ENG 2000-001: Intro to Creative Writing

Charlotte Pence

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ENG 2000: INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING

SPRING 2017

3 CREDIT HOURS

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Office: Coleman 3745
Office Hours: W 2-4; F 12-1, 2-3; & by appt.

Course Information:

11-11:50 MWF
Section: 001
Room: CH 3159

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- *Imaginative Writing*, 4th edition edited by Janet Burroway
- *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg
- Purchase of a course packet of reading material from I-Copy.
- A writer’s notebook of your choice. (Bring to every class.)
- Three-ring binder or folder to keep all of the workshop pieces and handouts.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This introductory course will introduce students to writing creatively in four major genres of creative writing: poetry, fiction, nonfiction and drama. We will articulate the distinctions of each genre, such as the importance of dialogue in drama and character development in fiction, while simultaneously exploring the connections between the genres and the need to create a text that fully engages a reader’s imagination. Finally, we will grapple with the larger questions of why it is that we write and why it is that we want to be a part of somebody else’s imaginative world. Analysis of literary models in each genre, individual and class criticism of students’ work, and discussions on craft will aid students in creating a portfolio of writing to present at the semester’s end.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

a. Students will develop skills in craft analysis by discussing, reading and writing across poetry, fiction, nonfiction and dramatic genres.

b. Students will develop the ability to produce and revise original creative work across poetry, fiction, nonfiction and dramatic genres.
c. Students will develop the ability to analyze their creative work in the context of a tradition across poetry, fiction, nonfiction and dramatic genres.

d. Students will hone their ability to critique creative work in a creative writing workshop.

e. Students will develop skills to effectively present their creative work produced for this course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

One poem, one play, one short story, and one creative nonfiction essay will be submitted to the class over the course of the semester. These works should have seen a number of drafts before submitting to workshop and will be graded based on professionalism (such as no typos or grammatical errors), meeting the assigned length, and development. Please use a standard font such as Times, and in the right hand corner include your name, the date, and the assignment’s genre. Also, note that it is your responsibility to make copies of your work for your peers.

A writer’s notebook is key to the writing process and a requirement for this course. Most weeks, I will provide writing exercises. Some of them will be turned in and some of them will not be. All of the writing exercises will either raise your awareness about key craft elements and/or help you practice craft elements that can be used for one of the four major writing assignments. We will also write in class together, so always bring the notebook to class. Most writers I know carry a notebook with them at all times to record images, bits of dialogue, poem ideas, etc., so this is a good habit to acquire. I encourage all of you to try to write at least six lines a day in this notebook since a writer is simply one who writes often. I will collect these notebooks periodically during the semester and grade based on completed exercises and regular entries. One may earn either full, half, or no credit per entry.

“A writer is a reader moved to emulation.”  —Saul Bellow

Reading will be one of the major ways that we learn about the craft and find inspiration. We will have the occasional pop quiz to ensure careful and close reading. These will be given at the start of the class. If you are late or absent, you will not be allowed to make these up. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped at the end of the semester.

One of the joys of this class is experiencing the vibrancy of contemporary writing. While we will be reading a diverse array of writers from many different time periods, we will focus on contemporary writers to better understand what is happening now in this field.

Finally, I’d like to point out that contemporary writing, especially nonfiction, is an art that addresses both the quiet moments of our lives and the tragedies of our lives. Be aware that readings in this class may hit upon difficult emotional ground for some of you and that many
of our writing exercises ask you to explore your past memories, both positive and negative. Please come see me if you’d like to talk about this more in private.

**Workshops** will encompass half of the in-class work that we will do. For each workshop, you are required to write editing and revision suggestions on each piece of writing before class. (Line edits and at least a full paragraph of reflective comments that will occasionally be checked as a pop quiz.) During workshop, I will randomly ask a few students to read their revision suggestions in full, which should address at least three strengths and three weaknesses. These comments will factor into the participation grade.

If you are being workshopped, you will need to bring copies for every person in the class on the class day before you are workshopped—unless otherwise noted. No emailed material will be allowed. **In order for the class to function smoothly, if you fail to turn in your material on your due date, you miss your workshop turn and lose 25 points from that draft for each day late.** For more details, see the “attendance, punctuality, and meeting deadlines” section of this syllabus.

