The Pedagogy of Creative Writing

Purpose
The primary purpose of this graduate-level seminar, *The Pedagogy of Creative Writing*, is to introduce students to theories of composition and creative writing seen through three perspectives: historical; theoretical; and topical. Students will devote a significant portion of the semester to reading and writing about the teaching of creative writing, composition theory and research, and essays by poets and fiction writers (with possible implications for creative nonfiction). Over the course of the semester, students will be expected to:

- read and respond in writing to theoretical articles;
- discuss teaching techniques;
- design assignments and workshops;
- observe a creative writing course and an advanced composition course;
- and, respond to and assess student writing.

After completing the course, students will be able to identify trends in the field and the theoretical and aesthetic rationale. Students will leave the course with a working theory of creative writing pedagogy, a syllabus, and a series of assignments.

Texts

- Articles on the web.
- *Teaching Creative Writing: A Reader* *

Course Requirements

- participate in class and online
- read material on the due date
- write homework assignments when they are due
- observe two classes and write two letters
- submit formal writing assignments when they are due
- submit a portfolio

Evaluation

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Attendance, Assignments and Due Dates
Come to class. You'll learn more, your grades will be better, and the class as a whole will be more interesting and informative. If you have to miss class, let me know in advance. If you miss more than one class, you will fail. Assignments are due when they are listed on your course schedule.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism
Plagiarism is grounds for suspension from the university as well as for failure in this course. It will not be tolerated. Any instance of plagiarism must be reported. Plagiarism is a counterproductive, non-writing behavior that is unacceptable. Plagiarism is included among the violations defined in the Academic Honor Code, section b), paragraph 2, as follows: “Regarding academic assignments, violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another’s work or any part thereof, be it published or unpublished, as one’s own.”

Office Hours and Email
You must have a working email address so that I can send you announcements and answer any questions that come up between class periods.

Please feel free to drop by during my office hours or to make an appointment for other times. If you can’t drop by, I check my email daily; so don’t hesitate to send me a message if you have questions or concerns about the class.

Important Dates
These are key dates for the semester (and are subject to change). I’ll also hand out detailed schedules for each unit.

Week 4—DUE: Signup for Observations
Week 9—Semester Break
Week 10—DUE: Midterm Paper
Week 12—DUE: Two Letters of Observation
Week 16—DUE: Project and Context Docs
Week 16—DUE: Portfolio

A Note on the Nature of a Syllabus
The Syllabus is subject to reasonable modification, given the needs of the class. I will notify you in writing when the syllabus changes.
Class Participation
Prepare for class, be ready to discuss issues and raise questions, and participate in online forums.

Reading SRR (Summary, Respond, Reflect)
For each reading, write a one page three-part text: first, summarize what you read; second, respond to it; third, reflect on it (you can compare/contrast with another reading or your own experience; play out the implications of the reading; synthesize readings to date)

Weekly Creative Writing Exercises
Short, in-class exercises aimed at practicing the field we’re teaching.

Midterm Paper
Engage a theoretical, pedagogical, or professional issue related to teaching creative writing (3-5 pages).

Observation and Report
Attend one creative writing course and one advanced composition course, and write two letters of observation (1-2 pages each).

Project and Context Docs
The major project of the course is a syllabus aimed at the delivery of undergraduate and graduate creative writing and contextual docs (annotated bib; planning docs; reflective docs).

Portfolio
Create a retrospective cover letter, reflecting on and assessing your work during the semester (1-2 pages). Turn in the documents that together are a composition demonstrating your knowledge of creative writing pedagogy.
**Tentative Schedule of Week by Week Plans**

**Week 1: Introduction to Creative Writing Pedagogy**

**Topics:** Introduction to the course. What are your initial thoughts about the intersection of creative writing and composition, teaching creative writing, theory and research?

