ENGLISH 463.090 – Elements of Craft
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1-2:15 PM
Spring 2019
Ferguson 177

Dr. John A. McDermott
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Office hours: 11:30-12:30 PM (MW), 2:00-3PM (TTH), 11-Noon (F), and by appointment.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:
Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self, Danielle Evans
Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk, Ben Fountain
Euphoria, Lily King
Get in Trouble, Kelly Link
This is Where I Leave You, Jonathan Tropper
Sing, Unburied, Sing, Jesmyn Ward
Battleborn, Claire Vaye Watkins
Sour Heart, Jenny Zhang

You should also have no hesitation with using dictionaries, guides to literary terms, and other reference resources. A writer who doesn’t love words is a musician who doesn’t love notes.

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION (from the General Bulletin):
Analysis of selected examples (either prose or poetry) with emphasis on technical, generic, and aesthetic features.

OBJECTIVES:
This course is designed to help fiction writers improve their craft by reading novels and story collections by established writers. Creative writing, like any art form or sport, is based on mastering a host of skills. In this course you will read like a writer—looking at elements such as (but not limited to) setting, dialogue, point of view, and characterization. We will primarily analyze literary fiction, but we will also be looking at the limitations and freedoms authors face when working in a genre (such as fabulism or comedy). You may not like every book you read for this course—odds are you won’t—but you will see a range of strategies for storytelling which will help you develop your own skills as fiction writers. Assignments include a presentation, two craft analysis papers, and two short stories. There will also be a midterm and a final. When you leave the course, you should be a more attentive reader, a more precise writer, and fully
appreciative of the choices that fiction writers are faced with on every page. This
will, I guarantee, make your own fiction stronger.

Here are the official **Program Learning Outcomes** for this course. Your
**Student Learning Outcomes** (beautiful bureaucratic language, isn’t it?) are
based on these goals:

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.

**GRADING:**
Your grade in this course will be broken down like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Analysis</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Analysis</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story #1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story #2</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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**Grading Scale:**

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

**ATTENDANCE (5%)**
Attendance and active participation in this course are absolutely necessary. I give
every student **two** excused absences. More than two absences will affect your
grade. Each additional absence beyond the excused two will lower your grade half
a step (for example, from a B to B-). If you accrue more than six absences, you
will automatically fail the course regardless of your other work. If you are sick or
otherwise unable to attend class, please get in touch with me. Being absent is **not
an excuse for missed information or assignments**. You should either
contact me or a classmate to find out what went on in class if you are not able to
attend. You are responsible for the material discussed in class on the days you
were absent.

**Warning:** I do not accept late work or give extensions on papers or
stories.

Please **do not be late for class**. One or two late arrivals is excusable; consistent
tardiness is rude and will affect your grade.
PARTICIPATION (5%)
Class participation is incredibly important in a course designed like this. I prefer
to conduct my classes as an open conversation. I will ask questions and you will
be expected to respond. That should launch us into a discussion about the works.
I hope that you will engage not only with me but also with others in the class. I
grade class participation in 2 main ways:

Discussion: Be prepared to talk about the readings on the day we discuss them
in class. If you do not understand the readings, feel free to ask questions about
what they mean. Let me stress that I’m not looking for "right" answers. I want
you to tell me what you think and defend it with reasonable examples from the
text. If you do not wish to talk in class, know that your grade (as long as you
appear attentive) will be no higher than a C. Try to talk at least once a discussion.

Active Listening: I expect you will listen to your classmates when they are
discussing aspects of the literature we read. There is always a chance that you will
think that the person talking is a complete idiot, but then again, they may say
something brilliant. Always treat people with respect and try to gain the most
from what they are saying and you will be treated in the same way.

EXAMS (40%):
There will be two exams in the course, one covering the first half of the course
and the other covering the remainder of the readings. Each exam will have 3
parts: identification, short answer, and a long essay. You will have an hour and
fifteen minutes for the mid-term exam and two hours for the final. There may be
a creative option on the last exam.

PRESENTATION (10%)
Each of you will choose an author and work and give a brief ten minute
presentation to the class about some aspect of the work you have researched
outside of class discussion. I’m not looking for biographical information here
unless it directly relates to a specific technical choice the author makes. We’ll talk
more about this assignment as the semester progresses.

PAPERS & STORIES (40%)
You will write 2 Analysis Papers this semester and 2 Short Stories. The
essays will analyze a single element or technique employed by the author for a
particular effect which you will explain clearly and succintly. 3-4 pages is ample
for those assignments. The stories will be anywhere from 2000-4000 words and
you will be expected to write a brief preface to your fiction which explains how the
reading you have done in the course has affected the decisions you made as an
author. I expect you to use techniques that you see in action in the readings or
you may react against an author and employ a polar effect. It’s up to you to
determine the choice, but you must explain your choice and I must see your
choice at work in the fiction you create for the course. This is not a workshop
course, so only I will be reading your fiction.
All essays must be typed, double-spaced in MLA format, which will be explained in class. You will be required to use parenthetical citation any time you cite anything from any text. All essays should have a standard heading on the top left corner of the page (your name, class title, my name, the date). Each paper should have an original title. Please use good quality, white paper. Staple all sequential pages.

