

EXPANSION AND INCLUSION OF CREATIVE WRITING: A COURSE FOR
ACADEMIC WRITERS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues for the creation of a creative writing course that will target and benefit students who do not see themselves as writers, but who seek help with their writing, either personally or academically. Creative writing as a discipline has turned toward professionalization and a career focus and thus narrowed their student outreach and blocked their ability to show the benefits of creative writing to students across fields of study. Creative writing skills can benefit students of all disciplines and skill levels by producing better writing and writers, as well as improved critical thinking and reading skills within those students. Combined with writing center theory and placed within the University Writing Center, this course will utilize writing center ideas of peer collaboration, self-directed learning, low-stakes learning, and non-hierarchical teaching to engage students in an encouraging and dynamic environment. Pointing to personal anecdotes and experience, the history of creative writing, and a literature review of creative writing within the classroom, this thesis claims that there is a place in the academic world, a need even, for this type of creative writing course for non-creative writers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
An Important Definition: What is Creative Writing?	11
Creative Writing Courses' History: Whom Do They Serve?.....	15
A Look at the State of Creative Writing Now.....	28
Creative Writing Across Classrooms.....	33
Site and Methodology: Why the University Writing Center?	50
Creative Writing Course Description.....	64
Conclusion.....	69
Appendix.....	72
Works Cited.....	78

Introduction

Since my kindergarten teacher taught me how to spell my name, with my crooked “k” and backwards “e,” I have been writing. What began as fumbled dates in left hand corners and words that I could never spell right, the perpetual “enoff” instead of “enough,” slowly but surely turned into sentences, turned into paragraphs, turned into stories. As a child, my greatest works focused on the escapades of my cats and jokes exchanged between household objects. Eventually, I took a turn for the realistic with a story about a sassy hairdresser and her misadventures in love and cutting hair. Writing, for me, began as a creative outlet, an expressive platform, and a craft to hone and practice for the pure joy of it.

When I entered college creative writing classes, writing became much more. Through these classes, I not only grew to become a better writer, but also a better reader and scholar. My creative writing abilities and skills grew alongside my eagerness to write and read well, and I saw creative writing practices blend into my work in other classes and fields of study. Whether it was attentive reading and responding to texts, analyzing deeper than surface level content, shifting style and form for content, or writing interesting and clarifying work, creative writing skills have led me to grasp and utilize all of these vitally important practices. The skills and techniques of creative writing I have learned over the course of four years have elevated my proficiencies in all fields of writing. While it would be easy to chalk this up to being an English student rather than having a creative writing concentration, it has been my creative courses rather than my literature or composition ones that have taught me the most universal academic skills, from close reading to in-depth analysis of texts to strong essay writing.

Although creative writing has always been an aspect of my writing life, college introduced me to the University Writing Center (UWC), a campus resource dedicated to helping students and community members improve their writing and process skills. This introduction to the UWC altered my view on writing and academia. In my time as a writing center consultant, I felt the same passion for helping students discover their own voice and strengths in writing as I have for bettering my own writing abilities. In fact, the collaborative and student-focused writing atmosphere of the University Writing Center has helped improve my writing abilities just as much as I have helped other students improve theirs. The UWC has introduced me to a completely new type of learning environment. The University Writing Center offers a unique opportunity to work with peers to grow as a writer in an environment without the pressures of grades or hierarchal teacher-student structures, while it champions self directed learning, collaboration, and writing with confidence. It is within this special environment that I found myself flourishing as a writer and a scholar among likeminded peers who supported students and learned communally.

During my two-year tenure as a writing center consultant and my four years as a creative writing student, I happily grew as both a creative writer and an academic. I can speak highly of my experiences within the University Writing Center and creative writing classes and their ability to improve myself as both a writer and an academic in all platforms, yet there are many students of all disciplines who lack either the ability or the confidence to enter both of these arenas and take advantage of these resources in their tenure at college. Looking at these experiences, I began to wonder if other students, students of every field of study and writing skill or comfort level, could benefit from creative writing just as I had. How could creative writing reach out to and help those students currently outside of its

departmental purview? It was in the middle place between creative writing and the writing center, or perhaps “other” place, that an idea emerged that creative writing skills and the writing center theories of peer collaboration, low-stakes learning, non-authoritative teaching, and self-directed learning could inform and improve one another if combined in a learning environment. It is within this unique environment that I advocate for the formation of an optional course that uses the University Writing Center as both the site and methodology to teach creative writing to students of all interests and disciplines, especially those who do not see themselves as confident or even competent writers (see Appendix). Such a course will not only allow students from every field of study to participate in and learn from the bounty of benefits found in creative writing practices, but also address several problems within the creative writing program that prevent students from taking creative writing classes, such as professionalization and perceived boundaries between disciplines. It will also address those students who currently utilize the UWC for creative writing aid and focus more acutely on those particular students and how to better serve them within the context of the University Writing Center. There are elements of the creative writing discipline that have thwarted students outside of the department from participating in creative writing, and therefore its benefits, and my course seeks to change that.

The course I propose, a creative writing course for non-creative writers, will address the changes within the discipline of creative writing, specifically professionalization, that have created a gap between creative writing practices and students who could benefit from them, isolating the craft of creative writing from those who sorely need it. Today, creative writing classes have become professionalized, focusing on the production of career writers and teachers of writing, rather than the inherent skills and benefits of learning and growing as

a writer (Myers 296). For professors within the discipline and even students, the professionalization of creative writing may seem like the natural progression of the field. Many majors and disciplines are meant, in a way, to prepare students for jobs in their field and to teach them technical skills that will benefit them in their career or in continued study. However, scholars within the field of creative writing, such as Wendy Bishop, and those outside of it, such as Lisa Kerr, both who I will discuss in more detail later, have shown that creative writing has more to offer than just a career path, and creative writing can benefit all students, no matter the genre or field of study, revitalizing them and creating and encouraging better writers. Creative writing classes have the exceptional opportunity to truly be a different type of academic discipline, one that is not confined to any one department, and transcend professionalization, specialization, and even the English department itself, a department rife with tensions between individual disciplines already. While the professionalization of the field of creative writing has continued to narrow its borders and exclude more and more students, my course will open the door again for all variations of students to enter creative writing classes to engage with the practices and techniques taught, not the career goals.

Additionally, my proposed course will be inviting to students of every discipline interested in improving their critical and creative writing and reading skills because it removes several boundaries that keep non-creative writing students out of the classroom. Any student could, theoretically, sign up for a creative writing class at any time if they were so inclined to learn, but most do not. This is not necessarily from a lack of interest, but rather a lack of opportunity. Creative writing sits within the English department and is often viewed as lofty or as elitist, “reserved for a select few students deemed worthy of study,” or even as

simply within a field of study closed off to those outside of that field (Mayers 224). Being a program within English also places genre limitations on creative writing and pigeonholes creative writing as merely a disciplinary sect of English. Furthermore, entering a classroom of potentially highly competitive long-term creative writers can be intimidating to someone trying out creative writing for the first time or for the first time in a long while. The pressures of not only competitive peers but also grades in an unfamiliar classroom environment are daunting. Finally, some students do not have time in their schedule to dedicate to another demanding, writing based class. My course, however, will remove all of these pressures that keep students out of the creative writing classroom by offering a low stakes, peer supported environment, specifically addressing students of all writing levels who are not currently directly involved in creative writing classes or even the English department, although those students are certainly welcome too. The placement of this course outside of the English department, or any department in general, will remove the limits of genre and the restrictive nature of disciplinary thinking and traditional discourse. By being optional, without grades other than participation-based ones, and peer taught and collaborated, students can enter into an encouraging atmosphere the University Writing Center has created and learn to write creatively, taking those skills back to their personal and, especially, academic lives. The forces or aspects of creative writing classes that have until now prevented students from entering will be disconnected from my course and new students will have a unique opportunity opened to them.

My proposed creative writing course will also more acutely address the needs of students who are interested in or are currently writing creatively and come into the UWC. I once had a student come into the UWC to work on a creative writing piece she had written in

her personal time. She was an English student, but she was not currently enrolled in any creative writing courses. She had written a short story that she was trying to get published, but after multiple rejections and revisions, she was not sure what else to do. She explained that she had asked several friends to read over her work, but they were mostly unhelpful, saying it sounded good to them as far as they could tell. This experience is not unusual. Creative writers often have a hard time finding thoughtful readers who are capable of critically reading creative work and offering suggestions outside of grammar and comments other than, "I liked it." Luckily, this student came to the right place. We spent the session talking about her writing, finding areas where she could add a line of description or give more emphasis to the preexisting description, as well as asking questions about her choices and their effectiveness. During our 45-minute session, we discovered that she was essentially missing half of the story, the critical half that justified the change within her character and gave that change meaning and significance to the reader. Through our work together, this student was able to take a hard, critical look at her personal creative writing and find several jumping off points as to where to improve and develop her story. The UWC offered this student a place to bring her personal writing without the contexts of class and teacher guidelines and get help from a responsive reader. There is no doubt in my mind that there are more students out there like this one student who could greatly benefit from help of this kind. My creative writing course will fulfill this exact scenario for many more students, allowing new writing to find a responsive and helpful audience as well as to encourage new writers.

It is also important to note that there is currently scholarship within writing centers that point toward a creative writing focus or outreach within centers across the country, like in Elizabeth Boquet's article "'It's All Coming Together, Right Before My Eyes': On Poetry,

Peace, And Creative Placemaking In Writing Centers" in which she discusses poetry contests within her writing center at Fairfield University. I am not unique in noticing that writing centers have the ability to offer creative writers an exceptional and much needed readership and resource. There are certainly other articles and scholars, although I have unfortunately not been able to look into more directly, suggesting a focus on incorporating creative writing and writers into writing centers more, which is vital and important, but my course is independent in distilling this need within an actual course.

Through my creative writing course, I aim to combat all of the elements that prevent students, specifically those who do not see themselves as writers per se, from taking creative writing classes so that all students can benefit from the practices of creative writing. I will do so by forming a new kind of creative writing class that is outside of the English department and the restrictions of one genre or discipline, a course that stands alone as a place of creative learning open for all students and writing abilities. I will place this new class inside of the University Writing Center in order to foster the idea that creative writing is for all students, as well as to remove the academic pressure and competitiveness of an evaluative, graded class. I will enable students to enter an environment that encourages the betterment of writing and writers across disciplines by taking elements of writing center methodology, such as peer collaboration, self-directed learning, low-stakes learning, and an absence of authority, which encourage and support writers in ways that are not often used in the traditional classroom. My course will be built on the idea that creative writing can benefit all students, in both academic and personal ways, especially those who envision themselves as non-creative and non-writers or feel stunted in their academic or personal writing.

An Important Definition: What is Creative Writing?

Creative writing is a subject that holds great variety and can come in many different forms and shapes, and because of this, the term “creative writing” itself is a malleable and even subjective one. Through my research on the inclusion of creative writing in academic settings, I noticed the terms “academic creative writing” and “literary creative writing” being used in several articles. Scholars writing on the inclusion of creative writing into other disciplinary fields, specifically Dali, Lau, and Risk in “Academically Informed Creative Writing In LIS Programs And The Freedom To Be Creative” and Kerr in “More Than Words: Applying The Discipline Of Literary Creative Writing To The Practice Of Reflective Writing In Health Care Education” used these terms to describe the type of writing they wanted to incorporate into their respective LIS and health care education classrooms. Presumably there is some “other” type of creative writing that is frivolous and without academic merit that these articles sought to distance themselves from, but what this type of writing is, I do not know. Perhaps these authors were trepidatious about using the term creative writing without the accessory of “academic” or “literary,” concerned that readers might imagine a room of nurses writing stories about magical rabbits rather than using creative writing productively in their education. Most likely, it is that scholars wanted to clarify that their creative writing exercises were informed by academic course content, not writing for writing’s sake, but creatively writing used as a tool of assessment or a way to teach course material (Kerr 299). While this clarification on the type of creative writing may be useful for some, it leaves the bad taste of pretension in my mouth, as well as belittles creative writing and implies that creative writing is inherently non-academic and non-literary, so I will not use these terms. Furthermore, the creative writing I propose for my course will

not be a tool for content assessment or reflecting knowledge of material covered in a certain course, but rather creative writing for the sake of learning creative writing practices and techniques.

