

FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

English 496A/B-01

Fall 2012/Winter 2013

Fiction Writing II, Section 91
Wednesday evenings, 19:00 – 21:45
Social Sciences 1153

Instructor: Professor A. van Herk
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OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays, 15:00 to 16:30
 Thursdays, 15:30 – 16:30
 or by appointment

English 496 is a course in the practice and theory of writing fiction for students at an intermediate level, with emphasis on the relatively accomplished and developed short fiction, and with the possibility of moving toward longer pieces. Students are expected to read and write a great deal and should be prepared for intensive work. The course is conducted as a workshop, along with analyses and lectures; class participation is required and is part of each student's evaluation. The class functions as a workshop of the whole; there is no separate group work. Students will make work to be addressed available in advance so that their colleagues can read that material and come to class prepared to discuss it with erudition and eloquence.

Students are required to submit work that is polished and re-written. Students are also expected to read their colleagues' writing with care, to write brief critiques of their colleagues' work, and to come to class with constructive criticism, prepared to discuss every piece of writing under consideration. This requires steady and thoughtful work in preparing for class, and it requires focused attention on an ongoing basis.

Students are required to write and submit five short stories, four that will be critiqued by the class and one final piece de resistance to the professor at the end of the year. All work should be well developed, carefully constructed, and should show evidence of re-writing and revision (no night-before stories!). Pages of writing should total around eighty, but that is a rough guide. Students may choose to submit longer short stories, or to merge two assignments and submit a novella. The expectation is that the student will be producing polished work, and with a greater fictional complexity than in Fiction Writing I.

Students are required to do one in-class presentation on a selected story from the class textbook. This in-class presentation will be brief (5 minutes), and will approach a

particular piece of writing from a writer's perspective, elucidating its effectiveness and usefulness.

COURSE WORK AND WEIGHTING

4 stories X 12.5%	50%
Final story X 20%	20%
Class participation	10%
Critical acumen, critiques, reading reports	10%
Literary Manifesto	5%
In-class presentation	5%
TOTAL	<hr/> 100%

A student must complete **ALL** assignments in order to pass this course. There is **NO** final examination in this course.

Assigning grades for creative work is, at best, problematic, however, this is an academic course and must fulfill academic requirements. Ideally, grades should be irrelevant to creative work, so try to ignore them and concentrate on the most important goal, your **WRITING**. Your final grade will consist of an evaluation of all the writing you hand in, as well as your attendance, participation, and the degree of improvement you make. While I do not penalize late stories (writers must learn to meet their own deadlines), I will penalize any late final assignments (with the loss of a third of a grade (an A- to B+) for each business day [not class] that the assignment is overdue.

*Please make every effort to give assignments directly to the instructor. If it is not possible to do so, take your assignment to SS 1152 and put it in the dropbox. Your assignment will be date-stamped and placed in the instructor's mailbox. **It is your responsibility to keep a copy of all assignments in case of loss by any cause. Assignments cannot be returned by staff in the Department office.***

GRADE STRUCTURE

Grading for this course follows the official undergraduate grading system of the University of Calgary. It can be found <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-2.html> **Grading for Creative Writing is determined in the following manner.**

A range: Consistently Exceptional work

The writing is moving toward a publishable level. The use of language is precise and original; figures of speech are imaginative and compelling; the content of the work is treated in a fresh, new way, and the form chosen is the best possible. Thus, writing in this range employs every element of fiction with sophistication and elegance. If a student's work is absolutely dazzling in every respect, s/he may earn an A+.

B range: Consistently Good work

The work is above average, with good use of language, originality, and control, but could use more refinement or development, and more revision. It shows at least in part a heightened awareness of structure, and an interesting perspective or point of view. Word choice and description are generally exact and thoughtful.

C range: Consistently Average work

The work is satisfactory, but relies on ordinary, even predictable use of language. Work in this range is not innovative, although the writing may be competent, even promising. The material will need more layering and more texture. Images and plot are sound but verging on the clichéd and predictable. Vocabulary is adequate but may be limited.

D range: Minimal pass

The work shows some effort but is carelessly constructed and may have grammatical problems or lack awareness of the mechanics of English. Use of language will be undistinguished and clichéd, ideas ordinary.

F: No Credit

Writing shows no effort, no serious attention. This would be the work of a student who does not deserve a place in this class.

Guidelines for In-class Presentation

Description of Presentation:

Your in-class presentation should be short (5 minutes), succinct and focused, dealing with ONE element of fiction, (how does the story address a element of narrative), and should articulate some aspect of the story you have chosen in terms of what it can teach us about the craft of writing. What writerly inspiration or warning does this story provide? For example, in Margaret Atwood’s “Happy Endings,” you could discuss why Atwood chooses to arrange the paragraphs as an alphabetical list? How do form and content mesh through this device? Prepare your presentation thoroughly. Do NOT read from a written text; be interesting and innovative. Employ an unusual approach; present it with imagination, props, music, linguistic acrobatics, anything but a boring monotone. No droning. Your presentation should be based on one piece from the class textbook.

