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ENGL 5161

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University of New Orleans

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ENGLISH 5161
ADVANCED FICTION WRITING WORKSHOP
FALL 2015
Richard Goodman

English 5161-001

Advanced Fiction Writing Workshop

Tu/Th 11:00am-12:15pm

218 Milneburg Hall

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: A workshop in advanced fiction writing.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester,

1. students will have a surer ability to write fiction. They will be better writers.
2. students will have honed techniques they are acquainted with and have explored new techniques as well. They will be better able to differentiate and integrate these techniques in their own work. These techniques and aspects of fiction include point of view, dialogue, setting, character development, narrative, use of time, word choice, drama and openings and endings.
3. students will be demonstrably better critics of their colleagues' work. They will be better able to articulate not only what specifically needs improving in a piece of fiction but, especially, what are its strengths. They will be better literary analysts, widening their range of the aspects of fiction they examine.

MEANS OF ACHIEVING COURSE GOALS:

1. By writing two long pieces of fiction, each a minimum of 3,000 words. Students may submit a long excerpt from a novel in progress in lieu of one of these stories.
2. By an entire class being devoted to workshopping each of these stories.
3. By receiving colleagues' written critiques and line comments on their drafts and through receiving constructive criticism in workshop discussion.
4. By producing written carefully considered critiques of colleagues' work and through giving constructive verbal criticism of that work in class.

This is a workshop. Which means that any piece you submit, by its very nature, is not finished. You're workshopping it because you want to get responses and insights from your peers. This workshop will be an environment where trust and courage are fostered—where we all help one other become better writers. Most important, no trashing of work in any form whatsoever. This is a supportive atmosphere. You'll face plenty of hostility in the real world as a writer.

NOTE: The order and due dates for workshop pieces are posted on Moodle.

TEXTBOOK:

Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott. Paperback. (Anchor, 1995) ISBN: 0385480016. It should be available in the University Bookstore.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

As the core component of the class, each student will produce two short stories during the semester. These stories should be no less than 3,000 words in length. That's roughly twelve double-spaced pages. You will write only literary fiction—no genre fiction such as romance, mystery, sci-fi, and pornography.

NOTE: In lieu of one of these stories, you may submit a long—up to 4,000 words—excerpt from a novel in progress. Please submit a synopsis of the novel as well.

FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS ONLY:

Graduate students will be required to write an additional paper of 5-6 pages. They will choose one of three stories (to be posted at a later time) and analyze what fictional techniques serve to make this story especially strong, and how.

NOTE: Make sure you devote ample time to composing your stories. Waiting until the night before to write an entire story will produce poor work, which you may be embarrassed to submit to your instructor and peers for workshop. Give your stories the attention and writerly patience they deserve. You want to take full advantage of the time and effort devoted to your work.

CRITIQUES: In a workshop, writers depend on frank, constructive commentary and participation. So it is important that students be well prepared for discussing the work in class and that the critiques they write are ample, specific responses to their fellow students' works in progress. These typed critiques should be a minimum of ½ page, single-spaced. For some, critiquing work in this fashion will be new. Like anything, the more you do it, and do it diligently, the better you'll become at it.

PLEASE NOTE: Emphasis will be placed on, and considerable time devoted to, accessing and articulating positive aspects of a piece. I do not mean the equivalent of "I really like this," but criticism on a meaningful level, in which the critic brings forward, with specific examples, matters and techniques that are especially successful. These might be comments on word choice, voice, use of dialogue, manipulation of time, scene setting, character development and so on. When you struggle with what makes a piece successful—or parts of it successful—you can better garner that technique for your own writing.

Authors are not allowed to speak while their stories are being workshopped. They shouldn't try to defend or explain the choices they made in writing their stories. The reason is this: if you're thinking of a rebuttal or an explanation for something, then you're not fully engaged in listening. This defeats the point of being workshopped. At the end of the workshop, authors may ask a few questions to help clarify the suggestions made by readers.

After workshop, a copy of the written critique and annotated manuscript will be given to the story's author. An additional copy of the written critique will be given to the instructor. Always bring in two copies of your written critique. Remember to put your name on your critique along with the name of the writer being workshopped and the title of the piece.

PARTICIPATION: Other appropriate participation includes attending regularly and punctually and having all critiques and annotated manuscripts ready before the class. Pertinent participation in oral discussion will also form a part of your grade.

ABSENCES:

You are expected to attend class every day and to arrive on time. Students may be excused from approximately 225 minutes of class time over the course of the semester, which translates to three TTh class periods. Beyond that, your final course grade will be lowered by 10% for every day you are absent. Please note that students who are consistently late will be counted absent. Being late for class three times will count toward a single absence.

NOTE: I believe you should make every effort to attend all workshops. If you are willing and able to ask your fellow writers to give their all for your work, you should do the same for theirs.

If you know you're going to be late or miss the class, **please let me know.** If you miss a class, you are responsible for supplying the writer who was workshopped with your critique and noted manuscript. Also, you are responsible for procuring the next story to be workshopped. You can't ask another class member to do it for you. It is not the writer's responsibility to get that story to you. It's yours.

EVALUATION:

- 1. Participation: (10%)**
- 2. Critiques: (20%)**
- 3. Writing 1 and 2 (70%)**

GRADING STANDARDS:

A Excellent, exceptional, original. Thorough and consistently industrious in thought and in craft. Consistently engaging and interesting to read. Sound grammar and mechanics. Clear evidence of labor and polish and highest standards with the refusal to accept the second rate.

B Very good to good. Often industrious in thought and in execution, with obvious attempts at achieving excellence. Often engaging and interesting to read. Sound grammar and mechanics.

C Shows effort but is without particular originality, distinction, thoroughness, or industry in thought, feeling or description. Doesn't steadily maintain reader interest.

D Minimally adequate in the areas mention above with little evidence of having strived for excellence.

E Not at all adequate in the areas specified above. A weak, lazy paper written carelessly, without any personal investment.

CONFERENCES: I urge you to make appointments with me during office hours throughout the semester to talk about your work. If you can't make it during those office hours, we can work something out. I want to meet at least once with everyone individually.

PLAGIARISM AND INTELLECTUAL HONESTY: Any instance of plagiarism will be reported to the UNO Committee on Discipline for appropriate action. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is, and its official consequences, check the University's official word on the subject:

www.uno.edu/student-affairs-enrollment-management/documents/academic-dishonesty-policy-rev2014.pdf

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are required to contact the Office of Disability Services, 248 University Center, (504) 280-6222, to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. This should be done in the first week of the semester. For a full explanation of the University's policy regarding this matter, please consult this UNO webpage: www.uno.edu/disability-services/

NOTE: Both the UNO Academic Dishonesty and Disability Policy will be posted on Moodle as well.

OTHER RULES: You must turn off your cell-phone/I-Phone/Droid whatever before each class meeting. I do not allow laptops to be open in class except for writing exercises. It's distracting.