Alongside noting the terms related to creative writing I will not be using, it is also helpful to define creative writing by what it is not. Lisa Kerr, a health care professional researching the incorporation of creative writing into health care education, points out the difference between reflective writing and creative writing. Kerr noticed that some of her peers in health care education used the terms interchangeably although they represent different forms of writing. This distinction I do believe is useful and I will reiterate here:

Reflective writing is to allow students and professionals to express themselves actively and to evaluate and share their experiences. In contrast to reflective writing, creative writing is sometimes described in the literature as involving an expectation that students will develop critical reading and literary writing skills *in addition to* expressing themselves. While creative writing might begin as reflection, through revision and editing, writers pay attention to craft (Kerr 296).

In other words, reflective writing's purpose is to express and reflect on experience, while creative writing allows students to do this and more, including developing better critical reading skills and writing abilities. Creative writing is inherently linked to more critical skills than reflective writing. Although reflective writing is a great tool for students, I find it more important to focus on creative writing here. As useful as this distinction between creative writing and reflective writing is, the same is not necessary for "academic," "literary," and "normal" creative writing. It is important to define "creative writing" as it is being used in this course on creative writing.

Creative writing is a difficult term to define because of its subjective nature. Most people outside of the English department might articulate a definition similar to Literature Wales' definition of creative writing as "the very fine art of making things up" ("What is"). I enjoy this definition because it focuses on the conception of creative writing as creating something out of nothing, looking at an empty space and making something up to fill it. There is something whimsical and fun about this definition, and creative writing does reflect that whimsy. While it is perhaps not the most elegant or all encompassing of the benefits and nuances of creative writing, this definition certainly is not wrong and it is important to acknowledge that this where the majority of people start off when they consider creative writing. From there, the definitions range from the dull and restricting, as in Duke University's statement, "Creative writing is a form of artistic expression, draws on the imagination to convey meaning through the use of imagery, narrative, and drama which is in contrast to analytic or pragmatic forms of writing," to the poetic ("Creative Writing"). Duke University's definition leaves out the beauty of creative writing and frames it as something incapable of being analytical or useful and realistic, which is untrue. This definition narrows creative writing's boundaries and outlines it as merely expressive, not investigative, questioning, complicated, probing, or intricate. Duke University's take on creative writing has stripped away all the intrigue of the subject and left a bland taste. In contrast, Karen Lockney, a lecturer on Education at the University of Columbia, gives a beautiful and poetic definition in her defense of creative writing across the curriculum:

There is a role for the imagination; a writer may draw on fact or on "real life" but is at liberty to extend this as far as they wish into the realms of fiction; the writing may fall into recognizable forms - poetry, a play script, a diary entry etc., or — in this

postmodern world — play with form entirely. Creative writing gets published by Penguin, Faber, and Random House, or it is locked away in the sock drawer never to be read by anyone other than the author. Nobel Prize winners engage in creative writing, and so do preschool children. Some people engage in creative writing because they dream of being courted by one of the aforementioned publishing houses, others simply write because they enjoy it; it may even be intensely private (diaries, for instance). Some people view it as part of a healing process (hence its use in some therapeutic contexts)...it engenders a positive feeling, it has a tangible output (whether or not it finds an audience), it allows us to express ourselves in ways we are not always able to do in many other walks of daily life, and sometimes to understand things in a way we could not do in more everyday contexts (43).

I find myself aligning my definition of creative writing more alongside Lockney's than Duke University's because it points to span and variety of creative writing rather than restricting it. Lockney, especially because she is defending creative writing across the curriculum, points to the features of creative writing that are capable of engaging all types and levels of writers, like positive and healing expression and the many different types of authors and avenues. This definition displays prominently the many forms creative writing can take and how all of these forms are not only valid, but also valuable.

For the purposes of this proposed creative writing course, I will define creative writing as best I can in my own words. Creative writing is the process of creation through writing that involves a focused and imaginative attention to originally producing a text that holds meaning and value, if only to the writer. Its form and content can range all across the spectrum, but most involve imaginative thought and the creation of something new. This

definition utilizes the positive aspects of all of the other definitions I have mentioned: Lockney's broadness of form and intent, Duke University's focus on the imaginative production of meaning, and Literature Wales' innovation and creation. However, my definition seeks to add something else, that creative writing is boundless. I think it is important to stress that creative writing is limitless; it has the distinct ability to open all doors for writers, to ask them to be completely original in content, format, and purpose. It is this limitlessness of creative writing that allows it to free student's mind and encourage innovation, as well as inviting creative writing to bleed into all other subject areas and disciplines. It is with this definition in mind, a purposefully broad and widely encompassing one, that I plan to bring creative writing to students of all disciplines.

Creative Writing Courses' History: Whom Do They Serve?

To see what my course can fully offer to not only students, but the university, it is necessary to look at how the field of creative writing got to its current position and how my course will alter the field after its implementation. Creative writing's history in academic institutions has been a constantly shifting program in execution and intent, a perpetual crossroads where my course will, like many courses before it, find its way both away from and toward creative writing pedagogy. Since creative writing's turn toward professionalization and the emergence of creative writing studies, a new field focused on creative writing theory and scholarship instead of practice, are relatively new in the discipline, it is important to look back at creative writing's history to see where other such alterations have occurred and if perhaps the beginning methods and intents of such courses can, and should, be returned to. As creative writing in academia has narrowed in and focused

on career-orientation, moving backwards through time will expand out creative writing's focus and reveal what kind of students were initially served by creative writing courses. Since my creative writing course seeks to widen the array of students creative writing can benefit, a need that arose due to the problematic narrowing of the current field, it is important to look at how creative writing got to this point in time. I will take a note from creative writing studies' focus on disciplinary history and examine the past in order to see what knowledge can be culled and used in future courses, perhaps to see the return of creative writing courses to their origins or earlier stages.

Before any formal classes or institutions began holding creative writing seminars or formal, academic meetings to discuss writing, there were writer's groups. Whether they were local reading and writing groups that shared and wrote together in coffee houses or rundown homes, or the famous generations of friends and writers like the Beats, writers have been coming together to discuss their work and grow their abilities since the 1800s, if not earlier (Wilbers 19). Obviously, this is case of writers serving writers, which is somewhat reflected in the workshop model today, and not of seminars and courses serving students. However, these initial meetings of writers coming together to support, encourage, and learn from one another in an open environment, lacking authority and high stakes, while encouraging collaboration and peer-to-peer conversations, is reminiscent of the model I wish to develop within my own course. Of course, the students in my course will not be professional or aspiring writers like those within early writing groups, but rather students seeking to learn about writing. Yet, the general atmosphere and social structure of early writing groups is worth imitating so that students feel supported, comfortable, and inspired in the classroom

and among one another while also instilling the belief that the students are indeed writers, whether they think of themselves as that or not.

While a meeting of like-minded writers to discuss their work is simulated in modern creative writing workshops, D. G. Myers argues that the academic pursuit of creative writing did not arise formally until 1880 to 1940. Myers explains that creative writing was “an effort to reform the study of literature,” not as an imitation of writer’s clubs nor as a way to train and produce professional writers like it is viewed in modern times (Myers 278). The growth of creative writing since the 1880s, and onward past today, can largely be attributed to a gap in literary studies that students yearned to have filled with literary practice.

This gap between literary studies and writing practice initially occurred when humanist practices went missing during the nineteenth century and was replaced by philology. Writing poetry was once included in class curriculums throughout the 1400-1700s as a part of humanist studies, as a way of increasing self-understanding and human development, as well as exacting literary reading. This belief that “humanistic education was to produce not poets but better human beings” is one that I completely agree with and wish to revitalize. Writing poetry was once as important as arithmetic and science in basic education for producing a fully realized and intelligent person during the reign of humanist ideals. For me, this is still true and is one of the reasons why my course is important for all students. The studies of the humanities has become important again in modern times, as seen by humanity majors and liberal arts colleges. However, during the later nineteenth century, philology overtook academic views and it focused on systematic scientific knowledge, prying into literature to view its linguistic structure rather than its human content. The study of literature thus took a turn for the scientific and stern, leaving behind humanistic ideals of expressing

the human experience. Creating and constructing was left to formal writing, while literature was examined as purely a base of knowledge, a sum of names and words to be memorized (Myers 279-282).

If we ask who does creative writing serve, in this light, creative writing arose to serve lovers and scholars of literature, who found themselves without the practice of writing. Creative writing emerged as an answer to students in literary studies who were unable to get hands-on experience with writing, who read and consumed without dreams of creation. While my course aims to serve students who are not necessarily lovers of reading and avid literature scholars, although those students are certainly welcome, it is purposefully outside of the English department and therefore outside of the realm of literary studies. It is this removal that may be one of the most radical aspects of my course, but it is following in the steps of creative writing's origins. Since literary studies during philology's dominance did not contain practical writing elements, creative writing was developed outside of it; now that creative writing does not contain practical creative writing skills and opportunities for all students, my course will develop outside of it, too. Since professionalization was one of the natural progressions of creative writing, so is my course, as it can boldly continue in creative writing's history of filling a void in academia with more diversified writing opportunities. As creative writing developed from a need in academic institutions, so does my course similarly emerge, from the need to have a course in creative writing for all types of students and fields of study.

As literary studies and writing instruction began to focus on the hard, dry facts of literature and language, rather than its human content, philology began to dictate and dominate the courses within the English department. During 1880-1900, however, professors

at Harvard University, under the belief that the “ideal end of the study of literature is the making of literature,” began to revive the creating process of writing (Myers 283). What first began as professors accepting poetry and short stories for class credit evolved when Barrett Wendell, one of the first novelists to teach at an American university, began teaching writing in a new way. He aimed to give “everyday students” the ability to write with well-practiced skill and understanding, while “exceptional pupils” were encouraged to become creative artists in command of both confidence and technical skill in their writing (Wendell 237). Wendell sought to inspire his students, to stimulate curiosity in his classes and the pursuit of creating art willingly and enthusiastically. For him, teaching the techniques and forms of writing was piecing together the fragments of literature and therefore making those fragments available for students to utilize and not just enjoy literature, but also make it.

One of the core methodologies of Wendell’s English composition was the “daily theme.” Remarkably similar to what we now call freewriting, the daily theme was meant to be a brief written piece about something observed during the day that was written in under a hundred words and done so pleasantly and easily (Myers 283-286). While simple enough in theory, the object was for students to “recognize and grasp the individual nature of experience” (Myers 286). At this point in creative writing’s history, we see the arrival of the content of creative writing—tapping into personal experience and individual voice.

Although, the daily theme was soon to be dropped by colleges, the study of literature was heavily impacted by Wendell’s new form of study and his persistence that writing instruction should stand apart from reading and studying written works and be expressive of students’ lives.

Wendell's new way of teaching writing is particularly important because it emphasizes the inclusion of all students. As Wendell adapted elements of creative writing into the study of writing in general, including freewriting style "daily themes" and encouraging the production of literature in his curious students, he continuously addressed all students, everyday writers and readers, not just the exceptional career writers. For Wendell, from poet to struggling student, writing instruction can broaden their perceptions, ease their writing, and allow them to engage with literature. Each type of student has a place in his classroom and can grow in their writing fluency just the same. His methodology served all writers of all levels and was particularly geared toward those unspectacular or uninspired writers, seeking to engage students in a pursuit of art as well as effective writing. Creative writing, in practice not in name, was another way to improve writers and students, especially considering that poems and short stories were accepted for class credits in classrooms not designed for the production of such work. I plan to return to this open floor style of teaching writing, leaving room for all skill levels and writing types to enter and participate with enthusiasm.

It is interesting to note that at this point in creative writing's development that, in name, it and composition were one in the same. These two disciplines did not separate in name and intent until the 1910s when demands on writing instruction began to diverge and it became necessary for creative writing to encompass the creative self-expression of writers while composition focused on the "communication of ideas and proficiency of usage" and academic functions (Myers 288). English composition began to focus on the practical activities of grammar and responding to the social world, while creative writing turned inward, focusing on the inner lives and self expression of students (Sumpter 245). This

separation reached its turning point when in 1925, creative writing acquired its name from Hughes Mearns, a writer who took hold of the English curriculum at Lincoln high school and replaced English classes with creative writing. His views on writing in his so-called “experiment” classes gave the course of creative writing its name and promoted the “creativist” reform of literary studies. For Mearns, teaching writing meant giving students the opportunity to take part firsthand and experience writing, not simply learn about it or be handed the knowledge. He felt writing was an innate part of expression and should therefore be lauded as a valuable piece of human experience and thus involved in academic pursuits. His reform of literary studies took on the task of writing first, then reading—initially learning by doing.

