

University of Florida Gainesville
MFA Workshop
Uwem Akpan

Spring 2019, Tuesday, 4:05-7:05 PM, CBD 216
Office: Turlington 4358
Office hours: By appointment
E-mail: uwem.akpan@ufl.edu

*We are one,
After all,
You and I,
Together,
We suffer,
Together,
Exist, and
Forever
Will recreate
Each other.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Text: *The Granta Book of the African Short Story*, Helon Habila, Granta

Recommended Text: *Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*, Bausch & Cassill

Recommended Text: *John Updike, The Early Stories: 1953-1975*

Writing: I expect each of you to put up **two** new stories or novel excerpts for workshop this semester. You must also significantly revise one of the stories you hand in for workshop and turn in any such revisions on or before 5 pm on Friday, April 27. Each submission should be 20 to 25 pages. All manuscripts should come with a name, a title and page numbers. They must be double-spaced and typed in a legible 12-point font. Recommended fonts are Times, Times Roman, Cambria, Garamond, and Baskerville. For those of you working on novels, you may choose to put up a fairly large chunk of your work once during the semester and take up both slots that night. That way, you can put up as many as 50 pages at a time. Novelists, like the rest, must rewrite 20 or 25 pages for final submission. **You must distribute copies of stories for workshop a week before your workshop day.**

Discussions: We will spend most of our time workshopping your stories and sometimes discussing assigned stories and issues of craft, content, or the writer's life. Most of these issues will arise naturally from our workshops, but I am also asking each of you to submit by email, at least, one question about writing (or the writer's life) that genuinely concerns

you; you can do this at any point during the semester. Please, check the resources section of our Canvas regularly to see if I have uploaded new stories for you to read.

Critiquing: Once you have committed yourself to a workshop date, little short of death should deter you from fulfilling that commitment. Remember that your objective as a critic, both in your written and oral comments, is to do for others what you would want done to your own manuscript. “Great story, send it to *The Atlantic!*” is as useless as “Why don’t you go back to being a carpenter?” This means recognizing the strengths of a manuscript (even if you think these are few and far between), paying lots of (nonjudgmental) attention to what the author is trying to get us to think and feel, as well as tactfully pointing out the story’s weaknesses and offering concrete suggestions for improvement. My motto is: **Say what needs to be said but politely.** Authors should go home feeling inspired to revise their stories, not to get drunk and jump off a building. From time to time, I will collect your written comments (**one page, single-paced letter**) and keep track of what you say in class.

Grading: Individual stories will not be graded. One-third of your final grade will depend on the effort you put into your writing during the semester and one-third on the quality of your revision. The final third of your grade will depend on your oral and written contributions to our discussions and workshops. Obviously, you are expected to attend every class. Missing two or more workshops generally means failing the course.

Caveat: I am open-minded, but I have blind spots and biases like all teachers. All judgments about the quality of a piece of fiction are subjective. Please, come see me if you don’t understand or agree with my comments. If something about the class upsets you, come to see me so we can discuss it (or take your classmate out for a walk, a cup of coffee or tea or some other beverage—and talk). Come in for conferences as often as seems useful.

TENATIVE SCHEDULE

- Jan 07:** Introduction.
Sign up for workshops.
- Jan 15:** Lecture on Suspense/Characterization/Facial expressions/Body language/Dark humor/Clips from *Jaws*, the movie.
- Jan 22: Dan S/Tim
- Jan 29: Savannah/Gardener
- Feb 05: Michelle/Jackson

- Feb 12: Drew/Django
- Feb 19: Dan G/August
- Feb 26: John/Earnest
- Mid-term
- Mar 12: Elizabeth/Tim
- Mar 19: Dan/Michelle
Lecture on middle of the story/conclusion of the story/More on Characterization/Clips from *Jaws*, the movie.
- Mar 26: Gardener/Savannah
Letter to the Young Poet by Reiner Maria Rilke
- Apr 02: Drew/Django/John
Humor: “The Voter” by Chinua Achebe, “Gimpel the Fool” by Isaac Singer, “Jambula Tree” by Monica Arac de Nyeko (all on Canvas).
- Apr 09: Dan G/Jackson
Humor Continued: “Love” by Robert Olen Butler” (on Canvas)
- Apr 16: August/Earnest/Elizabeth
- Apr 23 Excerpts from *The Writing Life* by Annie Dillard (Canvas)
Conclusion

We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.

Jonathan Gotsschall

Additional Information:

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/>.

Student disability services:

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.

Grading:

For information on UF Grading policies, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

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.

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>

UF Reading and Writing Center:

The Reading and Writing Center at the University of Florida is an excellent resource for improving reading comprehension and writing skills. For more information, see: <http://www.at.ufl.edu/rwcenter/>

Harassment:

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/scr/sexual/>