

Spring 1-15-2015

## ENG 4763-001: Fiction Writing

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### Recommended Citation

Knight, Lania, "ENG 4763-001: Fiction Writing" (2015). *Spring 2015*. 76.  
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ENG 4763: Fiction Writing  
Spring 2015, T/Th 11am–12:15pm, Coleman Hall 3130

Professor Lania Knight, PhD  
Office Hours: T 2–4pm, W 2–3pm, Th 2–3pm; Coleman 3751; ldknight@eiu.edu

In this course, students will deepen their understanding of fiction writing in general and the short story in particular. This course is a workshop and will include writing, attendance at local creative writing events and discussion of published short stories, essays on craft, and fellow students' short stories. As an advanced course, students are expected to be familiar with the fundamental elements of fiction as explained in books like Mike Kardos' *The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer's Guide*, or Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to

- a. Provide craft analyses of contemporary short fiction.
- b. Produce and revise original creative work in the fiction genre.
- c. Discuss their creative work and process in the context of a tradition in fiction writing.
- d. Critique new works of fiction in a creative writing workshop.
- f. Attend and meaningfully participate in public readings of fiction.

**Required Texts:**

Egan, Jennifer and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *The Best American Short Stories 2014*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2014.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor. 1995.  
One current issue of a literary magazine (TBA)

**Suggested Texts:** (will be on reserve at Booth Library)

Burroway, Janet. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*

Kardos, Michael. *The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer's Guide*

**Grades:**

Reading Responses	400
Workshop Submission I	100
Workshop Submission II	100
Workshop Responses	200
Lit Mag Presentation	100
Final Portfolio	100
Total	1000 points

**Be Prepared for Class**

To prepare for each class, please do the following:

1. Be ready to participate in activities
2. Bring your textbooks and a notebook with you to class
3. Read the assigned material **before** class
4. Respond via Dropbox on Desire2Learn to the assigned reading **before** class

## **Reading Responses**

Responses are due via Dropbox on Desire2Learn by 9am on the day they are to be discussed. Each response is worth around 30 points. For readings on craft and the writer's life, respond by writing either 1) a List of Ten, which means ten of anything about the reading, such as words you needed to look up, items you found interesting or confusing, or phrases you had questions about. ANYTHING GOES. Write page and paragraph numbers (not included in word count), 450–500 words per list, OR 2) Notes, in paragraph form, 450–500 words (with page and paragraph numbers, not included in word count). For short story selections, you are free to write a List of Ten or Notes (see above), or, if you need a prompt to get you going, you may answer questions from “checklist: read like a writer” on pp. 5–6 in Mike Kardos' *The Art and Craft of Fiction*. Note to Graduate Students: Your responses should be 950–1,000 words.

## **Attendance**

I keep attendance. You may miss up to four classes. If you miss a fifth class, you'll fail the course. Two late arrivals = one absence. Exceptions will be made only for documented emergencies and documented school activities.

## **Workshop Submissions**

For each workshop, submit one complete short story. Each submission should be 10–15 pages (2,500–3,750 words) in length. Please do not go below or beyond the word count. You are free to write about any topic, but the material must be new and created for this class. Submissions will be graded for originality and risk. Does your story say something interesting? Is the writing elegant? Does it pull the reader in? Workshop sign up will take place early in the semester. Your stories will be due before workshop and will be sent to classmates and the instructor via Desire2Learn.

## **Workshop Responses**

For each workshop submission, type a one-page single-spaced letter (450–500 words). Submit your letter(s) on D2L by 9am on the day of workshop, and print one copy to bring to class (for the writer). Your letter should address what you see happening on the page (describe the content and form), as well as questions for the writer. The most important task of this letter is to reflect back to the writer what he/she has written and to pose questions and predictions so the writer can begin to see if you, the reader, have understood what he/she has attempted.

## **Literary Magazine Presentation**

Pick a literary magazine from the list in the back of *Best American Short Stories* and give a presentation to the class to describe what the magazine is about. Topics to cover include format/layout (print if available and online), descriptions of content, analysis of editorial choices, and what is appealing (or not) about this magazine as a reader and as a writer. Presentations should be 8–10 minutes and include A/V and/or handouts.