Mearns also effectively opened up the literary canon, encouraging students to read modern writers of their own interest rather than the classics. This open reading, self-directed by interest and motivation, paired intimately with writing that either reflected or diverged from these readings and was the basis of Mearns’ creative writing instruction. However, Mearns sought to make better readers and students, not professional writers, and he intended to have creative writing be a subordinate of literary study rather than a stand-alone discipline (Myers 288-291). While Mearns made great headway in the creation of the modern creative writing course, the field took yet another turn after him, although it thankfully gained the practice of writing and reading with creativity in mind from his experimental creative writing instruction.

Mearns is an important figure in creative writing’s history because of his belief in students and their ability to grow through writing. Creative writing, for Mearns, served as an opportunity for all students to grow, personally and academically, and these are the exact

roots of creative writing I wish to return to. Mearns believed that the point of teaching creative writing to students was “to touch some of the secret sources of lives, to discover and to bring out the power that they possessed but, through timidity or ignorance, could not use; to develop personality, in short” (Mearns 14). He was an advocate of the idea that everyone has writing ability within them and something worth saying; all they lack is encouragement, an appropriate avenue, and helpful techniques to lead them to that expression. Lack of confidence in writing abilities or understanding about what creative writing encompasses and consists of is what discourages many students from undertaking writing, and this is exactly what I seek to address with my course.

Mearns, too, sought to reach into students and pull out their full potential and he used elements of creative writing to do so, just as I plan to do. For him, as well as for me, creative writing is a grand opportunity to reach out to students who are nervous, anxious, or unskilled and teach them to write well. The focus should not be solely on improving already strong writers. They can all grow together through creative writing practices and take part in the act of creating. Mearns also champions the universality of the process of writing and expressing yourself, and this is one of the elements of creative writing that I champion as well. The classic ideal of learning through doing shows through strong with Mearns’ technique and is a truism that I plan to utilize in my creative writing seminar, as well as the support of students personal growth through writing. Lastly, Mearns stated that students learned best in environments in which they entered through self-initiation (Myers 289). Self-directed learning, writing, and reading are important aspects of my creative writing seminar, so Mearns promotion of students actively and willingly joining in class activities to genuinely learn is yet another idea I support.

After Mearns' creation of a half composition, half creative self-expression course, the path of creative writing to academic discipline diverged yet again when Norman Forester became the director of the School of Letters at the University of Iowa in 1930. Forester sought to return literary studies to original writing and criticism, which he outlined in his article *The American Scholar*. Like Wendell and Mearns before him, Forester did not plan to create a separate field of study entitled creative writing, but rather to fix the broken study of literary texts, restructuring the philological focus on literary studies to turn towards criticism and creativity and away from rote memorization and spoon-fed knowledge. Creative writing was meant to be a complementary study to literary studies, helping with comprehension and critical understanding (Myers 292-294). While the University of Iowa's writing program in contemporary times is a compilation of workshops aimed to crank out professional writers or writing teachers, its initial purpose, under Forester, was to "develop a whole set of powers in these writers: aesthetic responsiveness, the ability to handle ideas; in sum, the critical sense" (Myers 294). However, though Forester advocated critical abilities, he was against creative self-expression, believing students did not require the constant spewing of their inner lives through writing to grow as people. Instead, Forester pursued creating writers and critics who were aware of the craft they taught and studied, who examined cultural values in writing, and who challenged comprehension of literature (Myers 295-296). Creative writing stood as a way to interact and understand literature, not as a production of art for the sake of art.

Here is where creative writing practice began to serve students in a new way by making them not only better writers, but also critical thinkers. Forester's contribution to creative writing was to use creative practices to improve students as critics. By planning for creative writing to accompany literary studies, Forester set up the precedent that creative

writing holds attributes that contribute to other types of learning outside of writing. Creative writing's benefits began to reach outside of the genre and encompass more students, as it was directed toward readers and analyzers of texts, as well as writers of them. My course also pinpoints this ideal of creative writing improving students in areas of critical thinking and reading. Forester's understanding of creative writing as a unique tool in academic learning is one I wish to recapture and use in my course, following his steps in serving more students. However, I disagree with Forester that self-expression is not a valuable asset to students and that personal growth should be excluded from the creative writing classroom. I think this is valuable element of creative writing just as much as critical analysis skills.

Also, unlike Forester, Mearns, and Wendell, I disagree that creative writing's rightful place is alongside and under the shadow of literary studies. Although the two fields obviously complement one another, and reading is a key ingredient in any successful creative writing class or seminar, creative writing has the strength and integrity to stand alone as a disciplinary field. The physical act of writing and sharing that writing with others in a constructive and supportive environment certainly holds merits that do not require the study of literature to support them. Besides, including literary studies with creative writing narrows the ability of students of all disciplines to enter creative writing and engage with its benefits. The separation of creative writing and literary studies has allowed the field of creative writing to grow exponentially and take on markers of its own, as it stands as a separate and powerful discipline within the English department and now outside of it.

Although Forester left the University of Iowa in 1944, the creative writing courses inspired by and held by the School of Letters remained intact and began to flourish. It is between this time and the early 1990s that creative writing courses took on a New Critical

perspective of art for art's sake, advocating the "uselessness" of art. This ideal became particularly popular in the 1970s with the rise anti-establishment ideals and the rebellion against conforming to strict ideas of success and professionalism. For some people like professor and writer Mary Ann Cain, creative writing in the 1970s academic world represented a dissent from professionalism, a choice of a creative, authentic life over a commitment to make a living with a "real world" job (Cain 229-231). Like Mearns original intention, creative writing programs represented a way of living and being, rather than an open and shut technical course pushing a life career, instead pairing the interaction of life and writing together. For Cain, creative writing filled her "desire to connect writing to how one lived one's life, as opposed to merely professional training" (Cain 229). Post World War II nationalism and state control of universities also contributed to the anti-professionalism of creative writing as universities became a "haven for the arts" and promoted cultural roles outside of mere educational purposes (Sumpter 346). Creative writing programs began to focus on serious artisanship of writing, rather than the educational purposes and benefits as these programs came to stand for an opposition to a harsh world and criticism.

Cain also connects the growth of such programs to the response to activism in the 1970s, as people sought a platform for sharing their ideals and a course of study that emphasized the uniqueness of individual voices. It was during this highly political time where people called for expression and authentic learning environments, instead of technical job production, and creative writing was able to answer (Cain 229-231). However, by the 1990s this ideal changed again for a number of reasons. Cain points to the actual usefulness of creative writing, claiming that it offered the chance to change perspectives and create cultural and social awareness and openness, providing a better purpose than remaining a

leisure activity for elites. Art for art's sake was removed from the equation, so that creative writing could serve as a way to analytically view cultures, influences, and society. This removal from "useless" art also brought in professional pursuits to the creative writing course. Since creative writing could play such a large cultural role as well, producing and recruiting high profile writers became the goal of institutions instead of continuing writing education for a wide student audience (Sumpter 346). Myers points condemningly to the change to professionalism as caused by pressures to meet writers' economic needs and a growing patronage system within institutions, as writing students were turned directly into writing teachers (Myers 296). Either way, or perhaps because of a combination of the two, creative writing programs today focus mainly on producing professional writers who can publish successfully in the marketplace and teachers of creative writing who could not make a sustainable living in writing alone (Mayers 218).

While who creative writing served varied between the 1940s and the current day classrooms, there are still aspects of the history of creative writing in academia that relate to my creative writing course. Cain provided a personal anecdote in her article "To Be Lived: Theorizing Influence in Creative Writing" about her fascination with creative writing during her college years and its direct rebellion against a lucrative living. When I decided to major in creative writing, I was questioned many times with what I could even do with that kind of concentration or, god forbid, what career path I would take. All I knew was that creative writing was what I was passionate about, so that was what I would study. Although Cain's attachment was to the rebellion of creative writing and mine perhaps despite that rebellion, it remains true that creative writing does not just offer a career path, it digs deeper and stretches further than that. The attraction of creative writing does not have to be technical or

professional, although it absolutely can be, but there are instead skills and experiences within creative writing that are far more valuable and widespread. Students of all fields of study can find aspects of creative writing that they are passionate about and can relate to emotionally and academically. It is because of this independence from a direct career path that I can encourage students of all interests and majors to partake in writing; the door is open to everyone because that is how it was initially, rather than a closed-off writing for a writer's career option.

Additionally, like Cain, I view creative writing as a great platform to learn how to express an individual voice or cause. Cain and creative writing champions this but also the ability to challenge and choose the influences we allow into our lives and our writing. Creative writing provides the unique opportunity for students to take the time to examine the everyday influences and underlying messages and beliefs that exist in life and eventually trickle into their writing (Cain 236). Creative writing courses can indeed offer a critical way to examine one's biases and beliefs, while leaving the space to allow any student to use that information and skill-set in practically any profession of their choosing. Therefore, creative writing in these few decades served students wishing to be authentic, to be true to themselves and their interests, as well as those seeking a way to use and refine their voices, share ideas, change perspectives and social awareness, as well as develop their unique take on the world. Creative writing can still fulfill these purposes today and my course will allow students access to these opportunities.

The history of creative writing in academia has been immensely helpful in allowing me to see where my own theories and course can fit and which ideas that originally existed in creative writing pedagogy I can revitalize and restore. Understanding the different ways

creative writing has served students and who benefitted from the varying types of creative writing practice and teaching has allowed me to see for whom my course can also serve, as well as supporting my choices in who can be served. Looking back to move forward with my creative writing course has given me the chance to pull from history to craft my course, while positioning it outside of previous creative writing areas and carving out a new space much like creative writing did for itself over the past century and a half or so.

A Look at the State of Creative Writing Now

The reasons behind the development of creative writing course sprung from the current state of the field of creative writing. The creative writing department has moved in a direction that has prohibited the vast majority of students to move along with it. Since creative writing practices can benefit students of all disciplines and skill levels, it seems that students should have access to an environment that encourages and teaches those practices. Yet, the department of creative writing no longer gives many students the opportunity to engage in creative writing, and thus my course plans to remedy this. However, it is important to look at where creative writing is today and how this poses a problem, and more tellingly, how my course can remedy that problem.

Creative writing is a continuously growing discipline in the academic world, originally arising as a response to literary studies removing the practice of writing from its study of writing in the 1880s and receiving the name creative writing from Hughes Mearns' book *Creative Youth* in 1925. It has gone through many changes and evolutions. One of the most recent changes within creative writing has been the movement toward professionalization. According to D. G. Myers, creative writing has become a "machine

turning out professional writers” due to the “the pressure to adapt creative writing to the economic needs of writers, to convert it into a kind of patronage system” as writers are cranked out and then begin to staff and command those same institutions (Myers 296). Tim Mayers, in his article “One Simple Word: From Creative Writing to Creative Writing Studies,” defines creative writing in universities today somewhat condemningly:

Creative writing is the academic enterprise of hiring successful writers (with success defined as publication in “approved” journals and magazines and by “approved” university and trade presses, along with the winning of prestigious literary prizes for such publication) to teach college-level creative writing courses. Creative writing has dual purposes: first, it aims to train aspiring writers to produce publishable work, to find success in the literary marketplace; second, it operates a *de facto* employment program for writers who are unable to earn a living simply by writing. (218)

Nowhere in his definition is there mention of creative writing as an educational program for improving writing or writers, creatively or academically, or forming environments of support and encouragement for developing skills and techniques in effective writing, communication, and compelling story telling. Indeed, Mayers’ definition is what the English department has created in universities and what students see when they consider taking creative writing classes.

This intimidating classroom set-up of professional, “serious” writers teaching other like-minded “serious” writers how to get published and how to pursue a career is not inviting to students who seek creative writing for its merits and joy. This professionalization, while helpful to those planning careers in writing, has created a partition between creative writing and students outside of the field that is almost impossible to cross over fearlessly and easily.

A whole arena of students that could benefit from and thoroughly enjoy creative writing are lost, and all those non-writers who do not believe they can write better, write confidently, adore writing, own their unique voice, or express themselves continue believing so without intervention. Career-oriented creative writing classes have disconnected from the tenet of creative writing practice that initially got writers interested, namely writing as a creative outlet to express oneself and connect with others, and left students who might need or find enjoyment in writing cast aside or ignored. My writing course will reclaim these students and teach them what creative writing has to offer in an environment that, through the inclusion of writing center methodology, is low stakes, lower pressure, peer supported, and inviting to all writing levels and creative interests.

