English 233: Introduction to Creative Writing
Summer 2017

Dr. Rebecca Dunham
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email hours from 9-5, M-F

Required Text
*The Practice of Creative Writing (2nd edition)* by Heather Sellers

Course Description

“The impulse to retrieve and preserve probably lies at the heart of all art.”

— Charles Wright

Everyone has a story to tell. What is yours, and how can you make it most effective and powerful for readers? Sometimes you don’t know what your story is until you look back at themes and ideas that keep emerging — in this way writing can also teach us what we think or feel about the world around us. It is a way of witnessing. Writing is also a way of making new meaning, or persuading others to see things in a new way. Indeed, this is why creative writing has often been censored by dictators. The craft techniques you will be learning are the tools all literary writers use to create vivid, memorable work.

Grading/Policies

All reflective writing and creative writing assignments must be turned in by the final day of the semester—July 22nd before midnight—in order to receive full credit. I allow this because I know that some weeks during the summer, people may have trouble turning things in by a specific date.

Late work (that is work after July 22nd) will not be accepted without prior permission.

Again, it’s true: the FINAL DEADLINE TO EARN FULL CREDIT FOR THE SEMESTER’S WORK is SATURDAY, JULY 22nd.

In order to receive feedback from me, however, you must submit your work by the “Deadline to receive comments from me” (as indicated in the syllabus).

- Reflective Writing assignments must be posted to the designated discussion thread on the D2L course site.

- Creative Writing assignments must be submitted in a PDF file to the appropriately labeled dropbox folder on the D2L course site. If they are submitted in an alternate
format, I will not accept them. On the Content page you will find a link explaining how to do this if you aren’t already familiar with the process.

The rubrics on the Content page explain in detail the elements I assess when grading.

Reflective Exercises 25%
Creative Exercises (not incl. story) 50%
Short Story 25%

Feedback: You will receive comments from me on creative exercises submitted by the deadline for comments. For the reflective writing assignments, I will send you your grade but will not provide commentary. Remember that although I am not giving quizzes, your creative exercises and reflective assignments will suffer if you have not completed all of the reading.

I aim to get feedback/grades to you by the following Thursday, but if it takes a bit longer, keep in mind that I will be commenting on up to 100 pieces of writing and reading up to 75 reflective writing assignments some weeks.

Email: If I have not replied within 24 hours (weekends not included), feel free resend your email as a gentle reminder.
Schedule

*Because this is a four-week course, the workload for each week is equal to roughly one month of a traditional academic semester.

WEEK ONE

Read in Practice of Creative Writing
- Introduction (1-8)
- Part One: Basics (9-113)

Deadline to receive comments from me: Friday, June 30th by 5 pm

Reflective Writing
- Reread Sherman Alexie’s “Bird-watching at Night” (p. 95). Where are the turns? How are they signaled in this prose piece? Then, reread Brenda Miller’s short essay, “Swerve” (p. 101). Where are the turns? How are they signaled in this prose piece? How does the title indicate this piece will be about turns? Turns of what nature?

Creative Writing Exercises
- #9, page 49: Scaffolding Technique
- #11, page 93: Imitation of “Swerve”
- #12, page 93: Imitation of “Bird-watching at Night”

WEEK TWO

Read in Practice of Creative Writing
- “Images” (116-171)
- “Energy” (172-204)

Deadline to receive comments from me: Friday, July 7th by 5 pm

Reflective Writing
(There is a sample “highlight” page on the Content page if you are confused about how to approach this.)
- Reread Akhil Sharma’s “Surrounded by Sleep” (p. 160). Scan back through the story using your highlighter (or making a list) to capture every single specific in the story. This is going to be a long list! Isocal, Hindi women’s magazine, It’s a Wonderful Life, chaplain, Clark Kent, etc.
- Read Brian Arundel’s “The Things I’ve Lost” on page 202. Make a list of the leaps, and analyze how leaps energize this piece.
- Go through Rick Moody’s “Boys” on page 198 with a highlighter (or make a list). Locate every single verb: enter, wound, slung, wear, coated, dreaming, etc. What kinds of
verbs does Moody choose? What verbs does he avoid using? Of his verb choices, the ones on your list, which are the most energetic, the strongest? Are there a few verbs you would like to incorporate into your own writing?

*Creative Writing Exercises*
- #2, page 139: All images
- #4, page 139: Sharma as launching point
- #8, page 196: Secret place
- #10, page 196: Couplets

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**Week Three**

Read in *Practice of Creative Writing*
- “Tension” (205-263)
- “Pattern” (264-303)
- “Sonnet” (447-450)
- “Ghazal” (418-420)

Deadline to receive comments from me: Friday, July 14th by 5 pm

*Reflective Writing*
- Read aloud just the dialogue—nothing else—from the short story by Jessica Shattuck on page 247. What do you notice about the dialogue? Now, go back through and highlight the actions that attend each spoken bit. How do the actions create oppositions? Tension? What is lost if we just hear the spoken parts? Which dialogue-action bits have the most tension? Rank them in order of most tense to least tense.
- Find the four components of “setting the thermostat” in a section of the Marisa Silver story “What I Saw from Where I Stood” on page 235. What tension(s) are set in the section of the story? Use the chart on page 210 to create an analysis of the four elements of tension.
- Read the story “How to Become a Writer” by Lorrie Moore on page 292. Track sound and syntax patterns, noting each example. Are there ways in which the author is “rhyming” sentences, sections, or paragraphs? Her short story imitates a self-help manual, or book on etiquette. What of the syntax of that form has she imported into her pattern?

*Creative Writing Exercises*
- #8, page 230: Dialogue/Action
- #1, page 283: Listing
- Write a Sonnet
- Write a Ghazal

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**WEEK FOUR**

Read in *Practice of Creative Writing*
- “Insight” (304-358)
- “Revision” (359-404)
- “Journey” (page 430-432)

Deadline to receive comments from me: Wednesday, July 19\(^{th}\) by 5 pm

*Creative Writing Exercise*
- Write a complete short story (8-10 pages) based on the Journey recipe (432).

Deadline: Saturday, July 22\(^{nd}\) by 11:59 pm

*Reflective Writing*
- Reread “Buying Wine” by Sebastian Matthews on page 56. Is he generous to the people in this poem? Not so much? What lines in the poem give the most insight into who these people are and what’s important to them? Does Matthews try to understand human weakness, create insight into it, or does he judge? Something else altogether?
- Read the poem “Carpe Diem” by Lynne McMahon on page 329. Reread it aloud and then highlight the questions in the poem. Does the author’s poem answer her questions? Why or why not? How are the questions *part of the wisdom* of the poem? What insights does McMahon want her reader to take home?
- Read *Persepolis*, excerpted on page 332. What does Satrapi yearn for as a child? What is her understanding of the big issues around her? What does the author gain by pairing her coming-of-age experiences with the large cultural, religious, and political events that are shaping Iran around her?

**FINAL DEADLINE TO EARN FULL CREDIT FOR SEMESTER'S WORK:**
**SATURDAY, JULY 22\(^{nd}\), 11:59 PM**