If our class size is somewhat large, you will choose one genre that you will not workshop with the class, such as poetry, fiction, drama, or nonfiction. You will still turn in the work to me, though, on a specified day. We will individually meet to discuss that work.

We will discuss proper workshop etiquette in class, but the general guideline is to braid together honesty, specificity, and kindness since one without the others will not serve the writer. Also keep in mind that material for workshop should have undergone at least two to three revisions before bringing them to us for suggestions. Not everything you write will be wonderful and not everything you write will be horrible. These are the extremes. What is more likely is that you will write something that lies somewhere in between—and we will help each other move the work in the direction the work wants to be moved.

A **final portfolio** will be submitted for the **final exam**. The manuscript needs to be submitted in a paper folder (no three-ring binders), preferably black. Within this manuscript, include in this order—a title page, an epigraph, a table of contents, your critical introduction (described below), one revised poem, one revised play, and either the story or creative nonfiction essay revised. Everything needs to be hole-punched and placed in the brads so that I can read the work easily and so that nothing gets misplaced. I would like the original work submitted directly behind each revision. Please note: it is your responsibility to keep your work throughout the semester.

In addition to your creative work, also include a two-to-three page critical introduction on what you wanted to revise, why, and how you went about the process with each piece. Also, mention at least three specific examples from other works that we read that influenced your decisions. For example, did you decide that you wanted to include research in a way similar to Beth Ann Fennelly? Did you decide that you wanted to create character through the nuance of dialogue like Richard Bausch? Don’t simply state the fact, but provide examples such as the sentence or passage that was your model. It’s this type of influence that I am interested in: specific craft moves rather than explanations of a literary kinship.
An alternative final exam option would be to submit three different finished works in three different genres that explore the same subject or obsession, such as the same personal anecdote but presented three entirely different ways. Your two-to-three page critical introduction for this option would explore what you learned about each genre by doing this approach. What did you find had to change based on the genre? What did you notice translated well in one genre but not in another? Which genre best fulfilled your intentions and why? These and any other points you’d like to address would all be part of the introduction. All other requirements, such as formatting, would be the same for this final portfolio.

“I want the reader to feel something is astonishing. Not the ‘what happened,’ but the way everything happens.” —Alice Munro on the short story

Participation is critical in this course. The time we spend together is our opportunity to expand our views on what is literary writing, to build a writer’s community, and to learn the craft behind the art. In Mystery and Manners, fiction writer Flannery O’Connor reflects on the value of writers interacting with one another. She says that unless the writer “has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication, and communication suggests talking inside a community.” At the end of the semester when I reflect on your participation, I will consider not only how often you contributed to class discussions, but the quality of those comments. I will also consider your seriousness with in-class writing assignments, your workshop responses, and any pop-quizzes if given, in the participation grade as well.

Finally, one of the more challenging aspects to writers is being able to shut off the world in order to write. Therefore, we will practice mindfulness in class. Text messaging (even once) and other distractions such as checking email in class (again, even once) will result in a failing participation grade for the semester. Since cultivating a supportive and challenging writers’ community is critical to our growth as writers, participation counts as 15% of your grade.

Attendance, punctuality, and meeting deadlines are all part of academic life. There are days you may not want to work, but successful students work—when they feel inspired or not. Coming to class is part of your obligation to your academic career and to your community. Therefore, missing four courses will lower your final grade by five points; Five or six absences will lower your final grade by ten points. Seven absences will result in failure of the course. To allow adequate time for class discussion and in-class writing, arrive on time. Being late twice (or leaving early twice) will be considered an absence. This attendance policy applies to all students regardless of the reason for the absence. The only exception will be school-sanctioned events or illness for which I receive notice, in writing, from a university administrator. Finally, if you arrive without the day’s reading in front of you, it will count as ½ an absence.

Also, I do not accept late work for most of our work (exception detailed below), which includes occasions when you are absent. If you must be absent, you may email me your work before the class to receive credit for it. If you fail to turn in your work that the class plans to workshop by your assigned deadline, you will lose your turn in the workshop rotation plus
twenty-five points will be deducted from your work for each day late (not each class, but each day). The four genre pieces are the only ones that I will accept late. Everything else, including journal checks, quizzes, final portfolios, etc., must be turned in on time to receive any credit for them. Also, if you miss a day that you are workshopped, you will simply miss your workshop. Since we schedule these in advance, you should be able to foresee any difficulties that may arise. The reason for this strict policy on late work is to help build discipline as writers. Procrastination can be the creative killer to writers, so I am trying to take the option of “later” off the table.