As creative writing programs have ultimately turned to the professional and have become somewhat isolated from other disciplines within the English department and students outside of the creative pool, a rift in intent has occurred (Mayers 224). There has been in recent years a call for more theory, scholarly inquiry, and research to be brought back into creative writing programs. Today, that call has been answered with creative writing *studies*. Creative writing has been criticized as being “the most untheorized, and in some respect, anachronistic area in the entire constellation of English studies” and creative writing studies regains that untheorized territory (Donnelly 1). Creative writing studies is a new academic discipline that sets itself apart from creative writing in that it looks at the pedagogical and historical strands of creative writing practice and study. Creative writing studies are reflective, inquiring into its own history and theory, and it plots to be placed alongside literary and composition theory as equals. This form of study would focus on interpreting texts through questions like “How can I make a text like this?” or “Under what conditions are

texts like this produced? as opposed to What does this text mean?" (Mayers 222). The emergence of this new field of study shows a divergence in intent within creative writing, one path pointing towards professional careers and technical training and the other towards scholarly research and study.

In some aspects this divergence and addition of a new sub-genre or perhaps co-genre with creative writing can be seen as a positive development. This new take on creative writing would lift the pressure of publication from both students, compelled to view success only as being critically published, and teachers, hired almost solely due to their publication history, rather than their academic merit. Traditional scholarship built on research and investigation would run alongside creative publications and open the field of creative writing to more accepted forms of teacher and student publication, a balance of scholarship and creative output. Also, any growth outward that could encompass and entice more interested students and professors in the world of creative writing should be considered a positive result since creative writing is a largely marginalized field. However, the addition of creative writing studies complicates the already existing problem with the creative writing discipline, namely, who benefits from creative writing courses.

If creative writing has sectioned itself off to general students to focus on professional writer production, creative writing studies have declared themselves as a similarly isolated discipline for producing professional creative writing scholars. While creative writing studies have broadened the field, it has not gone so far as to broaden the body of students. Rather than expanding outside of the English department, like I want my course to do, creative writing studies have instead burrowed deeper into it. In some ways, creative writing studies almost seem to have grown out of paranoia or a fear that creative writing was not being taken

seriously enough within academia. Creative writing studies indeed champion the serious and astute with its study of creativity within literature and in the process pushes students further away, especially those non-creative, non-writers who could benefit from creative writing. The intimidation coupled with taking a creative writing course that a student outside of English might face is doubled when theory and highbrow studies of literature are included. If creative writing courses were discouraging for students beforehand, they will be even more so now with the inclusion of rigorous academic study into a specific scholarship that is not necessarily universal nor overlaps with disciplines outside of English.

The expansion of the creative writing discipline toward the professional and the burgeoning field of creative writing studies make my course important and necessary. My course does not aim to create professional writers, nor does it plan to produce creative writing academics either. My creative writing course will remove the end goal of a profession, career path, or long-time subject of pursuit and, instead, use only the parts of creative writing practice that link the two shifting disciplines. At this crossroads of creative writing and creative writing studies, I will position myself outside rather than in-between. As the English department continues to narrow and divide itself further, turning towards specialization and professionalization, as is its right to do, I will position my course outside of it completely. My course will return to the basics and use the skillsets, techniques, and processes that creative writing teaches without the concern of making students into anything other than confident and encouraged writers. I will incorporate critical reading and writing, collaborative sharing and learning, lessons on elements and terminology of writing, processes of writing, and the history and significance of creative writing. I will exclude theory and research from my course, as well as skills to get published or career advancement because

my course will focus on basic practical writing skills. However, I do intend to take some notes from creative writing studies' views on teaching and will not teach other students about a field of which I am not at least minimally familiar with the research and history.

Understanding where the field of creative writing emerged from and how it has grown, and continues to grow, in universities is vitally important in truly knowing the field of study of which I have entered and hope to encourage other students to take part in. This is important especially because the time has come for creative writing practices to change yet again, widening the scope of students it serves and beginning fresh and anew within the writing center and outside of the creative writing department.

Creative Writing Across Classrooms

Although my argument to create a creative writing course influenced by writing center theory available to all students across disciplines because of creative writing's ability to benefit their critical writing and reading skills is distinctive, the inclusion of creative writing activities in academic classrooms is not a new idea. The argument that creative writing assignments and principles could be useful in a classroom dedicated to other disciplines has been slowly emerging in scholarship for the past thirty years. However, this inclusion of creative writing has been predominantly in regards to English departments. Richard Gebhardt argued in 1988 in his article "Fiction Writing in Literature Classes" that including "fiction-writing," or creative writing, in undergraduate literature classes would lead to greater "student understanding and appreciation of literature, and for the effective teaching of literature and writing" (150). Gebhardt understood the inherent benefits of the practice of creatively writing and promoted the use of "finger exercises," or "unpretentious practice

exercises” of fiction writing in literature classrooms (“Fiction” 151). Gebhardt is not alone in his thinking either, with Veronica Austen and Lynn Bloom also promoting the use of creative writing exercises in English classrooms in their respective articles “The Value of Creative Writing Assignments in English Literature Courses” and “Composition Studies as a Creative Art: Teaching, Writing, Scholarship, Administration.” These scholars point to several benefits of this inclusion that would make students not only better writers, but also better readers and thinkers.

Gebhardt points to three main reasons to include creative writing in literature courses: increased understanding of literary language, more varied and effective exposition, and improved communication and reader response. Rather than simply reading literature and literary language, students should dig their fingers in deep and write poetically, as “the act of writing in the poetic mode of literature, rather than the transactional language of criticism helps students understand and internalize the nature of the language they are studying” (Gebhardt “Fiction” 151). Furthermore, writing fiction instead of merely reading it allows for students to “make explicit and organic connections between technical terms by which we describe fiction and the concrete reality of works of fiction” (Gebhardt “Fiction” 152). So instead of letting literature wash over students and merely be consumed, creative writing gives students the ability to interact with the language and style they are reading, to put into practice the methods they study for better retention and understanding. A student can learn the names and moves of dance, but it is not until that student enacts those dance movements themselves that they truly understand those movements. Gebhardt also explains that creative writing can “help students learn lessons of originality, detail, image, and sound that can contribute to more varied and effective exposition,” as well as teach them “to anticipate

reader response to matters of tone, appropriateness, consistency of speaker, and message” (“Fiction” 153, 154). Critical essay writing, in a way, contributes to these lessons as well, but creative writing places far more focused attention on these aspects and provides a variety of exercises to teach them.

Austen mentions additional benefits of creative writing while reiterating several of Gebhardt’s points as well. Austen accounts for five main benefits, which are that “creative writing assignments can dispel the awe of literature and create active learners, develop critical readers, further student understanding of literary criticism, inspire deeper commitment to excellence, and motivate class bonding and dismantle the classroom hierarchy” (146). Austen bolsters the argument that literature can be better understood by students by coupling it with creative writing since “through forming their own creative works, students will recognize that literary texts are constructed through a long decision-making process rather than through some act of divine intervention that cannot be questioned” (140). Students of literature are often under the impression that canonical writers are untouchable, paragons of the creative arts to be studied and admired, but not interacted with. Creative writing allows students to assume the role of creator for a moment of time and dismantles the barriers of reader and writer. Creative writing also allows the dismantling of the hierarchy among student and teacher as “creative writing demands the appreciation of original thought, students can feel empowered knowing that there is no one right answer that their instructor expects” (Austen 145). Additionally, the process of creative writing forces students to pay attention to small details, the effects of their words, and the originality of their ideas, which promotes not only more concerned and attentive writers, but improved readers. This combination of reading creative works and writing them produces “more active,

competent, and vocal readers who understand that the process of reading should be productive rather than consumptive, that we do not merely receive the meaning of what we read but need to produce it” (Austen 141). By completing creative writing, students are able to understand the processes and decisions involved with writing and can take their personal experience and knowledge into their reading of professional writers. Creative writing deepens students’ ability to have a conversation with a text: gaining and adding meaning to the text, using skills and techniques found from texts for themselves, and increasing their understanding of decisions in diction, syntax, theme, and imagery.

It seems logical that the call for the inclusion of creative writing in academic classrooms would first appear in literature classes since creative writing first emerged as a field of study and practice because literature was viewed “as if it were a continuous experience rather than a mere corpus of knowledge—as if it were a living thing, as if people intended to write more of it” (Myers 279). The scholar D. G. Myers notes the loss of creative writing practice in literature classes as the main reason why creative writing became an academic discipline of its own in the 1940s. Literature, after all, was not simply meant to be read and digested, but lived, practiced, and then contributed to again by new writers. In this light, it only makes sense that involving creative writing assignments in literature classes would become important and beneficial once again, since one, it was initially that way and two, the practices of reading and writing literature are intimately tied together. As Lynn Bloom points out, “to be a producer as well as a consumer of texts enables—no, obliges—the writer to understand works of literature from the inside out” (57). However, while I agree with both Austen and Gebhardt about the benefits of creative writing in literature courses and

that the writing of literary work can inform the reading of literature, I believe that the benefits stretch far past literature courses.

There is not a single aspect of Austen and Gebhardt's arguments that could not translate into other academic disciplines. Many writing across the curriculum (WAC) scholars have argued this same point, that creative writing practices are transferable to other disciplines, such as Art Young in his article "Writing Across and Against the Curriculum" and I will discuss these scholars and writing across the curriculum in more detail later on. While some skills of creative writing may not directly translate into another discipline, each benefit mentioned from creative writing could at least set a template or act as a tool that a student could utilize. For instance, creative writing allows for students to use literary devices and terminology in their own writing instead of simply memorizing the definitions or one example from a given text. By using these terms and figurative language themselves, students develop not only a deeper understanding of the terms, but the ability to locate examples, analyze why and how these terms/devices were used, and question their effective usage and meaning as they would if they used those same devices in their own writing. This seems applicable for terminology in other fields as well: a physics student could write a short play that explains a hard concept or scientific relationship, or a business student could write a narrative about a business interaction describing methods of negotiation and business tactics. Again, the direct use of terminology and language typical of a field of study within a student's own writing increases their ability to understand, remember, and analyze those terms, no matter the field.

The same goes for abolishing the gap students perceive between themselves and accomplished writers; whether it is a great speech of a political figure or a moving portrait of

a social worker, students within these disciplines have idols and figureheads that they will be able to better understand once they have followed the same writing processes and fine tuning of skills to elicit a response in an audience just as those icons did. While my course will not explicitly utilize these activities directly related to a student's major, it will set up a framework for students to carry into their respective majors, adapting creative writing techniques to suit their own needs. While it may be that the relationship between creative writing and literature is easier to see and the connections quicker to draw, any academic discipline can find benefit from creative writing in many ways, even if they are not immediately obvious.

Wendy Bishop was one of the first scholars to notice that creative writing could stretch outside the boundaries of creative writing courses and even outside of the English department. In her article "Genre as 'Field Coverage' - Divisions in Writing Instruction Erase Common Ground," Bishop points out the misconceptions of writing solely within the discipline:

We assume students in different fields benefit only from instruction in the genres we typically associate with those fields. Engineers have nothing to do with poetry writing, we're quick to predict, and then go on to insist that they should focus on technical writing, envisioned as dry, mechanical, routinized form of purely instrumental communication (5).

Bishop admits to evoking some stereotypes with this statement, but her message remains that academic disciplines tend to narrow the types and styles of writing taught within the classroom. Bishop argues that all writing has commonalities and is based on process instruction and it is on this common ground that writing should be taught without fear of

blurring or blending genres. Although Bishop does not say explicitly that all disciplines could benefit from including creative writing in the lesson plans or course loads, but rather that composition courses should blend in creative writing with its current curriculum, she does hint to the idea that writing skills are universal. There are some aspects of teaching writing that are common across fields and should be championed over strict differentiations for each discipline, commonalities that a creative writing course can teach in an engaging way. Bishop also promotes genre experimentation in her classroom, and what is my suggested course if not a great call to genre experimentation?