A Dozen Guidelines for this Course

1. **Electronic Devices.** You are asked to shut off mobile devices at the beginning of class—no texting, no phoning, no FACEBOOK. We will, however, work with the internet in class: you are welcome to bring your laptop, to take notes, or to contribute in discussion.
2. **Speaking and participation.** In this class, you are expected to move beyond reductive vernacular, so certain words and expressions are to be shunned. Please make a note of them, and add to the list as the year progresses. For a beginning, do not resort to the following flaccid concepts or phrases: **society, lifestyle, thing, the thing is, I liked, I didn’t like, I loved, I hated, it’s real.** Your personal palate is not relevant to this class. When reading a piece of writing, the questions you must confront are not whether you

“liked” the character, but whether the character is convincing and whether her actions are prepared for in the light of the fictional trajectory occupied. If you feel that some aspect of the story works well, explain why. And if you feel some aspect of the story does not work well, explain why, using literary terminology.

3. Written Critiques. The same eloquence and focus holds for the critiques that you write in response to your colleagues’ stories. All students are required to write a one-paragraph double-spaced critique of every piece or story discussed in class. These written critiques are due on the evening of class discussion; your reading should thus not be a re-hash of what is said in class, but your own initial and thoughtful response to the work. Critiques should include the name of the piece being analyzed, your name, and the date, with two copies, one for Professor van Herk and one for the student whose work is under scrutiny. Keep in mind how useful these critiques are to you as a writer. It follows that to receive helpful critiques you must give helpful critiques. Each critique should not take you hours, but should be an encapsulation of your careful, intense reading skill, by now honed to a sharp edge. These critiques are an important part of your final grade; you are evaluated on your ability to read and criticize constructively and intelligently.

Critiques should focus on what strikes you as the most interesting element of the writing you have read. They should cover two aspects: what works well and what does not work well, and **why**. Always begin positively--with what is effective. Then address what worked least well, and **why**. Critiques should avoid, at all costs, general or self-evident comments, or spurious praise. “I liked this piece,” is not useful. And critiques must **NEVER** be personal or in any way derogatory--personal remarks are considered academic misconduct. Students are addressing the work on the page and **NOT** the writer. Nor should critiques consist of hollow praise (“this is a fantastic story!”) without substantial editorial comment. Constructive criticism analyzes both the merits and the flaws of a creative work, the point being to help the writer improve the work in progress.

Critiques will be marked for usefulness, consistency, consideration, skill, literary knowledge, critical acumen, and creativity. They are an important part of each student’s final grade.

4. Content. Deal with death as you will, but before you kill a character (especially with a gun), think twice. This is the most boring fictional event possible, it has been done by the masters and mistresses only too well, and you are not yet at a stage where you can kill off characters with panache. If you can and do pull it off, more power to you, but if you try and fail, your failure will be magnified.

5. Be prepared. Read the assigned material, and your colleagues’ stories, with care and in advance of the class. Remember, you will always get back the kind of criticism you give. If you offer thoughtful, thorough readings of your fellow writers’ work, you will receive the same.

6. Professional Conduct. Treat your colleagues’ work with respect, and with confidentiality. Do not show it to any other person without asking his/her permission.

Do not presume that the story is about your colleague's experience--that is a personal transgression. Everyone in this class is writing fiction. This is not a course in psychoanalysis, nor is it fuzzy-blanket therapy.

7. **Engagement.** This is a literary writing course, where the goal is to assist everyone in the class to write as well as he or she can, and to improve as much as possible over the course of the year. This means a tremendous amount of intense and passionate work, but with an end result that is, as other classes have proven, worth it.

8. **Deadlines.** It is up to you to meet the deadlines that you set for yourself by choosing the group you are in. I am not going to hound you if your story is late; however, if it is, your work will be critiqued last (that dread hour when everyone is both crabby and exhausted). That said, you must complete ALL assignments to pass. And while I do not penalize late stories (writers must learn to meet their own deadlines), I will penalize late Final Assignments, the capstone story of the year, with the loss of a third of a grade (an A- to B+) for each business day [not class] that the assignment is overdue.

9. **Time.** This class tends to go somewhat late. If you have childcare to arrange, or a ride, etc., please be aware that we sometimes work until 10:30.

10. **Public Readings.** Try to go to as many readings as you can manage during the year. The readings at Pages are free; Word Fest probably has a student rate; and many writers are really worth hearing in person. You will gain experience from watching and listening to them read. What do they do that is successful, what do they do that does not work? Take notes. If you want to be a professional, pay attention.

