

Fall 2015

ENGL 2161

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JENNIFER A. KUCHTA
INTRO TO WRITING FICTION**
ENGL. 2161.001
TTH 11:00-12:15 MH 212
Fall 2015

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MWF 1:00-2:00,
TTH 12:00-2:00
or by appointment

****PREREQUISITE:** English 1158 **and** One English course that includes fiction (ENGL 2238, 2258, 2031, 2032, 2341, 2342, 2041, 2043, 2071, 2072, 2090, 2378) or consent of department. **No exceptions.**

REQUIRED TEXTS: *The Art and Craft of Fiction*, Kardos (ISBN 978-1-4576-1390-6)

STORY COPIES: You are responsible for all copying and copying costs. Hardcopies only!

THE COURSE: The goal of this course is to introduce you to the principles and practices of writing short fiction. Emphasis is on fresh literary invention and meaningful selection of concrete details rather than on genres that tend to invite imitation and manipulation (such as horror, sci-fi, fantasy, fan fiction, romance, etc.). **This class is primarily a workshop for student writing.**

COURSE WORK: Assignments in this class will include readings from and discussions of the required texts, practice in the elements of craft through a variety of in-class and take-home assignments, the completion of two *original* short stories, vigorous participation during workshops, written critiques, and the revision of your first short story. These tasks are outlined more specifically below.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: By the end of the semester, students should be able to

- 1) Identify, define, analyze, and employ the various elements of fiction (plot, point of view, character, etc.) that are the building blocks of fiction writing.
- 2) Analyze and evaluate the writing of others (both professional writers and their workshop peers), and be able to articulate their findings during class discussions and workshops as well as in written critiques of their peers' work. In addition, this will allow them to better evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses as writers and to utilize their findings in future writing endeavors.
- 3) Successfully employ what they have learned about the fiction writing process in the two outcomes listed above. Doing so will enable them to write short stories that are as complete, edited, and polished as possible and prepare them for the more vigorous next course level: Advanced Fiction Writing.

READINGS/MINOR ASSIGNMENTS: For the first part of the semester, we will concentrate on a variety of smaller writing assignments geared at getting you writing and helping you through the writing process. These assignments along with the readings from our textbook will focus on the many different elements of fiction writing. Additionally, we will read and discuss a number of published short stories in order to expose you to the wide variety of styles of and approaches to fiction writing. Expect quizzes and/or small in-class or homework assignments related to these readings. **You MUST have the textbook, and you must bring it to class every day.** It is a textbook, grammar/mechanics handbook, and anthology.

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS: You must **complete two original short stories** over the course of the semester. **No novel portions, flash fiction, or short-shorts. Your stories must be non-genre stories** (mainstream/literary fiction)—much like the majority of the stories found in our textbook or in *Fiction 100: An Anthology of Short Fiction* (English 2238) or in *The Norton Anthology of Fiction*. **There will be no vampires, trolls, fairies,**

wizards, Wookies, etc. This class will teach you the fundamentals of fiction writing and help you to build a strong foundation for all of your future fiction writing endeavors.

Each story should be at least five typed pages in length (min. 1250 words), and **each MUST be as edited, polished, and complete as possible. Only turn in your best work.** These stories will be read by the entire class and workshopped. Everyone will turn in a short story and copies at the same time, twice. (However, that is subject to change.) You are responsible for providing copies of your stories for each member of the workshop, including yourself and the instructor (about 16 copies). **All stories must be stapled, double-spaced, and printed on only one side of 8.5"x 11" white paper in 12-pt. font with at least one-inch margins all around.** Your name and title should appear on the first page, and each page after the first should be numbered in the upper right-hand corner. After your workshop, these copies will be returned to you for use in any future revisions. **You may not submit your story via email or Moodle.**

A revision of your first story will be turned in during our Final Exam period. This must be a **substantial revision**, and it must be turned in with a copy of the instructor's annotated original story copy. Do not write on the instructor's annotated copy. Keep the original for yourself. **You are not guaranteed a higher grade or even the same grade on the revision.** Revising goes far beyond simple editing and polish. *Stories deemed to have no significant revision will be given a grade at least one grade lower than the first draft's grade.*