Taking it one step further than Wendy Bishop, several scholars have written on the benefits of having creative writing across the curriculum. Art Young in his article “Writing Across and Against the Curriculum” promotes using poetry writing across the curriculum as a way for students to break out of the constraints of genre thinking. Students are also able to express newfound language and engage in course content in more meaningful ways through poetry. Young specifically highlights the benefits of allowing students to break from the specific language of a discourse and use their own poetic language, which “engages, recasts, and critiques disciplinary knowledge without having to conform to the conventions of what to them is often an alien discourse” (Young 475). This new poetic language enables students to communicate in innovative and imaginative ways because they are free from the requirements of thinking inside a specific discipline or even a curriculum. For Young, creative writing is an extremely unique mode of learning because it is “low stake but somehow risky, personal but somehow social, alien but somehow accessible” (Young 475). These apparent contradictions force students to navigate fresh territories, interrupting their expectation for writing and thinking, and to participate in poetic writing and learning that

engages their creative thinking, problem solving, and perspective molding. Using poetry writing within any class, from literature to science, gives students the ability to free themselves from disciplinary bounds and create a new language and understanding for themselves. This across the curriculum style of using creative writing is particularly compelling because it advocates poetry, as well as other types of creative writing, as beneficial to all styles of thinking and writing not just individual courses.

Creative writing across the curriculum extends into other areas as well. Karen Lockney in “Creativity Across the Curriculum” gives examples for areas within high school curriculums where creative writing connects to and increases understanding of different areas of study. Examples include, science and the focus on detail and uncertainty, geography and the idea that places are locations with meaning, history and exploring the lives and views of others, as well as personal health and importance of personal expression. Among her examples of areas where creative writing is related to subject matter, she points to the “burgeoning popularity of engaging non-fiction about absolutely anything” found in bookstores as a sign that “there is no reason why such an appetite for varied creative writing cannot be replicated in school settings” (Lockney 46).

Chris Drew also argues for involving creative writing across the high school curriculum in his article “An Argument Worth Having: Championing Creative Writing in the Disciplines.” However, instead of advising creative writing activities that pair with learning concepts within a discipline like Lockney, Drew argues for using creative writing as a more interesting assessment tool for student understanding and retention. According to Drew, “writers do not primarily summarize or analyze information, they consider the subject more deeply by deliberately placing it in a creative context” (6). Using creative writing as an

assessment tool, such as writing a short story involving key class concepts, gives students a more comfortable and contextual framework that allows them to show comprehension of content in a more effective and interesting format.

One of the more interesting arguments for creative writing across the curriculum comes from Lisa Ciecierski & William P Bintz in the article “Using Chants and Cadences to Promote Literacy Across the Curriculum,” where they promote creating songs containing course specific information to deepen understanding, involve critical thinking and problem solving, as well as increasing retention, interest, and engagement. According to Ciecierski’s and Bintz’s study, the act of creating a song using well known chants or rhythms that uses course information allows students and even teachers to “actively learn, not passively memorize” as they take on ownership and pride for their songs and its material while remembering content better and engaging in critical thinking and problem solving when constructing their song (22).

What is interesting about all three of these articles and their arguments for utilizing creative writing across the curriculum is that they all take place in the context of middle and high school. Perhaps this is because there is an underlying belief that creative writing is a fun and interesting way to engage students who might not be interested in given subject areas whereas college students should be keener to learning. While not fully accepting the idea that creative writing can trick students into being more active or believing creative writing as more fun and easier than formal writing, Drew did admit to leaning into the idea of creative writing as a “spoonful of sugar” for students (7). While this may be true for some students, that is not how I wish to frame my creative writing course, as way to trick students into learning, which in the unflattering analogy is unpleasant medicine. However, I do not believe

that because these articles address middle and high school that the ideas within them could not pertain to higher education as well. Additionally, although I agree with these articles' core reasons for utilizing creative writing, their cited benefits of using creative writing, and that creative writing can be included in all subject areas to engage students and draw connections with writing and learning in a compelling way, I cannot reasonably ask every course in the college catalogue to find some way to interweave creative writing into their curriculum, no matter how interesting genre experimentation is. I can, however, hold true to the idea that there are correlations between creative writing and better learning and writing by making a stand-alone class for all majors instead of individually incorporating creative writing in different classes or making creative writing exercises course material specific.

While creative writing can improve student writing and give students new ways to learn and receive information, creative writing offers other benefits that are not as obvious. In a study of an introductory level literature ENG 131 class' response to the creative writing final assignment of the semester, Jessica Labbé found some interesting benefits of her inclusion of creative writing in her student responses. When Labbé asked students to respond to having their final assignment be a creative writing product which related back to the material learned through the course, three interesting benefits that students pointed out were the feeling of freedom, getting their creativity back, and branching out of their comfort zone. Students connected "the ability to determine the content of their work with a feeling of 'freedom,'" which led Labbé to believe points to saying that normally critical essays make students feel constricted and restricted (Labbé 69). Also, several students used the phrase "get my creativity back," which "highlights a loss the student has felt during the educational journey. The statement suggests that at some point the creativity was present, but over an

unstated period of time, it was lost, or—more specifically—taken away” (Labbé 71). What creative writing offers is not just another structure and framework of learning, but also a chance to feel free to make choices, risky or compelling choices, as well as the ability to reclaim a feeling of creativity that has either been stripped away from rigorous courses or lost to unpleasant writing experiences. Not only that, but creative writing is an opportunity to stretch students out of their comfort zone, engage them in new styles of writing and experiences that they are not used to or familiar with, but which they can enjoy and grow through. What is more important in a college education than growing past comfort zones in freeing and creative ways? My course has the ability to offer all of these aspects of creative writing in a comfortable environment free of the pressure of grades.

Following the footsteps of writing across the curriculum, I have had the personal chance to put my idea that creative writing can help students’ writing in other classes into effect in a small way. A peer of mine at the University Writing Center, Julie, asked me to develop creative writing activities for her students in a general education English class, WRC 2001. Her students were working on a large paper that addressed a global issue and she was hoping to help her students step outside of the immense research and multiple drafts for a change of pace with a creative writing exercise. I asked her class to complete two creative exercises: one involved describing the physical act of planting a flower in extreme, minute detail for 10 minutes and the other asked students to take a global issue and go from how the issue impacted the world globally, then through steps down in scale to how the issue impacted a family then, working on a scale from small to big this time, how a family all the way up to world leaders might begin to solve this problem. These exercises were meant to

stretch the students' minds about how they think about an issue and the importance of incremental shifts and steps in solving a problem.

Students reflected on the experience of participating in these creative writing exercises and how it influenced their lengthier papers about global issues. A sophomore sustainable development major said:

The above are some pieces from the exercise in freewriting that we completed in class. I intentionally (and also sub-consciously) wrote in a more narrative and comfortable style, which is one that I tend to suppress when writing any sort of formal paper. This approach was exceedingly helpful to me, in that it removed all senses of writer's block and allowed for a natural thought-to-paper writing process. I didn't get bogged down in formalities and thoughts of what would sound better. This writing is convenient for editing and for supplementing while I continue to work on developing the causal analysis.

This student noticed how creative writing broke them out of the normal restrictions they felt in critical and formal writing, how a new form of writing helped change their mindset and free up their writer's block. Creative writing allowed this student to not only open up their writing ability during class, but in the future for editing and supplementing purposes as well. A sophomore anthropology major wrote, "The writing workshop helped me think about how deeply my proposal could eventually affect the world...Once I was re-impassioned about my idea through global-to-individual, deconstructing the powers from the bottom up became a breeze. It's very far-fetched but it's the foundations of a plan- which is way more than I had!" This student found the exercise useful because it allowed them to think more deeply about the impact of their proposal as well as to reignite their interest in the subject, finding a fresh

direction to rethink their work. This student, like the sustainable development major, was able to use creative writing to change their thinking and discover new ideas that were once restricted by their conceptions of formal writing. A sophomore of political science wrote that,

The workshop was useful because it helped me to begin thinking about solutions on various levels, which I have not done at all yet. Simply because of that, it served as a great segue into starting my proposal because very soon I will have to come to a conclusion about a definitive solution. As well, it helped to make my topic seem less overwhelming. Just because there is no simple, clear-cut solution, it doesn't mean that a solution does not exist at all. All in all, it was a very useful exercise that I will remember and utilize again when I am in need.

Again, the creative writing exercise acted as a way for a student to rethink their topic and see new areas of their topic they had not considered or were too overwhelmed to consider. It seems evident that this exercise allowed students to step outside of their overly critical and analytical mindsets to relieve pressures and restrictions the genre of writing narrowed them into. It also offered a technique for revitalizing their thinking and a few students acknowledged they would use this technique in the future.

This creative writing exercise did not, of course, help every student in the class. One student, a physics major, commented on how the activity did not really impact the topic of their paper, but they enjoyed where their ideas were leading them. Though the exercise did not benefit their current paper, the student did admit to having their thinking altered about the framing of their issue as well as saying that they appreciated the activity. However, this is a success too. Creative writing allows for writing to be enjoyable and engaging again, even if only for a brief fifteen minute exercise, and can serve to not only stretch students' intellects

and thoughts, but to invigorate their interest in writing in general. All in all, these student reflections showed that creative writing can help students of all disciplines in various ways by being included in a general education classroom. Imagine how an entire course of creative writing could help these same students even more.

As some scholars are calling for creative writing within classes across the curriculum in general, other scholars have already begun to plan or even implement creative writing practices within the classrooms of disciplines outside of the English department. Lisa Kerr, I have mentioned before, wrote about the benefits of creative writing within health care education in her article “More than Words: Applying the Discipline of Literary Creative Writing to the Practice of Reflective Writing in Health Care Education.” Kerr notes that the use of creative writing leads to increased skills in observation, an improved ability to understand relationships between patients and other health care providers, and better daily communication and professional writing skills for health care professionals (296). Kerr also noted that poetry, in particular, was valuable because “of its use of metaphor, imagery, complexity and ambiguity—discursive features to which health care workers should be attuned in practice” (297). Narrative writing, in general, also contributed to the “enhancement of empathy, the development of self-awareness, and the improvement of relationships” (Kerr 297). Creative writing offers health care professionals the opportunity to refine their ability to tell stories but also to understand other’s stories with empathy, attention to detail, and self-awareness. Health care provides a unique connection with creative writing since human interaction and understanding is of utmost interest to both and in this way they can contribute to each other. Rafael Campo put it most poetically in his defense of “Why Should Medical Students Be Writing Poems” when he said:

Physicians who lack a passion for language or who fail to see beauty will be at a loss to translate these wonders in the most meaningful terms for their lay patients and into the larger society around us. We need now more than ever to be able to conduct ourselves in the realm of the imagination because what is science if not the dream of something new? (254).

As this article points out about the health care professionals implementing creative writing practices into their education, creative writing can deepen understanding of not only ourselves, but also other people in a way that is both professionally and socially useful. A discipline outside of the English department has already discovered the benefits of creative writing on students.

Creative writing has been included in another field outside of the English department recently as Keren Dali, Andrea Lau, and Kevin Risk explain in “Academically Informed Creative Writing in LIS Programs and the Freedom to be Creative.” The authors of this article have extremely similar ideas about creative writing in academic education as I have, even referring to writing center concepts of self sponsored learning, and I want to quote in full here their tremendous introduction to why they decided to use a creative writing assignment in their library and information science class:

We explore the role of creative writing in the facilitation of self-directed learning, which capitalizes on students’ interests and ability to relate to and invest in their work. It highlights the importance of creative writing in fostering the “habit of reflection” and observation, which is paramount for user and community centered LIS practices, as opposed to material- and resource-oriented ones. In particular, we advocate for creative writing as a vehicle for promoting a contextual and holistic

understanding of human experiences...It situates creative writing as an instrument for liberating students from patterned thinking, template solutions, and excessive dependence on secondary sources and authoritative opinions, and posits creative writing as an instrument that strengthens the bond between the theoretical material learned in the course and its practical applications (Dali, Lau, & Risk 299).

Dali, Lau, and Risk gave a creative writing assignment as an option for a final project in a LIS class, which asked students to create a fully developed character and reading history and to analyze that character's reading practices and habits. The assignment was meant to show "how creative writing can contribute to the development of creativity, critical thinking, ability for self-direction and independent learning—all the necessary skills for future leaders in the field of LIS" (Dali, Lau, Risk 298). The class observed that "grades for this assignment were consistently higher than for assignments in more traditional formats," and that "most students performed on a much higher level and delivered a superior quality of work compared with other assignments" (Dali, Lau, Risk 309). The reason for this improvement in the quality of work was credited to the unusual creative framework requiring students to spend more time with the content reading and writing, as well as critically thinking, the decrease in awkward and labored language of contrived arguments, and the ability for students to relate to the assignment through personal experience and interest of telling a story (Dali, Lau, Risk 306).

