“Art makes the familiar strange so that it can be freshly perceived. To do this it presents its material in unexpected, even outlandish ways: the shock of the new.”

— Viktor Schlovsky

Class description:
ENGL 4368 “Senior Thesis” (3 credits) is a supervised independent study for creative writing majors undertaking a substantial final project: the composition of a novel, a collection of short stories, a volume of poetry, or collection of creative essays. Typically students meet one-on-one with faculty for approximately an hour each week to discuss composition and revision strategies. Assigned reading varies dependent on the student’s project, but may include both creative and critical texts. Writing expectations are demanding: at minimum, fifty to sixty pages of prose or twenty pages of poetry, plus drafts of revised work. These activities average a minimum of nine hours of work to prepare outside of classroom hours.

Program Learning Outcomes:
1.) The student will demonstrate close reading skills and recognize strategies used by professional creative writers.
2.) The student will employ techniques and strategies for crafting carefully composed, competent creative work.
3.) The student will demonstrate strategic revision on completed creative work.
4.) The student will compose and sustain a complete, polished manuscript of substance in the focus genre.

Class format:
This course is designed to give you the time and space to begin /continue a book-length work of poetry or prose (for prose this means 100-150 pages; for poetry 48-64 pages). By now you should have and advisor with whom you will work. You will meet with this advisor on a schedule created and maintained by the two of you.

Grading:
Attendance – 10%
Thesis: Draft (1st semester) or Finished Mss (2nd semester) 50%
Revision (throughout) 40%
Assignments:

Attendance
You will be creating an individual schedule with your chosen advisor for meetings throughout the semester. Along with your active attendance at these meetings, you will set submissions deadlines per your advisor’s guidelines. Depending on your project, you may write and submit individual stories or essays, groups of poems, or chapters from a novel. You will be graded not just for your regular and professional attendance but also your punctual submission of work to be discussed. Depending on the instructor, late work will be penalized and may result in missed meetings.

The Thesis
You will be spending one semester writing and revising a draft of your thesis project. You should complete a minimum of 60 pages of prose (whether short stories/essays or a portion of a novel/memoir) or 30 pages of poetry by the end of the first semester. (The precise amount per semester and drafting/revision timeline will be arranged individually.) In the second semester, you will complete and submit the entire MS. Along with your ongoing revision based on advisor feedback, you will proof and edit the finished MS before submitting it. It should be clean, meaning no errors in grammar, formatting, or spelling. You will also include a title page, table of contents, and a brief (1-4 page) introduction/reflection on the MS and the process of composing it (done in consultation with your advisor).

Second-semester students will also read (approximately 10-15 minutes each) an excerpt or selection from the thesis.

Revision
You will be expected to radically revise your work during both the first and second semester. The difference between revision and radical revision is that the former means cleaning your work up, correcting grammatical mistakes, etc., whereas the latter means significantly re-approaching the work: e.g., changing the structure, changing the narrative perspective, changing the main character, changing the climactic event, breaking or imposing a poetic form, changing lineation, etc.

Notes on formatting
The MS must be arranged in a cohesive fashion (ideally this will be purposive and will have been discussed with your advisor). The final MS should be presented professionally; it should be spiral bound on clean copy. All your submissions (biweekly and final) must be typed.

Tentative Calendar
*For first semester students, the goal is to produce as much work as possible, so you are in a comfortable by the beginning of the second semester. For second semester students, the goal is revision of the final manuscript.
WEEK ONE

Go over Syllabus/Policies. Set up meeting times. The following weeks will be largely dependent on the size of the project, the pace of the student’s writing, and the demands of revision. These are simply suggestions which will change depending on the needs of the project.

WEEK TWO

Discuss first half of project and how much to achieve in the semester. HW: Write Story 1 or first chapters for collection/8-10 pages

WEEK THREE

Turn in work. HW: Read suggested material.

WEEK FOUR

Discuss Story 1. HW: Write Story 2/8-10 pages.

WEEK FIVE

Turn in work. HW: Read suggested material.

WEEK SIX

Discuss Story 2. HW: Write Story 3/8-10 pages.

WEEK SEVEN

Turn in work. HW: Read suggested material.

WEEK EIGHT

Discuss Story 3. HW: Write Story 4/8-10 pages.

WEEK NINE

Turn in work. HW: Read suggested material.

WEEK TEN

Discuss Story 4. HW: Write Story 5/8-10 pages.

WEEK ELEVEN

Turn in work. HW: Read suggested material.

WEEK TWELVE
Discuss Story 5. HW: Figure out order of manuscript and type up one-page of missing components and/or stories (outline for full-project). Start Revising

WEEK THIRTEEN

Continue progress.

WEEK FOURTEEN

Discuss final edits and 1-page outline for full project. HW: Finish final version of manuscript of first half of project, editing & outline.

WEEK FIFTEEN

Discuss final edits & format. Plans for second semester of course.

WEEK SIXTEEN

Turn in final manuscript Friday of finals week.