BEING WORKSHOPPED: Each student will have two short stories workshopped. Workshops provide the opportunity to have your work read and critiqued by your peers. **You will not be allowed to speak, gesture, cry, fume, pass notes, etc., during your workshops. No exceptions.** Instead, you should have a copy of your story with you, and you should be taking notes. Also, you should not discuss your stories with other class members prior to the stories' workshops, as this is not advantageous to the workshop experience. All workshop members should be privy to the same amount of information so that you may get the most out of your workshops. *If you think your work is already complete and perfect, you may want to reconsider your enrollment in this writing workshop.*

READING STORIES & WRITING CRITIQUES: You must carefully **read and annotate** all stories written by your classmates **before you come to class.** Each story should be read at least two times: once as a pure read, and once with pen/pencil in hand. Annotate each story with helpful hints and/or suggestions, and star or otherwise note any exceptional or noteworthy passages. Mark what works and what doesn't, yet. **Each and every page should be fully marked.** Making these annotations will help you to engage with the story and will be very helpful when you write your critique.

You must also write a one-page (minimum), single-spaced, and typed critique in 12-pt. font for each of the stories we workshop and bring **two copies** of it to class. A few sentences or a single paragraph is not enough. These should be thoughtful, helpful, civil, honest, and edited critiques. Offer constructive criticism as well as praise, being sure to provide plenty of specific details, examples, and thorough explanations. **Put your name on the critiques and the annotated manuscript.** These will be turned in to the instructor for credit and then passed on to the writer at the workshop's next meeting. One copy of the critique will be graded and returned to you. Extensive guidelines for writing these critiques will be handed out later in the semester.

WORKSHOPS/ORAL CRITIQUES: In addition to the written work, you must verbally participate in the workshops themselves. Workshops **are expected to be HELPFUL, frank, civil, and mature discussions focused on the story at hand.** You must verbally contribute your thoughts about the story so that we might help the writer on to new levels with his or her story. You may not simply read your written critique.

GRADING: As this is a workshop/performance course rather than a lecture course, you are required to attend class, to participate, and to complete **all** assignments **on time.** Grades will be based on your performance in the class. **Poor attendance (excused or not), tardiness, lack of participation, and/or not appropriately completing assignments will lower your standing at the end of the semester.**

All of your course work (exercises, quizzes, written critiques, text annotations, and stories) will be

graded as shown below. These points will be recorded (ideally on Moodle), weighted, and used to determine your grade at the end of the semester using a typical 100-point scale.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| A = 90-100 | Excellent quality work. Virtually no grammar & mechanics errors. Very polished and complete. Much time and consideration has gone into this work. |
| B = 80-89 | Above average work. Relatively free of grammar & mechanics errors. Assignment is still very polished and complete, but would benefit from more work and attention to detail all around. |
| C = 70-79 | Average quality work. There are some grammar and mechanics errors. Assignment is complete but would benefit greatly from more work in general. |
| D = 60-69 | Below average work. There are numerous grammar and mechanics errors. Assignment is rushed and perhaps careless in its execution and or incomplete. Reads as though not much time and consideration went into the process. Needs much improvement all around. |
| F = 0-59 | Very poor quality work. Fails to meet the expectations of the assignment all around. Writer needs to step up to the plate and get busy. |

Your overall grade in the course will be weighted as follows:

Story 1 = **25 %** Story 2 = **25%** Revision = **15%** Everything Else = **35%.**

OTHER GRADE INFO: ALL assignments are due in hardcopy the moment class begins or else they are subject to the One-Week Rule and other penalties/restrictions spelled out below.

- ***The One-Week Rule: NO WORK will be accepted once it is a week late unless you have made prior arrangements with me.*** For example, if a critique is due on a Tuesday, your ***last chance*** to turn it in is the Thursday of that same week.
- **Quizzes and in-class work cannot be made up.** However, if your absence is “***excused***” ***via documentation***, the quiz points will not count against you, and you ***may*** be allowed to make up the in-class work.
- If your critiques, annotations, or exercises are late because you were absent and that **absence is “excused” via documentation**, they will not be docked points. However, those materials **must be turned in on the day you return to class** unless prior arrangements have been made with me. (Does not include short stories.)
- **Unexcused late** critiques, annotations, and exercises will be **docked five points** (half a letter grade) **for each class period they are late** (one period only). (Does not include short stories.)
- **If it is the day to submit short stories and you fail to do so for any reason, there is absolutely no guarantee that your story will be accepted, workshopped, and/or otherwise graded.** The workshop depends solely upon its workshop members turning in their stories when due. Any member failing to do so potentially derails the entire semester. Should this happen, it will be entirely up to me to determine a course of action as well as a penalty.
- **If you are absent (“excused”) on your workshop day, there is no guarantee that we will be able to**

workshop your story at a later date. Should this happen, it will be entirely up to me to determine a course of action.

