will also need to select a short story you love from any edition of *Best American Short Stories* 1995-present, and a poem from any edition of *Best American Poetry* 1995-present. You'll make enough photocopies of these works for everyone in the class.

SPRING TERM 2009

219—Visiting Writers Series, TBA (Robbins)

This course operates as an independent study of those writers visiting campus for the Good Thunder Reading Series. **Enrolled students will not meet as a class.** Instead, they will work on their own by (1) reading selected works by some of the writers, (2) attending events at which the writers speak or read from their work, and (3) keeping a journal of directed responses. At the end of the course, students will have the choice of an oral or take-home essay final which will deal with all the writers covered.

242-01—Introduction to Creative Writing, MW 8-10 (Sheffer)

The course entails reading and writing in both poetry and creative prose. The readings provide models for writing assignments, which are staged over a period of two or three weeks, with plenty of opportunities for feedback and revision.

340—Form and Technique in Prose, TR 2-4 (Joseph)

This course studies the technical underpinnings of prose genres. Through lectures, readings, class discussions, exercises in imitation, and large and small group workshops, we will examine the relationship between form (how the story is told) and content (what the story is about.) Specifically, we will pay close attention to technical matters including point of view, characterization, setting/place, tone, style, imagery, structure, and theme.

343—CW: Fiction Writing, M 6-10 (Davis)

344-01—CW: Poetry Writing, TR 12-2 (Black)

This course will encourage students to both broaden and deepen their exposure to and engagement with the writing of poetry. Course emphases: writing *a lot* of raw material, experimenting with language and format, moving away from purely personal expression toward writing that anticipates an audience, practicing creative revision, improving skills as critical readers, and polishing work toward completion. We will also read and discuss several books of poetry (to be determined later) by different writers.

4/544—Advanced Poetry Writing, TR 12-2 (Terrill)

This is an advanced poetry workshop open to any undergraduates who have completed English 344 or English 340, Form and Technique in Poetry. Other undergrads may enroll with consent of the instructor, based on a sample of original poems. Graduate students outside of the MFA program (studying English or any other field) are also welcome.

The class will begin with a few writing exercises, then proceed in a workshop format, with students expected to produce, nearly every week, a poem worthy of critique by the group. We'll also read a good deal of contemporary poetry as a model for our own work. This class can be very valuable to interested and serious students who are primarily writers of fiction and nonfiction, as well as to poets.

446—Screenwriting, T 6-10 (Davis)

448—Contemporary Literature, MW 4-6 (Helget)

This course will have you look at and respond to representative works of literature published after 1970.

448—Contemporary Literature, R 6-10, Edina (Robbins)

This course will have you look at and respond to representative works of literature published after 1970.

641—Form and Technique in Poetry, M 3-6 (Robbins)

A poem is a vehicle of content, a formal object, and an historical and theoretical artifact—and when those aspects are seen in complementary relationship, a poem is also a thing of pleasure. Class discussions will keep that central fact in mind as we consider the common methods for reading and responding to poetry, as well as observe the ways poets have chosen to work their art. By the end of the course, students should be able to talk and write more confidently about what a poem means and how it makes meaning. Additionally, they should better understand some of the historical contexts in which past and present poetries have developed.

642—Creative Nonfiction Workshop, T 6-9 (Terrill)

On our first night of class we'll talk for quite a while about our expectations for each other over the term, and have a chance to air our pet peeves about workshop. In the next few weeks we'll read some professional models and complete two or three short exercises that cover some of the basics of the genre (information, reflection, fragmentation). Then we'll follow a workshop format, taking time to read more good published nonfiction along the way.

Creative nonfiction is writing that combines the narrative techniques of the fiction writer, the reportage of the journalist, and possibly the concern for language and form of the poet. Most students do personal narrative writing in this class, but I welcome and

encourage work in the essay, the profile (of a person, place, or culture), travel writing, or nature writing; environmental, historical, or biographical writing.

643—Fiction Workshop, W 3-6 (Joseph)

This workshop differs from traditional workshops.