Although creative writing was merely used as an assessment tool, the assignment allowed students to combine their acquired knowledge of theory and experience and fold it seamlessly into practice in a way that allowed them greater freedom and engagement. Creative writing helped them utilize ideas and concepts that were purely theoretical and

initially only observed and use them in a natural and compelling way in their narrative and analytical writing. Also, this article begins to point in the direction of involving the writing center practices of providing a risk-free environment with low-pressure stakes and an absence of grades. The authors explicitly advocated for a classroom environment that is supportive, with a teacher who values and understands risk-taking who the students can trust with reading and appreciating their creative work. They even point to the importance of reducing anxiety for trying out a new writing genre by having no grade penalties. This study and article on the implementation of creative writing in the LIS environment is the closest I have seen to matching up with my own ideas.

Altogether, this look at the current scholarship regarding the implementation of creative writing in the classroom has been very interesting. Many scholars support and advocate for the idea that creative writing has many benefits for students in the areas of critical thinking, reading, and writing and that students should have access to creative writing in the classroom in order to receive these benefits. These articles have pointed to countless uses of creative writing and showed positive student responses and achievement once creative writing was involved. Obviously, education can be enhanced with the inclusion of creative writing practices. However, I did notice a lack of scholarship encouraging students to take a creative writing class in full, but rather to involve creative writing exercises within preexisting classrooms of different subject areas. In this way, I am offering something totally different from the suggestions of these articles. I am suggesting that students of all disciplines can benefit from a full course on creative writing, not just creative writing exercises geared toward content memorization or analysis. I argue that the benefits latent within creative writing can be discovered by students in a separate class entirely and then

used within their own disciplines afterward. Additionally, I further complicate this argument by involving writing center methodology, removing a classroom authority in place of peer collaboration and support, as well as removing the high risk environment of grades. I think what my course has to offer is supported by the literature, but reaches far past it to combine writing center methods with a greater emphasis on creative writing practices in the form of a course.

Site and Methodology: Why the UWC?

An important aspect of my creative writing course is its involvement and close ties to the University Writing Center. Instead of using a traditional classroom set-up and system of grading and teaching, my course turns to the UWC to create a new kind of learning environment. Utilizing writing center theory, particularly the points of low-stakes writing and learning, peer collaboration and teaching, and self-directed learning, and the University Writing Center as the site of implementation, allows for my course to invite and encourage students of all disciplines and skill levels to get involved. Furthermore, the goals of writing centers across the country align with the goals of my course and both will offer, “places whose primary responsibility, whose only reason for being, is to talk to writers” (North 446). One need look no further than the seminal work of Stephen North and, in particular, his article entitled “The Idea of a Writing Center” to see how the University Writing Center is the perfect companion to creative writing and my course.

In North’s article, “The Idea of a Writing Center,” he offers a clear breakdown of what a writer center’s purpose is and what can be accomplished within a writing center’s walls. One such distinction is what a “new,” new in 1984 that is, writing center represents:

It represents the marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives on teaching writing: first, that writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered. This new writing center, then, defines its province not in terms of some curriculum, but in terms of the writers it serves. (North 438)

While, clearly, my course will have a curriculum in some form, though not as formal as traditional classes, the idea that teaching writing should focus on what the writers need and not what the classroom demands of them is what my course hopes to capture. The goals of my course are student-centered at their core, reaching out to all students to help them as writers through process writing and creative writing activities, yes, but also through meeting them at their level. Writing centers are focused on beginning “where the writers are, not where we told them to be,” and my course will highlight this ideal (North 442). Additionally, “going to talk in the writing center is a means of getting started, or a way to keep going,” and the writing center is a place that reaches out a helping hand and guides a student along the writing process without concern for an end-goal or deadline (North 442). Even though my course will have a start and an end date, the hope is that this is merely the beginning for writers, a jumping off point for their continued growth and learning as a writer. Rather than reaching a stopping point at the end of the semester, my course will have begun the process of continued learning, offering a way to keep going with one’s writing.

There are several other aspects of writing center theory that I wish to utilize within my course. The first is peer collaboration and collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is not to be confused with collaborative writing, where two or more writers produce a joint product, or co-authorship, in which multiple writers write and think through drafts together to

create one text. Instead, collaborative learning, as defined by Muriel Harris in her article “Collaboration is Not Collaboration is Not Collaboration,” “involves interaction between writer and reader to help the writer improve her own abilities and produce her own text” (273). This distinction is important because it emphasizes co-learning, not co-creation. Students are able to support one another in the process of writing, but not specifically in the decision-making or final results. Collaborative learning, specifically with peers, is an important tenet of writing centers because students benefit greatly from learning and working with their peers and do so in a different way than with a teacher or authority figure.

A traditional classroom looks to the teacher as the only source of knowledge and to students as passive recipients of that knowledge, whereas writing centers champion the belief that peers can collaborate and teach to and learn from one another to gain knowledge as well. Peer collaboration offers an amazing chance to “replace the hierarchical model of teachers and students with a collaborative model of co-learners engaged in the shared activity of intellectual work” (Trimbur 290). In this way, peer collaboration and learning changes the way students learn altogether. As Trimbur puts it in his article “Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms,” “the significance of collaborative learning is the way it redefines learning as an event produced by the social interaction of the learners—and not a body of information passed down from an expert to a novice” (290). In this way, peer collaboration takes away some authority from the teacher and gives it to the students. Students are given the ability to learn and benefit from one another, something students have always been doing, and banding together to support each other therefore becoming institutionalized and legitimized. Within writing centers, and within my creative writing course, students enter into an environment where they do not simply receive knowledge from a teacher, but rather

they work together to discover knowledge and aid one another in the journey to become better writers and even responsive critics of writing.

Peer collaboration and learning has already begun to be implemented outside of the writing center and into classrooms. Many teachers value the peer response groups and collaboration within the classroom because of its many benefits. Peer collaboration changes the learning environment and makes it more reassuring. Students can learn to depend and rely on each other while they grow comfortable responding to each other's work and ideas. Not only that, but students can offer emotional support as they all go through the stressful and frustrating process of gaining awareness of language and writing. Students are no longer painfully alone in the writing process, but among peers struggling through the same loneliness of writing and composing (Gebhardt "Teamwork" 71). Students also begin to see themselves as resources, as they not only receive helpful responses from their peers, but also are able to become critical readers and responders themselves in regard to other writing. Peer response is credited for its effectiveness "in improving critical thinking, organization, and appropriateness of writing, in improving usage in writing, in increasing the amount of revision done by students, and in reducing students' apprehension about writing" (Gere & Abbott 363). Working with peers makes students accountable to one another, motivating them to revise and rework more often because they have to live up to standards their peers and they decided for themselves. Additionally, peer response and collaboration changes "the normal expectation that one learns from the teacher, writes for the teacher, and is evaluated by the teacher" (Jacko 292). As I mentioned before, some of the authority granted to teachers is taken away and given to the students as they develop their sense of purpose with writing, realizing that writing extends past the teacher and their expectations and requirements. As

peer learning collaboration is introduced into more and more classes, although it may not be attributed to writing center theory, it certainly continues in the tradition of peer support and learning that writing centers valorize, and I plan to continue in this tradition as well. Peer collaboration will offer students within my course the chance to rely on one another to grow as writers as well as to learn alongside each other. Students will remove some of their dependency on teachers as a well of knowledge and instead seek one another and the knowledge they already possess, but perhaps do not initially trust. This peer collaboration extends even to the course facilitator, who in this course will be a peer and student as well. Through peer collaboration in my course, students can find a supportive learning environment that also challenges them to leave their comfort zone of passive learning and actively take charge in their writing education as they find new audiences, writing styles, and unique voices within each other.

Traditionally, creative writing practices both incorporate and reject peer collaboration and collaborative learning. In creative writing class workshops, there is certainly an element of peer collaboration as fellow students offer suggestions, advice, and concerns about a writer's work. Sometimes these comments are helpful, sometimes not, and sometimes these comments are malicious because of the competitiveness of students, and sometimes they are filled with positive intent and support. In this way, creative writing does utilize peer collaboration as peers respond and comment on each other's work, but because of the so-called "gag" rule in workshops, or the writer's inability to address other students when they are receiving formal feedback, there is less of a dialogue. Workshops do not promote truly collaborative learning since students do not engage in a back and forth of discovery together, but rather one moment of giving opinions and nothing else. An open dialogue about writing

and the talking through of problems and successes within a written work are more helpful than a one-time exchange of opinions between the reader and writer. Creative writing practices also stifle true peer collaboration due to the myth of the isolated genius. The idea that writers are solitary beings brewing up inspiration and toiling alone is a long-held, but mostly counterproductive one. By introducing more peer collaboration and dialogue as well as actual collaborative learning into creative writing practices in my course, creative writing will lose the destructive mythology of a recluse genius as well as the stunted peer dialogue. The writing center tenet of peer collaboration and learning will alter creative writing practices of the classroom and for the better of the students.

Coupled alongside peer collaboration is the lack of a formal authority figure that peer-facilitated learning demands in a writing center. These concepts are closely related and often blend into one another in practice. I have already spoken briefly on how peer collaboration can give authority back to students and direct it away from solely teachers and linear learning models, but the concept of a non-hierarchical learning environment requires further emphasis, as it is also a tenet of writing center pedagogy. Writing centers offer students a chance to learn from peers not from authority figures. The peer facilitator that will be facilitating my course will be an authority of sorts since they will informally lead the class and have more expertise on the subject of creative writing than the students taking the course. However, this facilitator will operate more as a peer who is learning and collaborating alongside the students, entering into a dialogue with the students directly to decide the direction the course will take. This peer facilitator is a deemphasized authority and allows the class to be peer-led instead of a formal authority figure directly handing down knowledge to students. Peers are able to give suggestions and offer their point of view and individual

experience, rather than just professional expertise, to a writer and that writer can listen, learn, but ultimately make decisions on their own. When a peer in the writing center advises on paragraph structure and content, it is the writer and not the peer who makes final choices on the writer's work, allowing the writer to decide for themselves what works and does not work and which responses fulfill their own goals, not the peers (Elbow 126). While a teacher or authority figure's suggestions and comments are simply taken as irrefutable fact without analysis or questioning, a peer's comments demand that the writers actively engage and make decisions for themselves based on peer response. In this way, students "understand the development of knowledge as a communal and continual process," and are not just receiving knowledge from one source (Penrose & Geisler 517). My creative writing course will reflect this non-hierarchical learning structure in order for students to actively engage in their learning rather than passively receive knowledge on their writing. The lack of an authority on writing will also allow room for a lack of authority on reading as well, allowing students to question authors as they question readers (Penrose & Geisler 517). If students can question a peer's comment on their writing, so they can also question the author of an article or a novel, creating and negotiating meaning for themselves. Without one direct authority in a classroom there is room for more voices and more opportunities to construct knowledge.

While writing centers give students a learning experience devoid of direct authority figures, non-hierarchical teaching is not solely an experience within the writing center. Perhaps most famously, Peter Elbow advocated for a "teacherless" classroom in his book *Writing Without Teachers*. While Elbow's writing is not related to writing centers directly, it further develops the idea of relying on peers to engender better writing. Elbow suggests that a teacherless writing classroom makes writing easier because it gives writers a wider audience

and more reactions to their writing, as well as the freedom of not worrying about those reactions. In other words, with peers instead of teachers, writers can hear perceptions and experiences of their writing with interest and thoughtfulness without the concern of evaluation and grading typically coupled with those reactions (Elbow 126). A teacherless classroom has lower stakes and is inherently non-evaluative. A teacherless classroom provides readers who are in some ways better and worse readers than a teacher, but always helpful. A peer that is a worse reader, or perhaps less experience or less expert, than a teacher can point out more clearly to the writer areas that are confusing or where material needs better explanation. However, a peer that is a better reader than a teacher “can listen fully to your words—just listen and attend to their reactions—because they don’t have to try to evaluate or give a grade. They get to know your language, your way of handling words, so they can hear ideas, feelings, and nuances that are only partially encoded in the words” (Elbow 128). Peers are able to offer a well-rounded response to a student’s work because their purpose is narrow and focused; peers are there to read and respond to a writer and that is all.

Along the way, of course, that peer will help the writer learn about their own writing and areas of success or areas in need of improvement and refinement, but at their core, peer responses are pure reactions and suggestions without ulterior motive. Writers are able to make decisions on what suggestions and reactions they find useful and give themselves authority over their own text because they do not have a teacher stepping in to do that for them. I want my course to reflect Elbow’s and the writing center’s idea of a learning environment without a direct authority figure in order to give students authority over their own writing and provide a more diverse readership and audience to their writing.