“*A poem is an event, not the record of an event.*”
—Robert Lowell

**Grading**

Assignments are proportioned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Nonfiction Essay</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer’s Notebook Pre-Midterm</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer’s Notebook Post-Midterm</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Manuscript/Final Exam</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading scale is as follows:

- A = 90-100
- B = 80-89
- C = 70-79
- D = 60-69
- F = 0-59

**University Policies**

**Academic integrity**

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU’s Code of Conduct (http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be dealt with according to university policy, which can be found on the Office of Judicial Affairs pages. First offense will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs and **will result in a grade of F** for this class. I think we all know what plagiarism is by now: the willful “appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work” (from Random House Dictionary of the English Language). In sum, do your job, which means do your own work.

**Students with disabilities**

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please
contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible. All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583.

The Student Success Center
Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

"Poetry is a verbal means to a nonverbal source."
—A.R. Ammons from A Poem is Walk

COURSE SYLLABUS

*Please note that the following syllabus may be altered and that additional assignments will appear on D2L. Be sure to check both the syllabus and your email for each class.

*I will refer to Writing Down the Bones as “Bones” and Imaginative Writing as “I.W.” in the following syllabus.

WEEK ONE

Mon, Jan. 9:
Introduction to class and syllabus review. Discussion on distinctions between imagery, specificity, and abstractions.

Focus on Poetry: Sound Sense, Imagery, and Specificity

Wed, Jan 11:
Work due in notebook: Exercise 2.1 on p. 19 from I.W.
Focus: Image

Fri, Jan 13:
Continuation of Wednesday’s discussions.
WEEK TWO

Mon, Jan 16: No Class: MLK Holiday

Wed, Jan 18:
**Work due in notebook:** Three image poems. Assignment on D2L.

Fri, Jan 20:
Continuation of discussion from Wednesday’s class.
**Work due in notebook:** One of the freewrites on p. 22-24 from Bones.
**Work due TYPED and PRINTED:** Type a vivid passage of fiction or creative nonfiction (at least 5 sentences long) from a writer whose work you admire. Underline any specific details. Now, rewrite the passage (on a new sheet of paper) but ruin it by replacing the specifics with generalizations and judgments. In class, you will give the worse version to a classmate to improve. So, strive to give them a whopper to make better. (Bring both versions—the original and your rewrite—to class.)
Focus: Specificity

WEEK THREE

Mon, Jan 23:
**Reading due:** Selected poems in coursepack that state “excellent specificity” and Bones pp. 29-35
**Work due in notebook:** Choose one detail in one of the poems. How does that one detail contribute to the poem as a whole? Please be as thorough as possible and see if any element of that specific detail is echoed in other aspects of the poem, however tangential. Be sure to have one full paragraph of at least 5 sentences.
Focus: Specificity

Wed, Jan 25:
Continuation of Thursday’s discussion on specificity.
**Reading due:** Essay in coursepack on patternicity plus selected readings from Lions in Winter authors (handout).
**Work due in notebook:** One of the freewrites on p. 22-24 from Bones.
Begin work on the spectacle poem.

Fri, Jan 27:
**Reading due:** Hamby p. 86 from I.W., plus poems by Plath, Brooks, Jabberwocky, and Harrington in coursepack; pp. 36-38 from Bones.
Focus: Sound Sense
**Work due in notebook:** Finish spectacle poem. Assignment on D2L.

LIONS IN WINTER BEGINS TONIGHT! ATTEND AT LEAST TWO EVENTS ON FRIDAY AND/OR SATURDAY. SEE ONLINE SCHEDULE FOR MORE DETAILS: LIONSINWINTER.ORG
WEEK FOUR

Mon, Jan 30: Class Repurposed for Lions in Winter

Wed, Feb 1:
Continuation of Friday’s discussion on sound sense.
Work due: List of the two events you attended for Lions in Winter plus at least three sentences about each event that made you think differently about your own writing.
ME: Begin work on listing poem in class.