**Week 2: Why Study Creative Writing Pedagogy?**

**Topics:** What can we learn from the history of our field? What can we learn from composition theory?

**Readings:**

**Due:**
SSRs on Fenza and “A Brief History of Rhetoric and Composition.”

**Week 3: How Do Creative Writers Write?**

**Topics:** Are there stages in the writing processes? Can research on composing processes inform our understanding of creative writing? How can we teach these processes?

**Readings:**
- Butler, Robert Olen. “The Zone” and “A Writer Prepares.” (*From Where You Dream*)
- Kirby, David. “A Poem is a Journey,” “First Drafts,” and “Getting it Right.” *Writing Poetry*
- Emig, Janet. “Writing as a Mode of Learning.” (reader)
- Ong, S. J., Walter J. “The Writer’s Audience is Always Fiction.” (reader)

**Due:**
SSRs on Butler, Kirby, Emig, Perl, and Ong

**Week 4: Developing Your Aesthetic Theory**

**Topics:** Do you have a theory of writing? Do you need a theory to organize a course around? Is an aesthetic theory necessary for a course about writing? Do your students need to develop an aesthetic theory? Can this be learned in a course, a year, a decade, a lifetime?

**Readings:**
- Baxter, Charles. “Dysfunctional Narratives, Or ‘The Mistakes We Made.’” (reader)

**Due:**
SSRS on Baxter, O’Connor and Kirby

Signup for Observations
Week 5: Aesthetic Theory in Action

Topics: Ways to discuss particular writers’ aesthetic theories. What can other writers’ aesthetic theories teach us as teachers of creative writing?

Readings:

Aesthetic Theory in Action
- Salinger, J.D. “Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut.” (reader)

Peruse the following website:

Due:
- SSRs on Eliot and Birnbaum

Week 6: Can Creative Writing be Learned?

Topics: This isn’t a debate about whether writing is an art or a craft (though, I am interested in your ideas). We will focus instead on how students learn, and if writing and/or creative writing can be learned.

Readings:
- Butler, Robert Olen. “Introduction.” (From Where You Dream)
- Kirby, David. “Foreword” and “Introduction” (Writing Poetry)
- D’Angelo, Frank J. “An Ontological Basis for a Modern Theory of the Composing Process.” (reader)
- Fulkerson, Richard. “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century.” (reader)

Due:
- SSRs on Butler, Kirby, D’Angelo, Fulkerson

Week 7: Can Creative Writing be Taught?

Topics: Last week, we decided either that creative writing can be learned or it cannot be learned. Either way, let’s now focus on the teaching of creative writing. What is teaching? Is the teaching of writing suitable to intellectual inquiry?

Readings:
- Garber, Eugene and Ramjerdi. “Reflections on the Teaching of Creative Writing: A Correspondence.” (Colors of a Different Horse)
- Lim, Shirley Geok. “The Strangeness of Creative Writing: An Institutional Query.” (reader)
- Berthoff, Anne. “Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning and Higher Order Reasoning.” (reader)

Due:
- No SSRs, instead skim and post a response to the following blogs:
  - http://babiesarefireproof.blogspot.com/
**Week 8: Conducting a Writing Workshop**

**Topics:** The next two weeks will provide you with several ways of thinking about and organizing a writing workshop. How do you imagine a workshop? What goes into planning a workshop? Has the workshop model grown stale? At the end of this unit, you should be able to make informed decisions about workshop structure.

**Readings:**

- Bruffee, Kenneth A. “Collaborative Learning and the “Conversation of Mankind.”” (reader)
- Pennisi, Linda Tomol and Patrick Lawler. “Without a Net: Collaborative Writing.” *(Colors of a Different Horse)*
- Murray, Donald M. “Give Your Students the Writer’s Five Experiences.” (reader)

**Alternatives to the Traditional Workshop Model (Pick Two):**


**Due:**

In lieu of SSRs, develop a unit with activities and readings on teaching an element of fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction.

