ENGLISH 4363.001 – Elements of Craft  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30-10:45 AM  
Fall 2020  
Ferguson 177

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Office hours: 11:00-1PM (MW), 8:30-9:30AM (TU), and by appointment.

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

OFFICIAL CREDIT HOUR JUSTIFICATION  
ENGL 4363 “Elements of Craft” (3 credits) typically meets twice each week in 75-minute segments, three times a week in 50-minute segments, or one night a week in 150-minute segments, for 15-weeks, and includes a 2-hour final examination.  
Students are assigned substantial readings in contemporary published creative writing, either prose or poetry. They are required to write two craft analysis papers (roughly 10 pages total), give a presentation on one of the assigned texts, write two short stories or essays (2000-4000 words each, roughly 30 pages) or a body of original poetry (approximately six-ten poems), and participate in both a midterm and final exam, which may be critical or creative. These activities average at a minimum 6-9 hours of work each week to prepare outside of classroom hours.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:  
Sharp Teeth, Toby Barlow  
Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self, Danielle Evans  
Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk, Ben Fountain  
Get in Trouble, Kelly Link  
Fall on Your Knees, Ann-Marie MacDonald  
Everything I Never Told You, Celeste Ng  
Sing, Unburied, Sing, Jesmyn Ward  
Battleborn, Claire Vaye Watkins

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.

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>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft Analysis</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story #1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story #2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam/Story</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Grading Scale:**

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

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (10%)
Attendance and active participation in this course are absolutely necessary.

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. 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 record a five minute presentation for 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. It will be posted on D2L so the entire class may see it and participate in discussion regarding your topic.

PAPERS & STORIES (40%) You will write 1 Analysis Paper this semester and 2 Short Stories. The essay will analyze a single or closely related group of elements or techniques employed by the author for a particular effect which you will explain clearly and succinctly. 4-5 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).
Stories will also have strict format requirements: double-spaced, appropriate font, with left header and word count. I expect professional presentation of your fiction.

**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/

**Withheld 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.

**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.

**UNIVERSITY COVID 19 FACE MASK POLICY**
Masks (cloth face coverings) must be worn over the mouth and nose at all times in this class and appropriate physical distancing must be observed. Students not wearing a mask or observing social distancing will be asked to leave the class. All incidents of not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing will be reported to the Office of students’ Rights and Responsibilities. Students who are reported for multiple infractions of not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing may be subject to disciplinary action.

**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, Fall 2020**
Tentative Syllabus

**WEEK ONE**  
8/25  
Zoom 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 excerpts from Chekhov’s letters and Carver’s “A Storyteller’s Shoptalk.”

8/27  
Discuss Chekhov, Carver, et al. What is the writer’s role? What makes a contemporary short story? What makes a collection?  
**HOMEWORK:** Begin Evans.

**WEEK TWO**  
9/1  
Discuss Evans.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read Evans.

9/3  
Discuss Evans.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read Evans.

**WEEK THREE**  
9/8  
Discuss Evans.  
**HOMEWORK:** Finish Evans.

9/10  
Last Day on Evans.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read Watkins.
WEEK FOUR
9/15  Discuss Watkins
     **HOMEWORK:** Read Watkins
9/17  Discuss Watkins
     **HOMEWORK:** Finish Watkins.

WEEK FIVE
9/22  Discuss Watkins.
     **HOMEWORK:** Begin Fountain
9/24  Discuss Fountain
     **HOMEWORK:** Read Fountain

WEEK SIX
9/29  Discuss Fountain
     **HOMEWORK:** Read Fountain.
10/1  Discuss Fountain.
     **HOMEWORK:** Finish Fountain.

WEEK SEVEN
10/6  Discuss Fountain.
     **HOMEWORK:** Read Ng
10/8  Discuss Ng.
     **HOMEWORK:** Read Ng. Write Craft Analysis.

WEEK EIGHT
10/13 **Craft Analysis Due.** Discuss Ng.
     **HOMEWORK:** Finish Ng.
10/15 Last day on Ng.
     **HOMEWORK:** Take-Home Midterm.

WEEK NINE
10/20 **Mid-Term Exam due.** Discuss Ward
10/22 Discuss Ward
     **HOMEWORK:** Read Ward.

WEEK TEN
10/27 Discuss Ward.
     **HOMEWORK:** Read Ward
10/29 Discuss Ward
HOMEWORK: Read Barlow.

WEEK ELEVEN
11/3  First Short Story due. Discuss Barlow.
HOMEWORK: Read Barlow.

11/5  Discuss Barlow.
HOMEWORK: Read Barlow. Finish First Story.

WEEK TWELVE
11/10 First Short Story due. Last day on Barlow
HOMEWORK: Read Link. Start working on your Second Story.

11/12 Discuss Link.
HOMEWORK: Read Link

WEEK THIRTEEN
11/17 Discuss Link
HOMEWORK: Read Link

11/19 Discuss Link/Prepare for MacDonald
HOMEWORK: Read MacDonald. Our discussions of her novel will progress online.

WEEK FOURTEEN
11/24 Holiday

11/26 Happy Thanksgiving!
HOMEWORK: Have you read MacDonald?

WEEK FIFTEEN
12/1 Second story due. Discuss MacDonald.
HOMEWORK: Read MacDonald.

12/3 Discuss MacDonald.
HOMEWORK: Write Final story.

Your Final is a story due in my SFA e-mail by Friday, December 11.

Happy winter break!