Friday, Feb 3:
Writing in class
Focus: Sound Sense
Assign Workshop Poem

WEEK FIVE

Mon, Feb 6:
Poem due from everyone (assignment on D2L). Be sure to bring copies for the entire class.
Workshop
Reading due: Bones pp. 42-44.

Wed, Feb 8:
Workshop
Reading due: Finish reading any poems that we did not workshop on Monday.
Notebook check-list will be handed out.

Fri, Feb 10:
Workshop
Reading due: Bones pp. 45-56 and the essay on metaphor in courspack.
End-of-Genre Notebook Checks: No notebooks will be accepted late.

Focus on Playwriting: Dialogue

WEEK SIX

Mon, Feb 13:
Reading due: “Voices from the Other Room” by Richard Bausch (coursepack) and “The Seven Tools of Dialogue” (coursepack).
Work due (in notebook): Let’s analyze effective dialogue. How does what the characters say tell us about who they are? Are the characters always being honest in their words or are there moments in which they are seeming to say one thing, but really saying something else? Are there moments when they’re even lying to themselves? Pick out a specific moment in the dialogue and explain how it contributes to the story as a whole. Be prepared to read yours in class.
Wed, Feb 15:
Continuation of Monday’s discussion on dialogue.

Fri, Feb 17: No Class: Lincoln’s Birthday

WEEK SEVEN

Mon, Feb 20:
Reading due: “Drama Format” pp. 367-372; essays on the genre pp. 329-331 and pp. 335-339 from I.W.
Work due (in notebook): Go someplace public where you can overhear two people talking. Write down what they say for at least 10 minutes. You might want to wear headphones so that they don’t realize they are being observed. You also will NOT be able to get everything down. What’s important is that you hone in on the important moments.

Wed, Feb 22: In-class writing on your plays. Divide into pairs (if you wish to work in a group) to begin work on your plays. Sign up for workshop days. (Note: Your play will be presented to the class. You will still need to make copies for us though.)

Fri, Feb 24: Plays begin to be due based on your workshop date: Write or co-write a short play (3-4 pages) where all action occurs in dialogue. Details of the assignment are on D2L.

WEEK EIGHT

Mon, Feb 27:
Workshop plays
Reading due: The plays being workshopped this day.
Please note: Participation grades will be entered as this is mid-term season. They are not permanent and are intended to provide feedback on your class performance at this time. If you receive a 50/F, please come see me as that grade indicates a problem that we should discuss.

Wed, March 1:
Workshop plays
Reading due: The plays being workshopped this day and pp. 57-59 from Bones

Fri, March 3:
Workshop plays
Reading due: The plays being workshopped this day and the essay on storytelling in your coursepack.
End-of-Genre Notebook Checks
Focus on Fiction: Character Development and Plot

WEEK NINE

Mon, March 6:
Reading due: “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin found in your coursepack.
Work due in notebook: Reflect on one of the characters in Baldwin’s story. Describe what
the character is like. Then point to specific moments in the story that helped you understand
the character. Is there a particular action, a particular line of dialogue, a particular physical
characteristic that really helped solidify your understanding of the character? Which one?
How so?
Focus: Character Development

Wed, March 8:
Reading due: Continue discussion on “Sonny’s Blues;” pp. 166-175 essays on the genre
from I.W; and read pp. 77-83 from Bones.
Work due in notebook: Start brainstorming ideas for your story. Try to fill
one page.

Fri, March 10:
Reading due: “Don’t Do This” by Jerome Stern (coursepack) and pp. 285-289 from I.W.

WEEK TEN: SPRING BREAK MARCH 13-17

WEEK ELEVEN:
Mon, March 20:
Reading due: “Self Reliance” by Edith Pearlman
Work due in notebook: Discuss what is the conflict of this story and how is it given shape?
What are some of the tricks you see Franklin using to pull you along and keep you interested
in the story? How does the tension increase?
Focus: Plot and outlines

Wed, March 22:
Work due in notebook: Read pp. 67-74 from Bones and do one thing that she suggests.
Writing day: Work on your story outlines.
In-class character exercise and outline assignment to be given in class.

