

**English 205: Introduction to Creative Writing**  
**Fall 2011**  
**M W F 10:30-11:20 HEAV 111**

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*"Writing and reading is to me  
synonymous with existing."  
– Gertrude Stein*

*"I nearly always write, just as I  
nearly always breathe."  
– John Steinbeck*

## **Course Description**

Welcome to English 205: Introduction to Creative Writing! I am so looking forward to working with all of you this semester. Ray Bradbury said of the reading and writing process: "We are cups ... constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out." In this class, we will fill ourselves with a variety of great poetry and fiction, and will spend time closely reading, analyzing and discussing these works. Not only do I hope you can find inspiration through reading the works of published authors, this will also help us build a vocabulary and an understanding of basic craft elements in poetry and fiction. Using our readings as a foundation and jumping-off point, you will then "tip yourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out" by writing your own poetry and short stories, which you will submit to me and your peers for constructive feedback in workshop. This workshop component makes the class intense – the workload is heavy, and you will be expected to contribute actively and thoughtfully every class session – but I also think this intensity is what leads to the greatest growth and reward at the end of the semester. It is my delight to embark on this journey with you!

## **Course Texts**

- Intro. to Creative Writing course pack of poems and stories (available at CopyMat in Chauncey Hill Mall)
- Frequent use of your Purdue printing quota for the copies of your poems and stories as well as comments for your peers
- At least one folder (I'd recommend two or three) to keep your various handouts, stories, poems, and commentaries organized
- A small notebook you can carry around with you in your daily life

## **Course Work**

During this semester, you will be writing five poems and one short story, in addition to various writing exercises, commentaries to your fellow students' work, and responses to at least two on-campus readings. To be a writer is to be part of a community, and we are fortunate to have a very active and vibrant writing community here at Purdue. I hope this class inspires you to take advantage of the various opportunities to engage with the writing community at Purdue and beyond.

One of your poems will be workshopped by the entire class, and multiple poems will be workshopped by smaller groups or partners. Your completed short story will be workshopped by the entire class. You will be turning in a poetry portfolio (at midterm) and a fiction portfolio (during finals week) in which you will have the chance to showcase your best, polished versions of your work. The revision process is an integral part of good writing, and is a strong focus of this class.

### **Poetry Portfolio (Midterm)**

Your poetry portfolio will be due at the culmination of our poetry unit, at the end of Week 8. In a folder, you will submit revisions of four poems along with a cover letter of 2-3 double-spaced pages that discusses the revisions you made for each poem, what you have come away with from the workshop and class so far, and the strengths and weaknesses you see in your own work. Your portfolio should include the original drafts of your poems with my comments, and a fresh copy of each revised poem in polished form. You will be writing five poems over the course of the semester, but you are only required to revise four. By all means if you would like to revise the fifth poem, do so and include it in your portfolio.

### **Fiction Portfolio (Final)**

Your fiction portfolio will be due at the end of the semester. In a folder, you will submit a revision of your short story (10-15 pages) along with a cover letter of 2-3 double-spaced pages that discusses the revisions you made, what you have come away with from the workshop and the class as a whole, and the strengths and weaknesses you see in your own work. Your portfolio should include the original draft of your story with my comments, subsequent drafts, and a fresh copy of the final draft in polished form.

### **Participation**

Because workshop is such a large part of this class, it is not only important that you show up for class – you must also be *fully present*. To me, that means being an active, thoughtful, respectful contributor to class discussions of readings and the workshopping of your peers' work. We will also do a lot of in-class writing; these prompts will be most helpful to you if you approach them openly and with energy. I will collect these exercises every so often and the points will go towards your participation grade.

### **Workshop Commentaries**

Throughout the semester, you will write commentaries to your fellow students' work, which you will turn in the day their poem or story is being workshopped. You should write these commentaries as letters (Dear So-and-So) and sign your name at the end. Poetry responses should be **half-a-page single-spaced**; fiction responses should be **a full page single-spaced**. Begin these responses with what you think is working in the piece and what your favorite things about it were, and then give suggestions for improvement. It can also be helpful to include questions you had while reading, places you were confused, or ideas you have to expand the piece or give it greater depth or resonance. End your commentary with a list of specific lines, phrases, or images that you found especially wonderful. You are also expected to give notes in the margins throughout the physical copy of the story or poem, which you will also turn in to the writer along with your commentary.

Print out two copies of your commentary; one for me and one for the writer. (The copy you turn in to me can have all the commentaries for the day together on one or more pages.)