The exclusion of a formal authority figure will not only positively affects my course and students ability to participate within it, but also will alter traditional creative writing practices in the classroom. The teacher of a creative writing class, no matter how much they may or may not try to seem this way, is always seen as an authoritative and absolute source of knowledge to students. A teacher's comments on a story or draft are seen a final and absolute to many students. Of course, these comments are most often useful and beneficial to a writer, but they never demand analysis nor does the writer challenge them. This is an oddity since the spirit of creative writing demands that the writer has authority over their writing and voice because creative writing is an expression of the writer, reflective of their personal insights and imagination. While teacher's comments can help a writer, they can also block the creative writer's sense of identity and authority over their own work. By lacking an authority figure, creative writing is able to flourish because ideas, advice, and comments by peers can be negotiated and discussed, not taken for gospel truth. This writing center theory allows a writer to have a firmer grip of their unique voice and authority over their text while still being open to revisions and refinement.

A classroom or learning environment without a direct authority figure is also one without high stakes or evaluation. One of the attractions of writing centers is the low-stakes learning. A traditional classroom has the pressures of grades and evaluations that add tension to student writing. Additionally, a student might be worried to speak with their teacher directly about their writing for fear of embarrassment or approaching the sometimes intimidating decider of their final grade with questions or incomplete work. The writing center provides a place free of these pressures and tensions by offering a third-party peer who can help students with their work. This low stakes environment lowers student anxiety and

allows them to feel comfortable participating in creative exploration and experimentation without fear of failure or criticism (Connor-Greene 217). Writing centers do not aim to determine grades or make evaluations of students, but rather to improve writing at any stage or level of the writing process. There is a freedom from evaluation that gives students the ability to loosen up and think about only writing and not the immediate stakes riding on the success of that writing. Students can enter the writing center without fear and stress of judgment or assessment while learning. Removing this sense of anxiety and fear of failure that typically inhibits student writing allows them to instead feel confident and excited about their writing. I plan to replicate this reduced stress environment in my creative writing course by offering similarly low-stakes learning. My course will not give strict grades for each assignment or class day, but rather a final grade for participation. In other words, students are required to write in each class, but the content will not be graded, only the participation in writing. Each writing sample will not be evaluated and scored, but rather developed and improved without regard to grade. I want students to enter the classroom the way they enter the writing center, excited to work on their writing and relieved to have help from reliable peers, and without dread of a looming grade or soul-crushing harsh evaluation process.

The writing center tenet of low-stakes and non-evaluative learning alters creative writing practices too. At its heart, creative writing is not meant to be evaluated or to be overtly intimidating. While sharing writing with peers, family, or friends can be hard for writers since creative writing can be intensely personal, it is risky in a personal sense and not an academic one. Creative writing courses, however, like most academic courses, are reliant on evaluation and grading. Even writing outside of college is subject to evaluation that can be intimidating, like entering writing into contests or publications. This pressure, whether in the

classroom or outside of it, can be stifling and daunting to writers, especially those who view their creative writing as very intimate and perhaps underdeveloped. By removing evaluation and the high stakes of grades and harsh criticism, creative writing becomes easier because the creative mind is free of immense and suffocating pressure. Creative writing is not unique to this phenomenon, but is significantly more affected by a low-stakes environment than other writing forms.

Finally, the last tenet of writing center theory I plan to use within my creative writing course is that of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is “a process whereby the learners are to determine their learning direction with minimal assistance from others,” and where learners can “diagnose their learning needs to formulate their learning goals” (Din, Haron, & Rashid 220). In other words, self-directed learning is when a learner, in this case a student, decides to take their learning process into their own hands and create their own learning goals, then decide how to achieve those goals. The University Writing Center is a paragon for self-directed learning since it is not required of students and is a resource utilized by students who actively seek to improve their writing and themselves as writers. Writers that come to the UWC have chosen to do so of their own volition, unless an ill-advised teacher requires it, and have done so because they have determined to better themselves as writers. It is that freedom of choice to learn and improve that is so striking about writing centers. The UWC succeeds because learners have chosen to “create their own knowledge rather than play a passive, receptive role” in their education (Pruitt 275). Just as having a non-hierarchical class allows students to have authority over their own writing and writing choices, so does self-directed learning allow for students to take authority in their learning process. Students are challenged to seek their own information and sources of knowledge in

an individualized way. If a student chooses areas where they want to improve or further their knowledge, they are more engaged and interested in that learning, more receptive, and more motivated (Pruitt 281-286). Self-directed learning puts the student in the seat of authority and, “if the student sees in himself as an authority on many subjects by virtue of his own interests and experiences, his own reading and informal research, he will be less inclined to see his writing as dull exercise” (Small 160). Thus, an environment that fosters self-directed learning develops within students a greater interest and engagement in writing, opening the gateway to life long learning. My writing course will likewise be built upon self-directed learners since it will not a required course, but for students who want to have control over their learning and are seeking to improve their writing.

Although the writing center theories of peer collaboration, non-authoritative classes, and low-stakes learning will alter creative writing practices within my course, self-directed learning is already largely present in creative writing. Most creative writing begins as self-directed, whether it is in a diary, in scribbled poems in a notebook, or in the secrecy of a sock drawer. In fact, the majority of creative writing majors come from self-directed learners who developed an interest and aptitude for creative writing and sought to refine it through college courses. My course will not implement self-directed learning into creative writing practices, but rather emphasize and enhance the aspects of self-directed learning already present, calling students to engage in a full course, not just personal writing.

Alongside several writing center tenets and theories, I plan to use the University Writing Center location as the site of my course based on three factors. First, the UWC as an institution believes in putting writers and students first as well as offering a peer-based atmosphere of support and collaboration. By placing my creative writing course within the

walls of the UWC, students will feel that the course is approachable and accepting of all disciplines and skill levels because that is an ideal that the UWC promotes. The site itself is a model of peer collaboration and writing resources in the minds of students, so placing my course there only makes sense if I wish to promote and encourage those same ideals.

Second, the University Writing Center is specifically placed outside of the English Department and outside the limits of a specific academic department. All of the constraints on thinking within a discipline are removed within a writing center since it serves a wide range of students and entering that environment will further encourage students to feel that they are outside any traditional discipline, but rather within a space that is free of such limits and structures. This removal of disciplinary thinking will allow students to not only open up their thinking, but to view the class as outside of general education, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), or a typical classroom. Although creative writing is a discipline, there is not exact style or format required of creative writing that limits it as much as other fields of study. Also, being coupled with the writing center will introduce creative writing as a new way to approach writing, which can provide a different mindset and structure of thinking. Changing the setting can benefit students in changing their mindsets when it comes to the way they will be learning.

Third, the physical UWC site itself is modeled around small group conversations and cooperation in the structure of the seating as well as the number of book and computer-related writing resources. The set-up of the space is designed to stimulate close group work, while also being an open area for reaching out to other peers when help is needed. The location within the school is also convenient because the UWC is located in the library rather than in a specific department building, making it not only convenient to find but also outside

of one particular department's purview or shadow. My course will happily sit inside of the UWC's site in order to promote its ties to UWC theory, its departure from the typical classroom and disciplinary focus, as well as its encouraging and collaborative atmosphere.

Writing centers across the country have already begun to expand the use of their space to include poetry slams, small writing groups, and other activities outside of direct writing center business. The UWC would benefit from more awareness of the center and its benefit to students, as well as further promoting its overarching goal of improving writers in all formats. Writing centers have even stretched to the community, sponsoring creative writing events for more than just college students. The Writing Center at Fairfield University helped sponsor Poetry for Peace, a contest that brought poetry writing to elementary and middle schools (Boquet 20). My creative writing course will begin the process of the UWC opening its doors for community outreach, from students to non-students within the area, and sponsored writing activities. Creative writing and writing centers have the ability to combine forces and offer students a new kind of course that can benefit them both as writers and as students while stirring up a little change in the academic world. As Stephen North said, "if we conceive of writing as a relatively rhythmic and repeatable kind of behavior, then for a writer to improve that behavior, that rhythm, has to change—preferably, though not necessarily, under the writer's control"(443). If nothing else, this is what my course represents, a chance to change the rhythm, an opportunity to take control of one's own writing, stretch out of one's comfort zone, and boldly change one's way of thinking about writing, all the while having a little creative fun.

Creative Writing Course Description

I have never subscribed to the idea that someone was born a writer, innately gifted with all of the talents and skills to write and inspire. Writing, as with all pursuits, takes practice, relentless work, and a heap of encouragement. While I will admit to having a natural and long-lived inclination towards writing and reading, I earned the title of writer simply by asserting it as my own, broadly announcing it for myself, and brandishing the title without any authority handing it to me. People are often shy about these types of declarations. A woman writing poems in her journal may not call herself a poet, but she is. A child telling stories and writing about his hamster “Muffins” and their adventures together may not feel like a writer, but he is one. For me, anyone who puts pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, with the purpose of expressing an idea, building on a thought, saying what was previously unsaid, is a writer. Owning the title of writer for yourself is accomplished only by having the courage and the confidence to proclaim that you have a voice and you will make use of it.

The aim of my thesis is to make students, especially non-creative writing students—whether it is the awkward psych student, the tight-lipped biology major, the nervous communications student, or the first year student in remedial English who feels they have nothing to say and no way to say it—stand up and declare themselves writers with pride and significant volume. I want to help them to build confidence in their writing, develop their individual voices, widen their perspectives on writing through new and creative lenses, and foster peer support and community. I am looking to reach out to those students who are not looking for careers or success as professional writers, but who rather are seeking an opportunity to improve themselves as writers and as academics through an inspiring and

encouraging creative writing course. I want to reach out to students who are motivated to advance and revitalize their writing and collaborate with peers in engaging new ways, but are unable to utilize traditional classrooms and credit hours to do so. From the practices of writing, specifically creative writing, students stand the chance to gain an eye for observation, an attention to detail, an inventive mind, an expressive hand, and a way to look at the world from multiple perspectives, keenly and with excitement. Such is what creative writing can teach the so-called non-writer.

The method I have chosen to use to create writers out of self-named non-writers or for students struggling to stay interested or engaged with writing, regardless of the discipline, is a semester long course. The creative writing course will be offered once a week for a semester to Appalachian students, and the syllabus for this course can be found in the Appendix. I will place the course in the University Writing Center, utilizing the UWC as both a site and source of methodology. The creative writing course will consist of the fourteen scheduled sessions, each including selected readings, free writing topics, writing activities, at-home assignments, and open sharing of student work with peers. The course will intermix creative writing practice with the select writing center theories of self-directed learning, low-stakes environments, peer collaboration, and an absence of authority to build a unique structure not found in the traditional college classroom. A course without grades and pretension, without lofty expectations and intense academics. This course will be a student-facilitated, student-owned class full of willing and self-directed learners and student participants supporting each other and growing in creativity, collaboration, and community.

This course will offer creative writing tenets and activities without the pretentiousness of acclaimed writers or the high pressure of grades and highly competitive

writing students. Instead, elements from creative writing courses, such as freewrites and story and character development, will be used to raise self confidence, increase critical thinking and awareness of audience, hone individual voice, and improve rhetorical writing skills. This creative writing course will include writing center tenets of self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and non-evaluative, low-stakes learning without the constraints of an actual writing center, like the limit of a forty-five minute conversation or the confinement of a single academic assignment to work on. The removal of these limiting elements of writing centers opens the door for peer support and an atmosphere of sharing and building as a community rather than being reigned in by a hierarchal classroom. A healthy amount of inspiring freewriting, helpful revising, and mind-stretching activities, combined with peer-to-peer communication, collaboration, and the absence of a formal authority figure will create a course that can engage students in a one-of-a-kind experience that has the potential to surpass its semester long tenure. This course offers the chance to participate in a creative writing class relatively risk-free in order to build academic and expressive writing skills, as well as the ability to talk and collaborate with peers. The occasion to improve writing and reading capacities for all fields of study while engaging in exciting activities and a supportive community is a rare opportunity and one that Appalachian State University campus needs to offer.

This course will be a pass/fail optional, or elective, class for one credit hour and it will be outside of any specific department. The course will be student-facilitated with an assigned creative writing student leading, directing, and actively participating in the class. Although this student will formally be in charge, their peer status allows for them to create a non-authoritative classroom, promoting peer collaborative learning rather than a linear

passing of knowledge from teacher to student (Small 155). The creative writing course will not be a part of general education classes or Writing Across the Curriculum because it is meant to be completely optional, devoid of requirements and the pressure associated with higher credit hours or classes that are necessary to obtaining a degree. The low-stakes nature of this course allows for non-experienced writers and students of all disciplines and skill levels with interest in writing but little time in their hectic class schedules to enter the writing conversation. Additionally, this optional course will be seen on transcripts and be a useful tool for students in their current academic career as well as on future graduate school and job applications. Of course, being optional does mean that the course is held together purely through student interest, but the inherent rewards of the course, the opportunity to network and to build community with peers, and the ability to use this positive mark of experience on resumes and transcripts should involve enough students to keep the course going.