Fri, March 24:
Work due: Come to class with a printed, rough outline for your story. Assignment on D2L.
You’ll workshop these in small groups. Outlines count as two notebook assignments.
Reading due: Fiction format on p. 294 from I.W. and pp. 75-76 from Bones.
Sign up for fiction workshop
WEEK TWELVE

Mon, March 27:
Writing due: Stories begin to be due based on your workshop date: Submit your final outlines (1-2 pages) with one scene (2-3 pages) OR one complete 4-5 page story. Double space these and do not go over the page limits by more than one page. Do keep in mind that if you fail to meet your deadline, you will not receive feedback from the class and will have points deducted off your work. On your due date, bring copies for everyone in class if you are going to be workshopped.
Workshop Begins
ME: (First day as before: we read it in class)

Wed, March 29:
Workshop
Reading due: The stories being workshopped this day. (Reminder: For all workshopped pieces, be sure to write both line edits as well as a paragraph of feedback at the end of the story.)

Fri, March 31:
Workshop
Reading due: The stories to be workshopped for the day plus pp. 86-92 from Bones.
Notebook check-list will be handed out.

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WEEK THIRTEEN

Mon, April 3:
Workshop

Wed, April 5:
Workshop
Reading due: The stories being workshopped this day.
End-of-Genre Notebook Checks (Note: outlines counted as two assignments)

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Focus on Creative Nonfiction: Form and Research

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WEEK FOURTEEN

Fri, April 7:
Reading due: Chabon p. 251-255 and Beth Ann Fennelly (in coursepack), two examples of the personal essay.
Work due: In your notebook, do either exercise on p. 255 of I.W.
Assign next essay
Focus: Form (the personal essay)
Mon, April 10:
Reading due: “Margot’s Diary” pp. 247-251 from I.W. and essays on the genre found on pp. 225-229 from I.W.
Work due in notebook: Exercise from pp. 108-109 in Bones. (Strive for a list of 20 ordinary objects.)
Focus: Form (the collage or braided essay)

Wed, April 12: English Studies Conference Day: Class Repurposed
And Mary Jo Bang Poetry Reading
Please attend two events this day.

Fri, April 14:
Reading due: Example of the hermit crab essay: “Son of Mr. Green Jeans” by Moore and example of the lyric essay by Claudia Rankine both found in your coursepack.
Work due: Submit the names of the two events that you attended to me. No need to write anything as proof other than the two events. (I can cross reference with sign-up sheets from the conference.)

WEEK FIFTEEN

Mon, April 17:
Writing due in notebook: Fill one page with notes from this town or a trip you are taking over the weekend, focusing on how you would write for atmospheric details. As much as you can, remove yourself and just record what you see.
Continuation of class discussion from previous essays, if needed.
Sign up for workshop days.
Work due: Come prepared with a topic by reviewing our past freewrites for this section. If one of those works for you, great. If not, have another topic ready. In class, we will start working on our essays.
In-class: Factual research for our essay topics
Focus: Research
Give atmospheric assignment.

Wed, April 19:
Workshop 2 essays (To be read in class)
Writing due in notebook: Atmospheric Research (assignment to be handed out)

Fri, April 21:
Workshop essays
Writing due in notebook: Exercise on pp. 95-97 from Bones. (Try to incorporate one of these new combinations into your essay.)
Reading due: The essays being workshopped.

WEEK SIXTEEN

Mon, April 24:
Workshop essays (more on next page)
Reading due: The essays being workshopped
Work due: Sentence exercise in coursepack

Wed, April 26:
Reading due: Any last essays to workshop.
Discuss the final portfolio and workshop any last essays.
Other discussion: Synthesizing the Genres. Arrive prepared to discuss an element that you found is needed across all genres. Also, be prepared to discuss one technique that improved your writing.
Work due: Jot down answers to the above questions in your notebook.
Notebook checklist will be passed out.

Fri, April 28:
Reading due: From Bones pp. 152-155
Small group workshop: Revised work. Bring three copies of one passage (no longer than a page) that you have revised for your portfolio that you want help with.
Work due: Writer’s Notebook Final Check

Final Portfolio Due Date: Tuesday, May 2 by 12:30. My office: 3745 Coleman.