

CRW 2100 – Intermediate Fiction Writing, Class # 12899, Spring 2020

Instructor Name: John Bolen (preferred title in class: John)

Course meeting times & locations: Matherly Hall, Thursdays periods 9-11 (8:30am to 11:30am)

Office Location and Hours: Turlington, 4415, Wednesdays, Thursdays 2:00pm – 3:00pm, or by an appointment made at least 24 hours in advance

Course website: elearning.ufl.edu (UF Canvas website)

Instructor Email: johnbolen@ufl.edu

Course Description

This course will focus on why good short fiction works and why bad short fiction does not. My hope is, by the end of the course, you will be an iota closer to writing good short fiction, or you will at least have a slightly better ear for good short fiction, *or* you will be able to determine for yourselves what *you* deem to be good short fiction and what you deem bad short fiction. We will read both classic and contemporary short stories, paying close attention to the “how” rather than the “why,” while also interrogating the intrinsic entanglement of the two. By the end of the course, you will have learned a portion of the various styles, methods, techniques, and maneuvers available to the short story writer, and you will have employed some of them in your own writing.

About short stories, Truman Capote said,

Since each story presents its own technical problems, obviously one can't generalize about them on a two-times-two-equals-four basis. Finding the right form for your story is simply to realize the most *natural* way of telling the story. The test of whether or not a writer has divined the natural shape of his story is just this: after reading it, can you imagine it differently, or does it silence your imagination and seem to you absolute and final? As an orange is final. As an orange is something nature has made just right.

About short stories, Joy Williams said,

I do believe there is, in fact, a mystery to the whole enterprise that one dares to investigate at peril. The story knows itself better than the writer does at some point, knows what's being said before the writer figures out how to say it.

John Cheever

Part of the thrill of being told a story is the chance of being hoodwinked or taken. Nabokov is a master at this. The telling of lies is a sort of sleight-of-hand that displays our deepest feelings about life.

William Faulkner

If you're going to write, write about human nature. It's the only thing that doesn't date.

General Education Objectives:

This course confers General Education credit for Composition (C), and also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).

- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.

- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6,000 words.

General Education Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

Required Texts: *The Death of Ivan Illyich*, by Leo Tolstoy. All of the other reading will be provided on Canvas. You must print all online readings and bring them to class. If I see that you are not doing this, you will get a 0% participation grade for that day.

Recommended Texts: Key word here is “Recommended.” I do not want anyone spending money on something that they will not see the point in owning after the class is finished. These are texts that have helped me understand the short story form, and texts that I believe contain a plethora of examples of good writing: *Tunneling to the Center of the Earth*, Kevin Wilson. *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Nine Stories*, J.D. Salinger. *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*, Richard Yates. *The Old Forest*, Peter Taylor. *The New Yorker Stories*, Ann Beattie. *Dusk*, James Salter.

Assignments/Grading:

Reading:

- Short stories every week, occasional interviews, your classmates’ stories.

Writing:

- Creative exercises
- Short Essays on the assigned short stories (600 words, 9 total)
- Workshop letters (one typed page minimum)
- One story (minimum 1 pages, maximum 10 pages)
- Artistic Statement (600 words)
- Story revision

Participation: 200 Points (See Course Policies)

- You are expected to be awake, prepared, and present in class each week. This class only meets once a week, so if you miss a class, you've missed an entire week. What's more, you also will have fleeced your classmates of the opportunity to hear your thoughts on their stories.
- Preparation is part of participation. Being prepared for class means that you will have thoroughly read what was assigned. This means taking notes, writing in the margins, highlighting, or whatever it is you need to do to feel comfortable talking about a piece from beginning to end. If I feel like you are not holding up your end of the bargain on this, I will begin quizzing you.
- Preparation is especially important for the workshop portion of the class. You should be reading your peers' work **twice**, both without and with a pen. I will talk more about this in class.

Creative Exercises: 150 points

- I will often assign page-long, creative exercises, either in class or out, which we will read in class, and you will hand in. These will be graded only for completion. If you do them to the best of your ability, then this should be an easy 150 points.

Weekly Essays: 270 points

- You will complete nine 600-word essays on the assigned readings, which you will submit on Canvas before each class. They should be double-spaced, Times New Roman, and in 12-point font. These essays will examine certain aspects of style, craft, form, and their effects on the reader and on the story. If you make a claim, it must be supported by evidence, such as a quoted passage from the reading. In the essay, discuss certain aspects of the story that you feel either produced or failed to produce a response from you, the reader. Where does it succeed? Where does it fail? How do you, as a reader, respond to it, and why? There is a certain beneficial separation, for writers, when they replace "I" with "The reader." So, in your essays, don't refer to yourself, refer to the reader.