- **If your absence on your workshop day is unexcused, your story's grade will be docked by a letter grade, and it will not be workshopped.**
- Don't wait until right before class to print your critiques or make your copies. Don't staple and collate your stories during class. These materials should be ready to turn in *before* you walk in the door.
- **Do not email any assignments to me without permission. Emailing your work to me does not mean it's on time, and it will not be read.**

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: When it comes to attending class, the UNO Website itself notes, "Class attendance is a vital part to academic success. When you miss a class you miss the material covered that day plus you give the impression that you do not consider the class important. Blowing off class to go to the beach is a bad idea. Class attendance is the number one predictor of success for the vast majority of college students. Excessive class absence and/or tardiness will result in a lowered overall grade and possibly failure of a course. Expectations for attendance are indicated in the course syllabus, so be certain to read the entire syllabus and always communicate with the instructor about absences and tardiness" (First Year Advising: "Frequently Asked Questions").

Additionally, the following attendance requirements are outlined on the UNO Website (Parent FAQs: "What are UNO's attendance requirements?"):

- Students are expected to attend all classes regularly and punctually. A student who is not present when attendance is checked in a class is considered absent.
- A student must attend all classes in any course for which he or she is registered. All unexcused absences in such a course are counted against a student's attendance record.
- Any student registered in a college may, at the discretion of the dean, be placed on attendance probation. The dean is further authorized to drop from the rolls of the University any student who violates this attendance probation.
- A student placed on academic probation is automatically placed on attendance probation.
- A student on academic or attendance probation is expected to attend all classes and an absence from any class may be reported to the appropriate administrator.
- Each instructor shall report all cases of absence from class which, in the opinion of the instructor, jeopardizes the student's chances of satisfactorily completing the course.

As such, if you are a person who tends to miss more than a class or two over the course of the semester (excused or not—see below), this workshop is not for you. Come to class prepared, on time, and ready to actively participate. Do not come five, ten, or twenty minutes late. Distracting interruptions are inconsiderate, disrespectful, and time wasting—especially in a workshop environment. There is no excuse for repeatedly arriving late. Traffic may well be a problem, but it is not an excuse; plan accordingly. Parking is often a hassle; allow enough time for it. Likewise, once you are in the classroom, you should remain there. It's only a 75-minute class, and students coming and going during class, especially during a story workshop, is very disruptive. Take care of business ahead of time.

If you are doing homework for another class, annotating the stories, reading a newspaper or magazine, sleeping, texting, eating, etc., you are not participating. **Students who are repeatedly asked to put away their phones, to pay attention, to stop talking, etc., will not receive the curve (if there is one) at the end of the semester.**

Attendance is mandatory in English 2161, and English Department policy requires that you be placed on attendance probation with your Dean for excessive absences. **Excessive absences (excused or not—there is no difference) and chronic tardiness will lower your grade.** At the end of the semester, regardless of

your coursework:

- Upon reaching your **fourth absence**, you forfeit any chance of receiving the curve (if there is one) at the end of the semester, and your **final grade will be dropped half a letter grade**. For example, an 83% B- becomes a 78% C+ final course grade, and there is no curve to “bump” you up.
- **If you incur a fifth absence, your grade will be dropped a whole letter grade** at the end of the semester. For example, an 88% B+ becomes a 78% C+ final course grade, and there is no curve to “bump” you up.
- **Students missing *more than five classes (more than two weeks)* will automatically fail the class.** Remember, *there is no difference between an excused and an unexcused absence* except that an absence “excused” via documentation allows you to make up work (excludes short stories), *generally* without penalty.
- **Roll is taken at the beginning of class only; coming in late (even five minutes) doesn’t guarantee that you will be marked “present” or “late.”** Three “lates” equal one absence.
- **If you leave class early, you will be marked “late” or “absent” for the day depending upon how early you leave.**
- **If you miss class on a day stories are handed out, be sure to stop by LA 325 to pick them up before the workshop’s next meeting.** They will be on my office door with your name on them.