When we discuss a story, there won't be talk about what we "like" or "don't like." There won't be talk about what's "good" or "bad"; there won't be any value judgments. (This kind of feedback is hugely subjective and frequently confusing—like when six people love it, six people hate it, and one needs more time to think things over.) There won't be advice on how to "fix" your story. (It's your story, which means it's your vision/version of the world, which means you should be the only one who can fix it.) There won't be suggestions about what you "could" or "might" do. (I'm not interested in talking about writing that hasn't been written.)

I am interested in what your story is about – the questions it raises, its themes, your artistic vision – and I'm interested in how your story is told, how its form reinforces its content. If writing is a series of choices, then what are the effects of these particular choices? If there's an infinite number of ways to say something, then why are you saying it in this particular way? Why use first person instead of third person limited? What's the effect of present tense over past? What are the story's significant images and how do they create meaning? This workshop centers on describing and interpreting your use of the elements of fiction—and describing how each works with the rest to create unity, a singular effect, a vivid and continuous dream.

This approach demands work that's more polished and developed than a rough first draft. Do not bring in work that is incomplete—it must have a recognizable beginning, middle and end. If you're bringing in a chapter from a novel, please provide a brief description of your project. If you bring in sloppy work, don't be surprised if there's not much to say about it.

644—Poetry Workshop, T 3-6 (Black)

In a perfect world, a writing workshop becomes a community. The members of that community learn about each other, perhaps begin to care about each other, and—if it is earned—respect each other. But because they are writers, they care about the work brought to workshop—their own and others'—in the same way. They become as familiar with the workshop's subjects, obsessions, vocabularies, sentence constructions, and images as they are with their own. They care if poems—not just their own—succeed or fail. They respect honesty, originality, beauty and courage when they find them in the writing efforts and responses of their peers.

That's what I want us to strive toward this semester. I want us to bring our best efforts to the workshop, poems that we have worked hard on, poems that are as "done" as we can get them. I want us to meet each poem with an open mind, eager to be surprised/awakened/changed by what it is trying to say. I want us to respond to poems honestly and constructively, to let writers know how we are affected by their words and why. I want us to truly listen to readers' responses to our work. If we can

sincerely try to do all this, then the attention we give to our own work and the work of others will earn us the respect of our peers.

We will also read and discuss several books of poetry (to be determined later) by different writers.

The class will begin with a few writing exercises, then proceed in a workshop format, with students expected to produce, nearly every week, a poem worthy of critique by the group. We'll also read a good deal of contemporary poetry as a model for our own work. This class can be very valuable to interested and serious students who are primarily writers of fiction and nonfiction, as well as to poets.

646—Contemporary Prose, TR 10-12 (Sheffer)

Approximately a dozen book-length works of literary prose are assigned and discussed during the semester. The course is a seminar, with an emphasis on informed discussion of literature. There is one term paper, whose subject is another work by one of the assigned authors.

649-01—Writing for Children, W 6-9 (Black)

I take writing for children very seriously. Tons (literally) of books are marketed toward children, but much of it is shallow and tepid. What I look for in children's books, what I strive for in my own writing for children, is—regardless of the intended audience's age, or the hilarity / absurdity / fantasy of the plot—a serious respect for the characters and readers, expressed in writing of the highest standard.

I also feel as strongly about the workshop being a place where writers feel free, feel *safe* enough to try new things, to reach toward a new readership, and to share those efforts with classmates. I think it's possible to have high standards while considering work in a draft stage, to encourage without over-praising, to point out weaknesses without being brutal, to accept others' work on its own merits without trying to turn it into our own.

The semester we will read and discuss classic and contemporary examples of some of the subgenres of children's literature—picture books, easy readers, early chapter books, middle grade novels. We'll workshop each other's efforts in these different subgenres. We'll discuss practical information about the business of writing for children and professional organizations that might be helpful.

649-02—Writing for Young Adults, W 6-9 (Davis)

672—Research and Publication in Creative Writing, W 12-3 (Terrill)

This class is required of all entering MFA students. We will focus on three areas: 1) MFA program requirements and planning, 2) business issues relating to being a writer, including publishing, and 3) developing an approach to and maybe a philosophy about what some have called "the writing life." Several guest speakers, many brief student presentations, three texts: *The Writing Life* by Annie Dillard, *On Becoming a Novelist* by John Gardner, and *Planet on the Table* edited by William Olsen.