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**Week 9: Semester Break**

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**Week 10: Responding to Creative Writing—Some Approaches to Assessment**

**Topics:** For the next two weeks we'll assume that assessment and evaluation has a role in the classroom. We'll attempt to answer the following questions: How should assignments be designed? How should teachers respond to and evaluate, stories, poems, and works-in-progress? How does our response to student work shape students’ assessment of their peers? What are reasonable ways to grade? What are the political consequences of assessment?

**Readings:**

- Freed, Lynn. “Doing Time: My Years in the Creative Writing Gulag.” (reader)
- Camoin, Francois. “The Workshop and Its Discontents” *(Colors of a Different Horse)*
- Bishop, Wendy. “Traveling through the Dark”: Teachers and Students Reading and Writing Together.” (reader)
- Bizzaro, Patrick. “Reading the Creative Writing Course: The Teacher’s Many Selves” *(Colors of a Different Horse)*

**Due:**

SSRs on Freed, Camion, Bishop, and Bizzaro

Midterm Paper Due
Week 11: Responding to Creative Writing—Some Approaches to Assessment
Topics: Approaches to assessment continued.
Readings:
• Anson, Chris. “Response Styles and Ways of Knowing.” (reader)
• Murray, Donald. “What, No Assignments?” (reader)
• Murray, Donald. “In Grading a Student, How Much Should You Consider?” (reader)
Due:
SSRs on Anson, Murray, and Murray

Week 12: Cultural Approaches to the Teaching of Writing
Topics: The university’s cultural makeup has changed and will continue to change well into the twenty-first century. How do we account for and teach students from multiple cultures? How do we respond to these students? How do you teach to ESL students?
Readings:
• Elliott, Gayle. “Pedagogy in Penumbra: Teaching, Writing, and Feminism in the Fiction Workshop.” (Colors of a Different Horse)
• Royster, Jacqueline Jones. “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own.” (reader)
Due:
SSRs on Elliott, Villanueva, and Royster
Letter of Observation Due

Week 13: Attending to Technologies in Creative Writing
Topics: What effect will technology have on writing? Will it change your approach to teaching creative writing?
Readings:
• Coover, Robert. “The End of Books.” (Colors of a Different Horse)
• Sloane, Sarah Jane. “Riding the Bus in Silicon Valley: Building Virtual Worlds.” (Colors of a Different Horse)
• Anson, Chris. “Teaching and Writing in a Culture of Technology.” (reader)
• Shipka, Jody. “A Multimodal Task-Based Framework for Composing.” (reader)
Due:
SSRs on Coover, Sloane, Anson, Shipka and Yancey

Week 14: Teaching Creative Writing in Elementary, Middle, and High School
Topics: Creative writing teachers are often invited into public and private schools to conduct day, week, and semester long workshops. How do children learn to write creatively? What works with different age groups? How does creative writing help students learn?
Readings:
Review the following websites:
• 826 Valencia: http://www.826valencia.org/
• Split P Soup: http://www.splitp.org/
• SC Poetry Initiative: http://www.cas.sc.edu/engl/poetry/index.htm
Due:
In lieu of SSRs, write a brief page on strategies, activities, and exercises for teaching creative writing to elementary, middle school, and high school students gleaned from the webpages you reviewed.

**Week 15: Creative Writing? You’d Have Gotten a Better Job Majoring in Underwater Basket Weaving**

**Topics**: “Whenever I ask MFA candidates what they plan on doing with their degrees, I only get two responses: 1) publish the manuscripts they wrote as final projects 2) teach in an MFA program. Neither of these, for the vast majority, will happen.”—Douglas Goetsch

**Readings**:
- Kendig, Diane. “It Is Ourselves that We Remake: Teaching Creative Writing in Prison.” (*Colors of a Different Horse*)
- Starkey, David. “The MFA Graduate as Composition Instructor: A Self Analysis.” (*Colors of a Different Horse*)

**Due:**
Nothing for this week. Focus on your final project.

**Week 16: Course Wrap Up**

**Due**: Final Project (with supporting context docs) and Portfolio