ENGLISH 361.090—Intermediate Fiction Workshop  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30-1:45 pm, Ferguson 177  
Spring 2019

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Office hours: 11:30-12:30 PM (MW), 2-3 PM (TTH), 11-Noon (F), and by appointment.

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION  
Readings and discussion demonstrating the basic structural and technical elements of fiction with opportunities for practice and peer workshop.  
Prerequisite: ENG 261 or consent of instructor.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:  
*Ecco Anthology of Contemporary American Short Fiction*  
Edited by Joyce Carol Oates

You will also spend a lot of money photocopying your original work for distribution to your peers for full class workshops. You will need lots of paper, inkjet cartridges, and dedication.

OBJECTIVES  
There are two ways to begin thinking and writing like a fiction writer. The first is to write and we’ll be doing lots of that. The second best way to become a writer is to read, so we’ll be doing lots of that, too. But we won’t be reading in the same way other classes have you read. We’ll be *reading as writers*—with our focus on the craft and strategies that went into making the art. To meet that goal, we’ll be breaking down the various elements of form and perspective and working on ways to use those elements in our own work. You will be required to write a considerable amount of fiction this semester and you must not be shy about sharing your work with classmates and editing their work as well. Learning to give and accept constructive criticism is an important step in becoming a writer (and really an artist of any sort). Expect to write three complete stories, workshop two of them in class, and give an in-class reading of the last. You will also *actively* engage in peer editing (and probably have some quizzes, too).

Here are the official Program Learning Outcomes for this course:

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 articulate useful, critical editorial advice for peer writers.
4.) The student will demonstrate strategic revision on completed creative work.

That all boils down to a pretty simple goal (we can call them **Student Learning Outcomes**): you will read a number of professional stories and examine them for craft; you’ll write skillful, original stories and present them in workshop; you will treat your classmates’ work with respect and a keen editorial eye; and you’ll turn in a portfolio of polished, revised work. Sounds good to me!

Since I know you all want to do well as far as grades go, here’s the breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Breakdown</th>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Craft Analysis</td>
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<td>Short Story 1</td>
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<td>Short Story 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short Short Story</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
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**ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION**

If you want to do well in this course, you should attend every class period. There will be numerous discussions, a few quizzes, group activities, and assorted in-class assignments. Your eventual grade will benefit from high attendance and active participation. I give everyone two free absences. (That’s a week worth of class.) After that, any absences will mar your final grade.

If you let me know beforehand and have a reasonable excuse (serious illness, death in the family, etc), a **limited** number of absences beyond the freebies will be counted as excused; if you don’t get in touch with me, then it will be unexcused. In either case, being absent is not an excuse for missing assignments. You should either call a classmate or talk to me and find out what went on in class if you were not able to attend. If you miss more than two classes without a valid excuse your attendance and participation grades will drop a full letter grade for each additional absence. If your absences are more than a fourth of class time, you will automatically fail the course. In other words, I give you a free week to skip: use it wisely.

**Don't miss days on which you have work due or when your story is the focus of discussion.**

**I DON'T ACCEPT LATE WORK AND I DON'T GIVE EXTRA CREDIT.**

The effort you put into assignments, group work, and class discussion will count toward your grade. If you are absent for either class discussion days or group work, your grade will be affected. If you doze, pass notes, use your cell phone, or
act in a disruptive manner (specifically, talk while others are talking), expect your grade to suffer accordingly.

Tardiness is rude and annoys me more than you imagine. Be punctual. Every time you’re late for class, you lose points. No kidding. For every two tardies, I’ll dock you an absence.

**READINGS**
Most of the assignments (and any quizzes) relate to the stories and essays you’ll read for class discussion. Keep up with the readings; they are very important. We will be analyzing them carefully. I expect you to have read and thought about them before you come to class—and not in the five minutes before class begins.

**HOMEWORK**
There will be a variety of writing and reading assignments. Do them and you’ll improve your fiction and your grade. Don’t do them and both will suffer. I also expect you to keep a creative journal this semester. This is not an assignment; it’s good advice. Keeping a work journal is one of the best ways to hang on to your good ideas and have them bear fruit later. If you think good ideas will stick with you and you won’t forget them, you’ll forget them. Write it down. Make it a habit. Frequent journal keeping keeps writer’s block at bay. Trust me on this.