Workshop letters: Part of your participation grade

- You will write a one-page letter (12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced) to each person whose story is being workshopped. Bring one copy to class for your classmate and submit one copy on Canvas.

Stories (Short Story, 150 points, Final revision, 180 points, Artistic Statement, 50 points)

Short Story

You should obey rules of grammar and appropriate usage. I understand that great writers often abandon these rules, but I believe that you should have a good grasp on formal storytelling. Should you feel compelled, for the sake of your story, to intentionally disobey these rules of grammar and syntax, then we can discuss the decision in class. I am looking for clarity, attention to detail, thoughtfulness, attention to language, and creativity. The story can be about literally anything in the universe.

Artistic Statement

What other part of the universe would you like to write about?

Grading Rubric for Weekly Essays:

Content: Ideas should be intellectually creative and critical. Papers offer personal, fresh insights into the material. Avoid summary. Go beneath the surface.

Organization: Use an orderly structure that facilitates reading and sustains reader interest. Paragraphs have meaningful topic sentences and cohere. Sentences should be written with an eye for clarity. Transitions between paragraphs should create a logical progression of ideas.

Evidence: Support claims with examples from the text. Use relevant details to support your main ideas. Quotations should be properly integrated into the body of the paper. Excessively long quotations should not be necessary.

Development: Analyze your evidence in a way that supports your main points. Papers should build off each other and become more and more rich as the course progresses.

Mechanics: Spelling, grammar, and punctuation should show careful attention and proofreading (subject-verb agreement, run-ons, fragments, comma errors, unclear pronouns.)

Course Policies:

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Your second unexcused absence will cost you a letter grade. If you have three unexcused absences you will fail the course. A justified excuse (medical emergency, family emergency, religious holiday, etc.) will be excepted from this rule.
3. If you are late 3 times you will be marked absent.
4. Assignments should be submitted at the beginning of class on the day assigned and in the assigned format. Stories should be submitted the class before they will be workshopped.
5. *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities.* Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
6. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism.* Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
7. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.
8. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
9. *Grade Appeals.* In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
10. *Course Evaluations.* Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>
11. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>
12. *UF's policy on Harassment:* UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>

Weekly Schedule

Reading assignments, scheduling, and weekly themes are subject to change. You will be notified by email. The themes are merely meant to get you thinking about the critical essays; they are not *completely* arbitrary, but close. Workshop order, however, is completely arbitrary.

Your story is *always* due the class period before your workshop.

Your name
Times New Roman
12-point font
Page numbers
Stapled

January 7th: Introduction/orientation

“Chixiclub,” T.C. Boyle
“Silver Water,” Amy Bloom

January 14th

“A Good Man is Hard to Find,” Flannery O’Connor
“Bartleby, The Scrivener,” Herman Melville

Essay # 1 Due

January 21st

“The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” Leo Tolstoy

Workshop 1

January 28th

“Danny in Transit,” David Leavitt
“A Platonic Relationship,” Ann Beattie

Essay # 2 Due

Workshop 2

February 4th

“For Esmé—with Love and Squalor,” J.D. Salinger

“Parents’ Morning Epiphany,” Zadie Smith

Workshop 3

February 11th

Watch Seinfeld: Season 8, Episode 22

Essay # 3 Due

A lecture on the short story and its relation to the sitcom.

Workshop 4

February 18th

“Apollo,” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

“Gold Coast,” James Alan McPherson

Workshop 5

February 25th

“Treasure State,” Smith Henderson

“The Man on the Flying Trapeze,” William Saroyan

Essay # 4 Due

Workshop 6

March 10th

“Arizona,” John Edgar Wideman

“Wildfire Johnny,” Kevin Wilson

Workshop 7

March 17th

“What Is Remembered,” Alice Munro

“An Ex-Mas Feast,” Uwem Akpan

Essay # 5 Due

Workshop 8

March 24th

“Most Die Young,” Camille Bordas

“Goodbye and Good Luck,” Grace Paley

Workshop 9

March 31st

Watch “Oh, Hello on Broadway” (Netflix)

Watch John Mulaney stand up

Lecture on “The comedian as an example of voice and first-person narration.”

Essay # 6 due

Workshop 10

April 7th

“The Paperhanger,” William Gay

“On the Hill,” Elizabeth Spencer

April 14th

“The Housebreaker of Shady Hill,” John Cheever

“The Gift of the Prodigal,” Peter Taylor

Essay # 7 due

April 21st

Last day of classes.

Revision and artistic statement due April 30th.

Quotes from writers (To be added to further)

Part of the thrill of being told a story is the chance of being hoodwinked or taken. Nabokov is a master at this. The telling of lies is a sort of sleight-of-hand that displays our deepest feelings about life.

- John Cheever

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- William Faulkner