11. **Extra Support.** Since you have gained a place in this class, you also have access to my expertise in terms of extra writing, other questions you might have, etc. I am happy to help and encourage you; do, however, make an appointment with me in advance.

12. **Pleasure.** We're going to have a great year! Never has hard work been so much fun.

TEXT

(available in the University of Calgary Bookstore)

Short Fiction and Critical Contexts, A Compact Reader, edited by Eric Henderson and Geoff Hancock (Oxford)

Plagiarism:

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Please refer to the following information and make sure you are familiar with the statement below on plagiarism.
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-1.html>

Scribe and Muse Club for English Students:

The Scribe and Muse Reading and Writing Club (SMRWC) fosters and champions reading and writing through community service, leadership, and engagement. We strive to enhance the academic and social experience of undergraduate students by promoting academic excellence and interaction between students, faculty, and the community, through social, cultural, and academic events. <http://english.ucalgary.ca/content/scribe-and-muse-reading-and-writing-club>

Our email address is smrwc@ucalgary.ca.

English Department Website:

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English, please go to our website at <http://english.ucalgary.ca>.

Writing support:

The Student Success Centre offers both online and workshop writing support for U of C students. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Follow the Department of English on Facebook & Twitter:**Academic regulations and schedules:**

Consult the *Calendar* for course information, university and faculty regulations, dates, deadlines and schedules, student, faculty and university rights and responsibilities. The homepage for the University Calendar is

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/index.htm>

Guidelines on e-mail Etiquette:

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/it/help/articles/email/etiquette>

Grade appeals:

Consult the following University *Calendar* link and request advice from the English Department office, SS 1152. Please note that “mere dissatisfaction with a decision is not sufficient grounds for the appeal of a grade or other academic decision.”

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html>

Deferral of term work and final examinations:

Should you require an extension for completion of term papers or assignments beyond the deadline of five days after the end of lectures, an Application of Deferment of Term Work form must be completed. The University also has regulations governing the deferral of final examinations. See *Calendar*:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html>,

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>.

Academic accommodation:

It is a student's responsibility to request academic accommodation. If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation and if you have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Your academic accommodation letters should be provided to your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the commencement of this course. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/drc/>

Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints;>

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip/>

“Safewalk” Program:

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night: call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot pay booths.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/safewalk/>

Faculty of Arts Program Advising and Student Information Resources:

Have a question, but not sure where to start? The new Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (PIC) is your information resource for everything in Arts! Drop in at SS110, call us at 403-220-3580 or email us at artsads@ucalgary.ca. You can also visit the Faculty of Arts website at <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate> which has detailed information on common academic concerns.

For program planning and advice, contact the Student Success Centre (formerly the Undergraduate programs Office) at (403) 220-5881 or visit them in their new space on the 3rd Floor of the Taylor Family Digital Library.

For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Enrolment Services at (403) 210-ROCK [7625] or visit them at the MacKimmie Library Block.

Contact for Students Union Representatives for the Faculty of Arts:

arts1@su.ucalgary.ca, arts2@su.ucalgary.ca, arts3@su.ucalgary.ca, arts4@su.ucalgary.ca

Contact for Students Ombudsman's Office:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is an extremely serious offence. Please read the following information carefully. The penalty routinely recommended by the English Department for documented plagiarism is failure of the course in which the offence occurred; academic probation is also routinely applied at the Faculty level. Suspension or expulsion can result from severe or repeated plagiarism.

The University *Calendar* states:

1. **Plagiarism** - Essentially plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not. Most commonly plagiarism exists when:

- (a) the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test),
- (b) parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author,
- (c) the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source, and/or,
- (d) a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted.

Plagiarism occurs when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, or when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. Citing your sources in a bibliography is not enough, because a bibliography does not establish which parts of a student's work are taken from other sources. MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose. Advice on adequate documentation can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STATEMENT ON PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT

According to the University *Calendar*, (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/j.html>) "The University of Calgary community has undertaken to be guided by the following statements of purpose and values: to promote free inquiry and debate, to act as a community of scholars, ..., to respect, appreciate, and encourage diversity, [and] to display care and concern for community". The Department of English, like the university as a whole, is committed to a "positive and productive learning and working environment." This environment is characterized by appreciation and encouragement of diversity and respect for the dignity of all persons: students, support staff, and faculty. The department will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour, such as threatening gestures, threatening or abusive verbal or written communication (including e-mails), or any conduct that "seriously disrupts the lawful education and related activities of students and/or university staff". Any cases of such misconduct should be reported immediately to the department Head, who, depending on the nature and severity of the incident, may then take further appropriate action.