There will also be one Craft Analysis Essay where you’ll analyze two of the stories from your assigned readings and explain an element which the authors use successfully. Expect to quote from the stories to back up your argument and use MLA format.

**DETAILS**
Pay particular attention to each assignment description. This should give you a good idea what I am looking for in each piece and the sort of errors I will mark. I will also go over this in class. Please note that if you fail to turn in a major assignment (a story, craft analysis, or the final portfolio), you will fail the course.

**FORMAT**
All in-class assignments must be written neatly in ink. Stories and out-of-class exercises must be printed via computer; no handwriting for those. **Staple sequential pages together.** Your work must be presented in a neat and professional manner. Don’t use an inkjet on its death bed. If I can barely see the type, or it’s blurry, how can I enjoy the story?

**FICTION**
You’re going to write three stories this semester, two full-length stories (2000 to 4000 words) and one flash fiction (under 1000 words). I don’t forbid genre work (horror, sci fi, mystery, romance), but I prefer if you try your hand at literary fiction first. (We’ll talk more about what I mean by that.) I do insist that you avoid gratuitous sex, violence, or hateful characters. Notice the word gratuitous. Sometimes sex, violence, and hateful characters have their place in accomplished
fiction, but it takes skill. This semester we’re here to hone our initial skills; if you want to write an especially nasty story after you’ve mastered the basics, go for it—but **not** for this class. If you really want to write a disturbingly graphic story which you feel has literary merit, see me. Perhaps you’ll convince me that your skills are up to it and we’ll let the class decide if you succeeded. But you have to be pretty convincing. And see me **first**.

**GRADING**
How will I grade creative work? It’s partially subjective, of course, but I give you ground rules in both format and content that should clarify what I’m looking for. Effort counts, too. I don’t know who said it, but art really is 98% perspiration, 2% inspiration. Perspire a little—no, perspire a lot—and you’ll get an A. If you are spectacularly gifted and turn in sloppy work, you won’t get an A. The race isn’t won by the naturally swiftest; it’s won by the runner who trains the most productively. This course is for the writer-in-training. Consider me a coach.

**PORTFOLIO**
The last thing you hand in this semester will be an anthology of the work you produced this semester. I expect it to be revised work; nobody produces their sharpest stuff first time out. The work you write in January and February will reappear in May and it **must** be in a more polished form. Save your early draft. I want to see multiple versions, so I can compare how your manuscript has improved. We’ll talk more about this as the semester progresses, but my warning now is you must be prepared to revise. Writing is revision. (Say it again: writing is revision. It should be one of your mantras.) I also want an introduction to your portfolio, in the form of a brief self-analysis of your work: your strengths, your weaknesses, your intentions for revision.

**WITHHELD GRADES SEMESTER GRADES POLICY (A-54)**
Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**
To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/
ACCEPTABLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR
Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.

PLAGIARISM
I don’t know why anyone would take a creative writing class and then not use that as an opportunity to do his or her own work, but, hey, stranger things have happened. So, just to remind you, claiming something as your original work when someone else wrote it is called PLAGIARISM. The penalty for plagiarism on any assignment is failure for the course. I will also notify the Dean’s office of any documented case. Plagiarism is theft and it’s a particularly egregious offense to writers. I can’t imagine why anyone would want to plagiarize in a creative writing course, but if you’re ever tempted, just remember, even if no one catches you, you’ll end up with bad, bad karma.

Here’s the university’s official statement on the subject:

Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Definition of Academic Dishonesty
Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one’s own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one’s paper without giving the author due credit.
AND NOW FOR SOME GRUMPY WARNINGS:

I will fail the following:
Late major assignments (stories or craft analysis)
Incomplete work
Stories not presented in expected format (this includes going over the word count)
Stories with an abundance of uncorrected misspellings or typos (more than 2 per page)—professional editors have no patience with thoughtless errors. Neither do I.

Always keep copies of what you write for your own protection in the event your work should be lost or misplaced. It probably won't be, but the general rule is save everything just in case.

SOME COMFORTING LAST WORDS
If you don't know, ask. If you can't remember, ask. If you panic, talk to me before the night before. Most importantly, relax.