Stories will also have strict format requirements: double-spaced, appropriate font, with left header and word count. I expect professional presentation of your fiction.

Always keep copies of what you write for your own protection. Do not give me the only copy of anything. In the event that your work should be lost, or misplaced, you want to make sure you have a back-up copy.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**
Please contact me if you are having any difficulties with the material due to a documented disability. I’m more than willing to accommodate you in a reasonable manner to help you succeed in this course. Many, many writers have blossomed despite physical, mental, and/or emotional hurdles. Just let me know and we can figure it out with the help of the University’s various and impressive resources.

The university asks us to include this information on all course policies:

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/

**Witheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54)**
I rarely use WH—the circumstances have to be extreme—but the university has asked all faculty to include the official policy on withheld grades:

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.
OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:
I will FAIL the following:

- Late essays & stories (Writing must be ready at the beginning of class)
- Incomplete work
- Work not typed in standard format
- Work with an abundance of spelling/grammatical errors (more than 2 per page)

ACCEPTABLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR (UNIVERSITY POLICY)

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.

Please read the complete policy at: http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp

KEEP ME INFORMED
Please keep me informed about anything you feel I should know about you, particularly if you feel it affects your performance in class. If you are having any difficulty with the material, please know that I will be more than happy to confer with you regarding it.

In this course you are all fiction writers. I will treat you as writers. Read like writers and learn from those who’ve come before you. Like dancers at the barre or musicians playing scales, you can learn to write fiction by imitating—and then departing from—the art that you ingest. Be attentive. Be precise. Be original.

Good luck.

**English 463, Spring 2019**
Tentative Syllabus

**WEEK ONE**
Introduction to the course.
What do you want from the course? What can you get? What do I expect from you?
**HOMEWORK:** Read course policy statement and syllabus.
Read handouts: excerpts from Chekhov’s letters and Carver’s “A Storyteller’s Shoptalk.”

**WEEK TWO**
28 Jan. Mon.
Discuss Chekhov, Carver, et al. What is the writer’s role?
What makes a contemporary short story? What makes a collection?
**HOMEWORK:** Read Evans.

30 Jan. Wed.
Discuss Evans.
**HOMEWORK:** Read Evans.
WEEK THREE
4 Feb. Mon. Discuss Evans.
**HOMEWORK:** Read Evans.

6 Feb. Wed. Last day on Evans.
**HOMEWORK:** Read Watkins.

WEEK FOUR
**HOMEWORK:** Read Watkins.

13 Feb. Wed. Discuss Watkins
**HOMEWORK:** Read Watkins

WEEK FIVE
18 Feb. Mon. Last day on Watkins.
**HOMEWORK:** Start Fountain.

20 Feb. Wed. Discuss Fountain.
**HOMEWORK:** Write first craft analysis. Read Fountain.

WEEK SIX
25 Feb. Mon. First Analysis Due. Discuss Fountain.
**HOMEWORK:** Finish Fountain.

27 Feb. Wed. Last day on Fountain.
**HOMEWORK:** Read Zhang.

WEEK SEVEN
4 March Mon. Discuss Zhang.
**HOMEWORK:** Finish Zhang.

6 March Wed. Discuss Zhang.
**HOMEWORK:** Write Second Analysis.

WEEK EIGHT
11 March Mon. Second Analysis Due. Last day on Zhang.
**HOMEWORK:** Study for Midterm.

13 March Wed. Mid-Term Exam on Evans, Watkins, Fountain, & Zhang.
**HOMEWORK:** Read King.

WEEK NINE
18 March Mon. Spring Break

20 March Wed. Spring Break
WEEK TEN
25 March Mon. Discuss King.
**HOMEWORK:** Read King.

27 March Wed. Discuss King.
**HOMEWORK:** Finish King

WEEK ELEVEN
1 April Mon. Last day on King
**HOMEWORK:** Read Link.

3 April Wed. Discuss Link.
**HOMEWORK:** Read Link.

WEEK TWELVE
8 April Mon. **First Short Story due.** Discuss Link
**HOMEWORK:** Read Link. Start working on your Second Story.

10 April Wed. Last day on Link.
**HOMEWORK:** Read Tropper.

WEEK THIRTEEN
15 April Mon. Discuss Tropper
**HOMEWORK:** Finish Diaz

17 April Wed. Discuss Tropper
**HOMEWORK:** Finish Tropper.

WEEK FOURTEEN
22 April Mon. Last day on Tropper,
**HOMEWORK:** Read Ward.

24 April Wed. Discuss Ward
**HOMEWORK:** Read Ward.

WEEK FIFTEEN
29 April Mon. Discuss Ward.
**HOMEWORK:** Finish Ward.

1 May Wed. Last day on Ward.
**HOMEWORK:** Finish Second Story.
WEEK SIXTEEN

HOMEWORK: Prepare questions for exam review.

8 May Wed Review for exam.
HOMEWORK: Study for Final.

Final Exam on Wednesday, May 15th, 1-3PM in F 177.

Happy Summer!