

CRW 4905 3304 12507 U Akpan

**University of Florida Gainesville
Advanced Seminar in Fiction Writing 4905
Uwem Akpan**

Fall 2020, Thurs, 4:05-7:05 PM
Office: Zoom
Office hours: By appointment on Zoom
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

Covid-19 Statement: In light of the continuing impacts of Covid-19, this course will be offered entirely through online course sessions. We will meet synchronously on Zoom every Tuesday, from 4:05 to 7:05pm. Outside of class time, you are responsible for completing readings, responses, and your own creative work. Our classes will rely heavily on discussion which, I hope, will help to bridge some of the gap between our computer screens. Please, be sure to download Zoom on your personal computer before the start of the class and familiarize yourself with how it works. I will send instructions to the class email via Canvas about how to join our Zoom meetings.

If you as an individual have any COVID-related hardships which may obstruct your performance in this class, please communicate with me as well as making use of all UF resources available to you. We can then assemble a plan to help you complete the class and fulfill all requirements in the way most beneficial for you.

Required Text: *The Granta Book of the African Short Story*, Helon Habila, Granta
Recommended Text: *Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*, Bausch & Cassill

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 email to me on or before 5 pm on Monday, December 8, the last day of class. Each submission should be 5000 words. 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 10,000 words at a time. Novelists, like the rest, must rewrite at least the first 5000 words for final submission. **You must distribute copies of workshop stories a week before your workshop day.**

Discussions: We will spend two hours of each class workshopping your stories and the remaining hour 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. I will often assign or hand out copies of stories that might illuminate these concerns. 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. I will regularly collect your written comments (**one page, single-paced letter**) and keep track of what you say in class. While it is true that I favor quality over quantity in both instances, repeated failure to turn in thoughtful, complete critiques or to contribute to our in-class discussions will affect your grade (see below).

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 and a report of a visiting writer's reading on or off campus. 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.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Sept 03: Introduction/Sign up for workshops.

Sept 10: “Teaching and Writing Fiction” by Wallace Stegner, “The Nature and Aim of Fiction” by Flannery O’Connor’s and “What’s Art?” by Leo Tolstoy.

1 **Nathaniel**

2. **Hannah**

Sept 17: Lecture on Suspense/Characterization/Facial expressions/Body language/Dark humor/Clips from *Jaws*, the movie.

3 **Ann**

4 **Skyler**

5 **Phillip**

Sept 24: Place of Humor in Writing: “The Voter” by Chinua Achebe, “Gimpel the Fool” by Isaac Singer, “Love” by Robert Olen Butler” (from *Canvas*), “Baptizing the Gun” by Uwem Akpan (newyorker.com)

6 **Julia**

7 **JT**

8 **Alexis**

Oct 01: Writing from the perspective of children. “Stickfighting Days” by Olufemi Terry (*Granta*), “Jambula Tree” by Monica Arac de Nyeko (*Canvas*), “My Parents’ Bedroom” by Uwem Akpan (newyorker.com)

9 Alana

10 Shalisa

11 Brian

Oct 08: *Letter to the Young Poet* by Reiner Maria Rilke

12 Charlie

13 Rob

14 Zahria

Oct 15: Lecture on the middle of the story/Illustrations from “The Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka (*Anthology*) and *Jaws*

15 Ann

Oct 22:

16 Skyler

17 Zahria

Oct 29: Lecture on Revision and Rewriting

18 Alexis

19 JT

20 Phillip

Nov 05: “Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals?” by Yvonne Vera, “Bumsters,” by EC Osundu, “Good Soldier,” by Maaza Mengiste (all from *Granta*)

21 Julia

22 Brian

Nov 12:

23 Charles

24 Hannah

Nov 19:

25 Shalisa

26 Alana

Nov 26: Happy Thanksgiving!

Dec 03: End of Class: Lecture on dramatic ending/Loose ends/Faculty Evaluation. **By 5 pm, mail me a revision of at least one of your two workshopped stories.**

27 Rob

28 Nathaniel

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 Gottschall

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/sccr/sexual/>