I always give this advice: lose yourself in your art. It’s the best way to create something you are proud of and to which others respond. I believe that each of you can write interesting, well-crafted, perhaps astounding stories this semester. Throw yourself into this course. Abandon your doubt. Focus and work hard. Don’t take yourself too seriously but take your writing seriously.

Do this and you’ll have more fun and you’ll get a better grade. And you’ll be a better writer.
TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

Note: I will also give you handouts—craft essays and occasional published stories to read beyond your workshop stories. Sometimes frequently, sometimes less, depending on our workload.

Week One
1/22  Introduction to course and each other. Explain and discuss the goals of the course. What makes good fiction? A word about workshops.
   **HOMEWORK:** Read handouts. Buy book.

1/24  Discuss process.
   **HOMEWORK:** Read “Lobster Night” by Russell Banks.

Week Two
1/29  Discuss Banks.
   **HOMEWORK:** Read “Off” by Aimee Bender.

1/31  Discuss stories.
   **HOMEWORK:** Discuss Bender. First workshopers finish first full story. Read “Ranch Girl” by Maile Meloy.

Week Three
2/5   Discuss Meloy. First stories due for group one. Exchange stories for beginning of workshops.
   **HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

2/7   **WORKSHOP 1**
   **HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop. Read “The Love of My Life” by T.C. Boyle.

Week Four
2/12  **WORKSHOP 1** and discuss Boyle.
   **HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

2/14  **WORKSHOP 1**
   **HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop. Read Jhumpa Lahiri’s “Once in a Lifetime.”

Week Five
2/19  **WORKSHOP 1** and discuss Lahiri.
   **HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

2/21  **WORKSHOP 1**
   **HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop. Read “To Those of You Who Missed Your Connecting Flights Out of O’Hare,” by Amy Hempel.
**Week Six**
2/26 WORKSHOP 1 and discuss Hempel.
HOMEWORK: Read and comment on stories for workshop.

2/28 WORKSHOP 1
HOMEWORK: Read and comment on stories for workshop. Read “Aurora” by Junot Diaz.

**Week Seven**
3/5 WORKSHOP 1
HOMEWORK: Discuss Diaz. Read and comment on stories for workshop. Discuss craft analysis.

3/7 WORKSHOP 1
Read and comment on stories for workshop. Write Craft Analysis essay.

**Week Eight**
3/12 WORKSHOP 1. Craft Analysis due.
HOMEWORK: Work on Story 2.

3/14 Discuss handout.
HOMEWORK: Read and comment on stories for workshop.

**Week Nine**
3/19 Spring Break
3/21 Spring Break

**Week Ten**
3/26 WORKSHOP 2
HOMEWORK: Read and comment on stories for workshop.

3/28 WORKSHOP 2
HOMEWORK: Read and comment on stories for workshop. Reading “Television” by Lydia Davis.

**Week Eleven**
4/2 WORKSHOP 2 and discuss Davis.
HOMEWORK: Read and comment on stories for workshop.

4/4 WORKSHOP 2
HOMEWORK: Read and comment on stories for workshop. Read “Death of the Right Fielder,” by Stuart Dybek.
Week Twelve
4/9 WORKSHOP 2 and discuss Dybek. 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

4/11 WORKSHOP 2. 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop. 
Read “Night Women” by Edwidge Danticat.

Week Thirteen
4/16 WORKSHOP 2 and discuss Danticat. 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

4/18 **NO CLASS.** 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

Week Fourteen
4/23 WORKSHOP 2 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

4/25 WORKSHOP 2 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop. 
Read flash handout (TBA).

Week Fifteen
4/30 WORKSHOP 2 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on stories for workshop.

5/2 WORKSHOP 2 
**HOMEWORK:** Read and comment on last stories for workshop.

Week Sixteen
5/7 **Short-Short Fiction presentations** 
**HOMEWORK:** Revise earlier work to include in portfolios.

5/9 **Short-Shorts, cont’d.** 
Last day discussion. Portfolio questions. 
**HOMEWORK:** Revise and prepare portfolios.

There is no Final Exam for this course.

Final Portfolio due by Noon, Wednesday, May 15 in my office (LA 214). 
**No late portfolios accepted.**

Congratulations, you’re done. Have a wonderful summer!