## **Creative Writing Events**

Attend three creative writing events during the semester. After attending an event, please submit a 450-500-word response along with your Reading Responses due before the class period immediately following the event. Additional events will be shared during the semester.

**Jan 30-31:** Lions in Winter at the Doudna Fine Arts Center [REQUIRED]

**Feb 26, 4:30pm:** Andre Dubus III at Authors Corner, Illini Union Bookstore (UIUC)

**April 29 (or so):** Class public reading [REQUIRED]

### **Final Portfolio**

The Final Portfolio consists of two elements:

- 1) a significant revision of one of your stories, and
- 2) a reflection essay. For this essay, write an 8–10-page (2,000–2,500) [Graduate Students: 14–15 pages, 3,500–3,750] reflection on the course readings, the activities in class, the stories you wrote, your revision, and any other material relevant to your development as a writer. This essay should connect the course materials and activities with your understanding of writing, and it should also demonstrate your lively engagement with the class and the process of writing over the span of the semester.

### **Students with Documented Disabilities**

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodation, you must make arrangements through the Office of Disability Services; you should contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

### **Tentative Schedule**

#### Week One

Tuesday, 1/13: Intro and overview; Workshop sign up; lit mag sign up

Thursday, 1/15: Discuss *Bird by Bird* (BbB) “Introduction”

#### Week Two

Tuesday, 1/20: Discuss “Getting Started,” “Short Assignments” and “Shitty First Drafts” in *BbB*

Thursday, 1/22: Discuss “Medium Tough” in *Best American Short Stories* (BASS) and “Thought Verbs” by Chuck Pahlanuk ([link](#))

#### Week Three

Thursday, 1/27: Discuss Edward Kelsey Moore and Stephen Graham Jones selections

Thursday 1/29: Discuss Stephen Graham Jones selections and “Perfectionism” and “School Lunches” in *BbB*

Friday 1/30-31: Lions in Winter Literary Festival at the Doudna Fine Arts Center

#### Week Four

Tuesday, 2/3: Discuss “Mastiff” in *BASS*

Thursday, 2/5: Discuss “Polaroids,” “Character,” “Plot,” and “Dialogue” in *BbB*

#### Week Five

Tuesday, 2/10: Discuss “The Breeze” in *BASS*

Thursday, 2/12: Discuss “Set Design,” “False Starts,” “Plot Treatment,” and “How Do You Know When You’re Done?” in *BbB*

Week Six

Tuesday, 2/17: Discuss “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners” in *BASS*

Thursday, 2/19: Discuss “Broccoli,” “Radio Station KFKD,” and “Jealousy” in *BbB*

Week Seven

Tuesday, 2/24: Discuss “Writing Groups” and “Someone to Read Your Drafts” in *BbB*

Thursday, 2/26: Workshop; Andre Dubus III reading at UIUC

Week Eight

Tuesday, 3/3: Workshop

Thursday, 3/5: Workshop

Week Nine

Tuesday, 3/10: Workshop

Thursday, 3/12: Workshop

Week Ten: **SPRING BREAK**

Week Eleven

Tuesday, 3/24: Lit mag presentations

Thursday, 3/27: Lit mag presentations

Week Twelve

Tuesday, 3/31: Lit mag presentations

Thursday, 4/2: Workshop; lit mag presentations

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, 4/7: Workshop

Thursday, 4/9: NO CLASS

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, 4/14: Workshop

Thursday, 4/16: NO CLASS

Week Fifteen

Tuesday, 4/21: Workshop

Thursday, 4/23: Workshop

Week Sixteen

Tuesday, 4/28: Discuss reading (TBA); afternoon/evening class public reading

Thursday, 4/30: Discuss Neil Gaiman’s 2012 commencement address and “The Last Class” *BbB*

Monday, 5/4: DUE at 3pm: Final Portfolio