Be sure to let me know ASAP if you will be late/absent or why you were late/absent. It is **your** responsibility to notify me if you will miss a workshop, to ask me about making up late work or switching your workshop date, to check Moodle for announcements and assignments, and to provide documentation regarding your absence. You will be able to track your attendance on our course Moodle shell.

UNO STANDARD STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at <http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu>.

WARNING ABOUT PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism is presenting as one’s own the writing or ideas of another person. Some students think of plagiarism only as extensive copying, but copying a single sentence, or even a genuinely distinctive and individual phrase is dishonest if you pretend it is your own expression. Furthermore, it is plagiarism to paraphrase another writer’s ideas without providing proper documentation. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, you should ask me before you turn in your work.

Since plagiarism is cheating, I may report any offense to the UNO committee on discipline for appropriate action, which may include probation, suspension, or expulsion from the University. **All appropriate paperwork will be filled out and submitted to the Director of Student Accountability, Advocacy Affairs, and Disability Services.**

ANY work suspected of being even minutely plagiarized will be checked against any and all available sources, especially the Internet and its various “free paper” sites. Plagiarism penalties will be handled on a case-by-case basis, but will most likely result in you receiving a ZERO on the assignment, which may very possibly lead to a failing grade in the course. Plagiarists will not receive the curve, if there is one, at the end of the semester. **If you plagiarize your short stories in any way, shape, or form, you will automatically fail the course. You have been warned. THERE ARE NO SECOND CHANCES.**

CLASSROOM CONDUCT:

1. Civility in the classroom and respect for the opinions of others is very important in an academic environment. Remember that everyone comes to the class with very different writing backgrounds and intentions. It is likely that you may not “like” everything we read and/or agree with everything that is said or discussed in the classroom. Courteous behavior and responses are expected. This includes ANY form of sexual harassment.
2. Feel free to ask questions of the instructor during class, but do not ask other students, as talking disturbs my concentration and the concentration of other class members.
3. Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. Any actions that purposefully and maliciously distract the class from the work at hand will not be allowed.
4. **Only students enrolled in the class will be allowed to attend the class.** Leave all significant others, friends, children, parents, pets, etc., where they belong.

PHONES, LAPTOPS, AND ALL OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES: These devices **MUST** be turned off (or to the silent mode) and stowed away during class—**unless you are *clearly* using them for reading or taking notes.** They must be out of sight. No earphones or headsets may be worn during class. Do not leave the classroom to answer or make a call or answer or make a call while in the classroom. Do not text, Facebook, Google, or the like while in class. **You will be called out and potentially counted absent for the day. If you can’t refrain from entertaining yourself with your phone, pad, or laptop for 75 minutes, this probably isn’t the class for you.**

EMAILS, INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT CORRESPONDENCE, OTHER COMMUNICATIONS & RESOURCES: You **must have** Internet access to **www.uno.edu** (for email) and **Moodle**, and you should **check both regularly**. Class announcements and assignments will be posted on Moodle, mostly as backup. Ideally, grades will be posted on Moodle so that you can easily keep track of your progress during the semester. Use only your UNO email account to email me—other addresses will be regarded with suspicion. This is **not** an online class, but you should become familiar with and utilize all of these resources.

Emails to me should be composed and sent with audience in mind. I am not your mother, brother, sister, best friend, or enemy and should be written to and addressed in a professional manner. This is an English course after all. Be sure to refer to the course and your subject in the subject line (for example, English 2161: Question about Epiphanies). I check my UNO email throughout the day Monday through Thursday and on Sunday until 9pm. However, you may not get a response as quickly as you would like. Be patient. I have a lot of students. I do check my email sporadically on Friday and Saturday, but generally only before noon. Emails sent on those days may well not be answered until Sunday. Additionally, if you send an email, check for a response. If you expect me to answer your email, I expect you to read my response.

Do note, however, that **I will not respond to emails or talk to you about grades or written comments of any sort on the same day *those* grades/comments are returned to you.** There is a twenty-four hour waiting period for such discussions – unless you literally can’t make out or don’t understand something I’ve written. This timeframe allows you to read ALL of my comments, absorb what was said, and think things over before discussing any problems or concerns.

UNO STANDARD STATEMENT ON ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to <http://www.ods.uno.edu>.

SYLLABUS OF READINGS AND DUE DATES will be handed out on Tuesday 8/25.