It is imperative that you put time and thought into these commentaries. Your classmates will be giving you honest, insightful commentaries when your work is up for workshop; it is extremely disrespectful not to give them the same consideration. Remember – to be a writer is to be part of a community! Furthermore, differing views are expected and encouraged within our discussions. Be honest, but always respectful. Any harsh or personal attacks will not be tolerated. Please come to workshop, either as writer or commenter, with an open mind, an eagerness for new ideas and perspectives, and a helpful attitude. We are here to help each other grow.

### Two Responses to On-Campus Readings

During the course of the semester, you'll be expected to attend at least two on-campus readings: one poetry event and one fiction event. We are extremely fortunate to have a fantastic reading series here at Purdue, and you will have the option to attend additional readings for extra credit. During the first week of class, I will provide you with a schedule of all the readings; I encourage you to pencil these into your calendar early, since the semester will undoubtedly get busy! For each reading, you are required to write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) personal reflection of what you got out of the reading, how it affected you, and what you will take away from the experience. You do not have to love the particular reading. What I want is for you to write a thoughtfully honest response. Your two reading responses are due, printed out, with your Fiction Portfolio at the end of the semester.

### Grading

This course follows Purdue's plus or minus grading system: A+ (above 100), A (95-100), A- (90-94), B+ (86-89), B (83-85), B- (80-82), C+ (76-79), C (73-75), C- (70-72), D+ (66-69), D (63-65), D- (60-62) and F (59 and below).

Here is a breakdown of the course work:

- Poetry Portfolio.....25%
- Fiction Portfolio.....25%
- Workshop Participation (submitted work, peer comments, discussion).....20%
- Class Participation (assignments, exercises, reading, quizzes, discussion).....20%
- On-Campus Reading Responses.....10%

### Course Policies

**Attendance:** Because this is a workshop class, attendance is vital. We will be doing a great deal of in-class work and discussion that cannot be made up. That said, you are allowed **three absences** during the semester; I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. For every class missed after three, your grade will drop by half a letter grade. **It is essential that you are present in class on the days your work is being workshopped.** We are on a very tight schedule and cannot make up missed workshops.

**Tardiness:** Please be on time to class. If you arrive after I have taken attendance at the beginning of class, you will be marked absent for that day.

**Submitting Your Work:** I do not accept late work. Being absent does not equal an automatic extension. Technical difficulties happen, but they are also not an excuse (back up your work often, and never turn in the only copy of a poem or story!) If you need to be absent on a day that you have work due, have a classmate bring it to class for you, put it in my mailbox *before* class, or have a friend/roommate drop it off. **I do not accept work via email.**

For each of your workshop submissions, you must print out enough copies for the entire class, including one for me. Submission dates are marked clearly on the workshop schedule; these are NOT flexible. Your short story should be double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and a 12-point font. Your poems should be single-spaced; however, you are welcome to use other line spacing when it is important to the aesthetic of your piece. Remember to *always* include your name on your submissions.

*“Write with passion! Write with love!”  
– Ray Bradbury*

*“And the day came when the risk to  
remain tight in the bud was more  
painful than the risk it took to blossom.”  
– Anaïs Nin*

**Workshop Environment:** Submitting your poems and stories for workshop can be a scary thing. You will all be laying your work bare for comments and constructive criticism. It is crucial that our classroom be a safe environment where everyone feels comfortable taking risks and breaking free from their inhibitions. We must treat each other with the utmost respect. When discussing a fellow student’s work, for example, I expect you to

mention aspects you like about the story in addition to suggestions for improvement. Also, please consider “What is *this particular writer* attempting to do in this piece?” rather than “If I were writing this piece, I would do *this* instead.” This shows respect for each other as writers with individual styles and perspectives. Our goal as commentators is for the writer to leave workshop feeling rejuvenated, filled with ideas to improve their poem or story.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:** This class is a chance for you to take risks, explore new terrain, and create work that is wholly unique to you and your experience. Plagiarism – the use of others’ work without their consent or acknowledgement, or trying to pass off others’ work as your own – is an affront to me, your classmates, and yourself. All work you submit must be original to you and to this course (for example, I will not accept work completed for another creative writing course you have taken.) Plagiarism is a serious offense and will result in automatic failure from this course and possible expulsion from the university. If you are unsure about what might constitute plagiarism, please talk to me, visit the Writing Lab in HEAV 226, or check out [www.purdue.edu/ODOS/osrr.integrity.htm](http://www.purdue.edu/ODOS/osrr.integrity.htm).

**Statement about Disabilities:** Students with disabilities must be registered with Adaptive Programs in the Office of the Dean of Students before classroom accommodations can be

provided. If you are eligible for academic accommodations because you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please schedule an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your needs.

**Campus Emergency:** In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may necessitate a revised calendar. In such an event, you can get information about changes in the course by emailing me at [dwoodbur@purdue.edu](mailto:dwoodbur@purdue.edu).