The course is framed to last an entire semester, beginning a week after regular classes start and ending before finals. Look to the appendix to see the syllabus, which includes fourteen meetings for the spring semester of 2017 as a framework for how the course operates. Each meeting will consist of a main topic, such as developing imagery or responding to peers' writing, which will be taught in a mini lesson and then fleshed out with an in-class writing activity, student questions, and an out-of-class writing assignment. The last element of out-of-class work will be optional, unless work was not completed in the class itself, in order to support students with busy schedules and jobs. In-class activities will range from guided freewrites to structured writing assignments, like character interviews and creating portrait descriptions. The rest of the meeting time will include the reading aloud of a poem or flash fiction piece so that students can hear professional and popular writing.

Reading aloud, too, leads to talking about writing in a productive and useful way, pinpointing strategies and elements that are effective or not within the text. Other activities that will occur during the course of most classes includes group and partner work, which involves sharing and responding to each other's writing; one-minute reflections at the end of the meeting to get student feedback, optional reading assignments for students wishing to read further outside the course, and practical applications of the creative writing activities and their relevance to scholarly writing in other fields. Each meeting will vary depending on the topic of the day and the size of the in-class activity.

This creative course aims to create a new kind of class experience, one that involves the combination of creative writing skills and writing center theories to improve students as both writers and scholars. The course will encompass a wider range of students than any creative writing course before it and give the interested student population the chance to participate in and benefit from creative writing without the stress and intimidation of current creative writing classes. Furthermore, this course will allow students to come together in a collaborative and experimental environment to discover for themselves a new way to learn and engage in writing, exploring their acquisition of knowledge and self-motivated learning. Writing center theory offers students the chance to complicate traditional creative writing classes and bring in useful and dynamic elements of current writing centers, such as collaborative learning, into a classroom setting. All in all, this course represents a call to action for creative writing and writing centers to combine forces and create a new and exciting learning experience for engaged and interested students asking for help and for a little bit of writing inspiration.

Conclusion

What began this thesis was a question I often found myself asking throughout my four years of education as a creative writing major: why do I love and respect creative writing? From there blossomed other questions, questions about what I have gained from creative writing to what others could gain from it too. Then finally, and perhaps most importantly, how could I bring creative writing and its vast benefits to different kinds of students, and what would that process look like? The answer to these questions and the course they inspired have taken me in many directions, down the rabbit hole of theory and scholarship and out again as I have rounded out and ran through my own ideas. It has led to me to incorporate writing centers and their pedagogy while I expanded my scope and view of student writing. It has led me to discoveries about myself as a writer and writing center consultant as well as confirming and strengthening my understanding of creative writing, academia, and scholarship. However, throughout this process the answer to these questions first and foremost comes back to one thing, and I will borrow a quote from Connor-Greene to explain: “when people are creating, they feel more engaged and live more fully than at other times, and the products of their creative work enrich their own and other people’s lives” (216). I want to build a creative writing course that allows students of all disciplines and skill levels to live more fully through writing.

Creative writing has the unique ability to bring out the best and the most inspirational of a writer, to engage the mind in complicated and exciting ways, to inspire and revitalize the thinking and to engender a passion for writing that students often feel numb to when writing routinely in a discipline or reading without motivation. Creative writing gives writers a chance to create something beautiful and meaningful, enjoying the process, the result, and the

impact along the way. Furthermore, creative writing has the ability to teach students important and useful techniques, such as critical reading, responding acutely to peers work, focusing on description and show-not-tell details, interacting with texts and authors, gaining authority over one's ideas and writing, and stimulating new thought processes. These skills are vitally useful in not only a creative writing class, but extend far past a singular course and into students' academic and personal lives to improve them as writers, readers, and even people. Creative writing is a meaningful activity, but also a technique and tool that students can utilize again and again throughout their educational and professional career to revitalize their writing, reengage with reading, and invigorate their communication and collaboration abilities. I hope that this thesis has asked the question whether or not students can benefit from a creative writing course structured within a writing center environment and then answered it with a resounding "yes", but also done so in a way that inspires the reader to take a moment to be creative themselves.

Since this thesis has argued that creative writing and writing center theory can combine to form a peculiar and marvelous learning environment and course that has the ability to aid and improve writers, it should be ended with a note on what the improvement of all those students in writing could mean. A course of this nature has a place in not only creative writing's continued history of development, but also in universities. Although hypothetical within this thesis, this hybrid course of creative writing practices and writing center theory stands that chance to introduce an alternative style of classroom that can engage and support students, as well as the opportunity to show students tools and techniques that they have not had the access or encouragement to develop. Who knows how many articulate and stimulating minds are buried under the burden of routine writing and the conventions of

a discipline? Who knows how many keen and exciting writers with the capability to change fiction, poetry, or even their own disciplinary field are currently discouraged and wavering about their writing ability? This creative writing course will allow these writers, these hidden gems, to emerge and flourish, perhaps changing the future course of writing history in the process. Even on a less grand scale, do we not owe it to all students to give them the chance to learn and grow as writers, to urge their potential to be explored and encouraged? Whether it is the brilliant novelist waiting to find their path or the disheartened student needing a place to express themselves, this creative writing course has the ability, the responsibility, to bring out the best within students and discover the bright minds waiting to be tapped. There is a space within the creative writing department that begs to be filled, a space that students of disciplines and writing levels can occupy and learn to improve their writing skills. This course has the grand opportunity and responsibility of giving students a new structure of thinking about writing and, most importantly, about themselves as writers so that they can flourish and grow within and outside academics.

Appendix

Creative Writing Course Syllabus

Course Syllabus
Creative Writing for the Non-Creative Writer
Spring Semester 2017
Meets Weekly, 6:00-7:30pm

Located in Belk Library, Room 008

“Someday, somewhere - anywhere, unfailingly, you'll find yourself, and that, and only that,
can be the happiest or bitterest hour of your life.” — Pablo Neruda

Instructor: Kendall MacVean

Email: macveanke@appstate.edu

Course Description & Objectives:

This course is designed to give students of all disciplines and skill levels the opportunity to learn creative writing skills such as freewriting, developing complex plot, building characters, and revising in a self-directed, collaborative, and non-hierarchical course. This combination of creative writing skills and writing center theory will contribute to improved student writing and reading across all disciplines. The course will utilize peer collaboration and peer-facilitated learning to develop students' abilities to critically read and respond to other's works, as well as gain authority and confidence over their own writing. Students will read and produce creative work throughout the course while discovering and defining for themselves successful writing. Students will leave this course having gained confidence in their voice and writing authority, improved their ability to write in any

discipline, whether academic or personal, and created constructive peer relationships through collaborative learning and small group community. This course aims to revitalize creativity and interest within students' writing lives, as well as to explore the inherent benefits that creative writing and writing center theory offer to students across fields of study and skill levels. The student facilitator will lead mini lessons and direct the discussions during all classes.

Achieving Course Objectives:

Each day of class will incorporate some, if not all, of the following activities to achieve course objectives.

- ❖ Topic lessons: the student facilitator will lead short lessons for the explanation of the main topic of the class, such as freewriting, responding to peers' writing, developing voice, culling and refining story/poem ideas. These lessons will always be followed by a directly related activity. These lessons are meant to introduce writers to new concepts and the practical effects of each on creative writing and other academic writing.
- ❖ In-class writing activity: these activities will be directly related to the topic of the day, for instance, going through class freewrites to mine out ideas or lines that could be molded into a fully developed story or poem. These activities are the heart of the class and are the process by which students get their hands dirty with creative writing and actively participate in creatively writing to learn.
- ❖ Ten-minute freewrite: a block of ten minutes will be set aside during class for freewriting on either one topic or a guided series of topics. Freewriting is meant to

get students in the habit of writing without worrying about content or quality, as well as jumpstarting the mind on ideas and possible stories/poems.

- ❖ Read and discuss fiction piece: a published short story or poem will be read aloud and discussed as a class or in small peer groups. The selected readings will be either student suggested or chosen by the facilitator one week in advance. These readings will introduce students to professional and interesting writers to see “successful” writing, as well as allowing them to pick apart the effective or ineffective aspects, analyze and critique productively, and get inspired.
- ❖ Group work: group work will either be reading and responding to one another’s freewrites or in-class writing activities or collaboratively writing a piece together. This time is important for building peer relationships and trust and sharpening views on audience, effectiveness of communication, and authority in writing.
- ❖ One-minute reflections: these reflections will be at the end of class and allow students to decompress and examine the usefulness of or interest in the class’ activities. This will allow students to have a voice in the way the class operates and to make changes, as things are determined more or less helpful.
- ❖ Out-of-class activities: students will be given an additional and optional freewriting or writing exercise topic should they wish to further work on their writing. There will also be an additional and optional piece of reading. These activities and readings are there purely for students interested in them who wish to continue their work outside of the classroom, but are unsure how to do so.

Grading:

This course will be pass/fail and rely heavily on class participation for grading. All writing done within and outside of the classroom will not be evaluated for a grade, but for participation. Participation in this course means students must write something, not necessarily something great or good, inspirational, or even logical, but a piece of writing none-the-less each class period. Student success is reliant on student motivation, meaning that what a student puts in is what they will get out of it. The purpose of this course is not for an easy grade or an extra credit hour, but for self-directed learners to engage in writing to improve and develop their abilities in an encouraging and engaging environment. The majority of work will take place during the class period and any assignment done outside of the class time will be encouraged, but not required in order to accommodate busy student schedules. Students are accountable for producing writing every class. There is no expectation that all students' writing will be "good" or successful each day, but that writing is necessary for productive group work and writing growth. If a student does not produce writing of any kind at all during more than three classes, that student will fail.

Final:

There is no formal examination at the end of the semester, but students are required to submit one piece of writing, either a poem, short story, flash fiction, or anything else of their creation that took place during the semester. This piece of writing will be made into a chapbook that contains a selection of writing from every student. Again, this piece of writing will not be graded for its content, but simply for being accomplished and submitted.

Required Materials:

All assigned in-class reading will be provided in handout form, as well as posted online in a PDF. Outside-of-class readings will be available online or found within the ASU

library for student access. Students are recommended to checkout or purchase a book of short stories or poetry on their own in order to contribute suggestions for class readings and to engage in reading outside of the classroom.

Examples of class readings: David Sedaris' "The Learning Curve," Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," Pablo Neruda's "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines," T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock," Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," George Ella Lyons' "Where I'm From," Etgar Keret's "Breaking the Pig," and H.J. Shepard's "Please Hold Me the Forgotten Way."

Attendance Policy:

Students will automatically fail should they have more than three unexcused absences. As the pass/fail of this class is based solely on participation in class, more than three absences will prevent a student from passing.

Dates and Topics of Discussion:

These are the following dates of each of the 14 class meetings, and the main topics of discussion that the group work, in-class activities, and mini lessons will center around. The readings for the day are unrelated in topic and will be chosen by the class a week in advance; these readings will either be student suggestions or from a list of possible readings given at the beginning of the semester, some of which are included above.

Meeting 1— 01/27/17 – Introductions to Each Other and Course, Addressing Expectations and Concerns

Meeting 2—02/03/17—Freewriting, Defining "Good" Writing Together

Meeting 3—02/10/17—How to Respond to Other's Writing, Utilizing Group Work

Meeting 4—02/17/17—Owning Authority Over Text, Discovering Individual Voice

Meeting 5—02/24/17—Culling and Mining Ideas From Freewrites, Brainstorming

Meeting 6—03/03/17—Drafting, Revising

Meeting 7—03/10/17—Pause for Group Work and Class Sharing of Written Work So Far

Meeting 8—03/17/17—Imagery, Rich Descriptions

Meeting 9—03/24/17—Perspective

Meeting 10—03/31/17—Character Building, Character Interviews

Meeting 11—04/7/17—Dialogue

Meeting 12—04/14/17—Plot and Story Complexity

Meeting 13—04/21/17—Mood and Tone

Meeting 14—04/28/17—Sharing Writing With Class and Creation of a Class Chapbook

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