COURSE BASICS

Course Overview: This course is a writing workshop dedicated to “genre” fiction, such as science fiction, fantasy, crime, and so forth. While genre fiction is not fully distinct from “literary” fiction, traditionally it has more of a focus on suspense, action, and ideas (where “literary” writing might traditionally be thought of as having a focus on realistic drama and emotion). As a workshop, we will be focusing on your own original fiction writing, which we will discuss as a means to study and examine the craft of genre writing. We will also read and discuss contemporary genre stories to examine their thematic depth and craft technique. The class will focus mainly around developing your material for workshop discussion and then utilizing your feedback for improvement and revision.

Reading Materials: We won’t be using a textbook or anthology. A series of selected published stories will be available to access on Blackboard. Some additional stories or craft materials will be available as handouts in class. Creative work from the group will also be shared and discussed.

Participation: As a workshop, this class will rely heavily on student discussion and participation. Your contribution to class discussions, including reading discussions and writing workshops, is vital to the success of the class. Before class, be sure to read that week’s material carefully and formulate your thoughts and questions about it. In class, please offer up your contributions freely and engage with what others in class are saying. Everyone being involved is crucial, but your regular participation should otherwise be seen as a casual and informal part of our workshop setting.

Attendance: Since our class will be based almost entirely on our group working together as a whole, everyone needs to be able to attend class regularly and consistently. One absence (equivalent to one week of class) will be excused without penalty for whatever reason (work, travel, illness, etc); a second and/or third absence will each lower your final grade by 10 points. Absences beyond three will be reason for failing the course. Some exceptions may be made for extreme hardship or religious observation. Excessive tardiness, if repeated, will be counted as absence. Class will get started between 6:00-6:10pm; please arrive and be ready to begin within that time. (Class will end by or before 8:30 depending on how much we have to cover each week.)

Grading: Grading for this class will be simple and straightforward. The assignment grades, as listed below, will be earned for adequate and timely completion of the assignments, including your story assignments. If you meet the basic expectations of the assignment and turn it in on time, you will earn the available points. Late or broadly inadequate work will be deducted accordingly. Written feedback will be provided for your three main creative assignments, but these comments will be independent of a given assignment’s point score. If you can complete all your assignments on time and regularly come to class and participate, it will be easy for you to earn an A in this class. Feel free to ask questions about your grade at any point. Final grades will break down as follows: A (90-100); B (80-89); C (70-79); D (60-69); F (0-59). Points are as follows: workshop stories (45 points); discussion and participation (30 points); feedback letters (25 points).
THE WORKSHOP

Workshops: We will hold three rounds of workshop, one for each of our three main creative assignments. During workshop, our classes will consist of open and casual discussions of student material. During workshop discussions, the author will be asked to listen and take notes, but not participate in the discussion. The rest of the class will address their comments to the group, not directly to the author. Before the conclusion of each discussion, authors will join in with the group to bring up questions or concerns about their own writing and to ask further questions of the group’s feedback.

Due Dates: At the start of each round of workshop, stories will be due to turn into the group. Due dates will be the Thursday before each round of workshop begins. Stories will be shared electronically, but you should print workshop material so you can make written comments and return the stories to their authors. The stories you turn in to the group for workshop are not expected to be perfect (of course—that’s why we’re workshopping them) but they should be “complete” drafts (as opposed to partial drafts) that have been sufficiently polished and proofread (i.e., they should be “ready to share”).

Feedback Letters: In addition to offering your feedback as a part of class workshop discussions, you will also write a letter of feedback to the author explaining your reactions, thoughts, and questions. This will help you formulate your feedback for the class discussion and give you a chance to communicate your thoughts directly with the author. Each letter should be one page single-spaced; the letter should be signed with your name and addressed to the author, though beyond these formalities the letters should be seen as informal. Write your comments in a straightforward manner with thorough details and explanations. In all your feedback, you should see yourself as an advocate for the work you are addressing, always supporting its improvement and success. All feedback for workshop should be honest, charitable, and constructive. Along with your letter comments, please also include helpful margin comments and line notes on the manuscript itself. Your printed letters and written comments are due to return to the authors on the night of each workshop. I will also collect a copy of each of your feedback letters.

THE STORIES

Story Assignments: At least two original, completed stories will be submitted for workshop. In terms of content and style, the story assignments are generally wide open, meaning overall you can write whatever you want for a given story while keeping in mind our overall focus for the class (which should be viewed as a launching point for interesting narratives as opposed to a confining requirement). What you write about and how you write about it is up to you, and determining this for yourself is an important part of effective creative writing. However, your material should, in one way or another, attempt to utilize elements of one or more genre and in general to function both at the level of theme and entertainment. Finding vivid and creative ways of expressing and exploring such material is exactly what your writing for this course will be all about.

Excerpts or Chapters: While for craft purposes we will be primarily reading published short stories in class, you may use your story assignments to work on original longer-form fiction, such as excerpts from a longer work, chapters of an in-progress novel, or linked/connected stories from a series. If you decide to pursue any of these options, please make sure you are composing original material for this course and include a brief note explaining any necessary context for understanding the material.
Assignment #3: For our final assignment you will have the option to revise and/or expand one of your first two stories or to produce a third new story; revisions or new stories for assignment #3 will be turned in for our final round of workshop. Additionally, at the end of the semester, one last revision will be due in place of a final exam.

Length & Format: Your stories should be around 9-15 pages in length with standard formatting: Times New Roman 12, double-spacing, and one-inch margins. Some fluctuation in length is obviously natural depending on content and style, and while you should meet at least the minimum length, do let your material guide you instead of writing only for the sake of length. Of course, it’s always fine to write more than the suggested page length. Stories should include page numbers as well as a title and author name on the first page. Please submit stories as PDFs if possible.

Fiction Selections: In addition to reading our assigned material and composing material of your own for class, you should also consider other published genre fiction. Which writers do you enjoy? Which books and stories? Reading creative writing is one of the first and best steps in improving your own. Finding the sort of stories and writing you want to read will help you figure out what sort of material you want to write yourself. So in addition to our assigned readings for class, be on the lookout for authors and stories you enjoy, and select something to share with the class. Later in the semester we will share copies of your selections, read excerpts, and discuss them in class.

A Final Note: The fiction we’ll be discussing in this class is fiction that tries to be fun, thoughtful, and exciting. Take that idea to heart and focus on working on the best, most thrilling material you can. Genre fiction is serious, but it’s also about the real joy of a good story. Try to enjoy the writing you are doing and infuse that joy into the drama, suspense, humor, and life of your work. Please try to write stories that matter to you, that you enjoy, and that you can enhance and improve, and focus on helping others do the same.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES & RESOURCES

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, including stolen or inadequately cited material, will not be tolerated in this course and will result in failure of the assignment and potentially of the course. Turning in work not original to you or to this class is considered plagiarism. Please note that violations will be reported. Read the full academic integrity policy here: wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html

Classroom Environment: The university promotes learning environments that offer the best possible educational experiences for all students. To that end, this class is intended to provide a space that is both supportive and challenging. All members of this class are expected to strive toward a positive and inclusive atmosphere that values the diversity of its members, allows and encourages its members to express themselves freely, challenges assumptions and stereotypes in favor of critical thought and inquiry, and lastly expects thoughtful consideration, courtesy, and respect between all its members.

Disability Resources: If your work for this class requires special arrangements because of a disability, please contact the Cornerstone office at 935-5970 or at cornerstone@wustl.edu. As long as I receive timely guidance in writing from Cornerstone, you may receive any specific accommodations for which you are eligible. Cornerstone serves as the official university resource for approving and arranging students’ accommodations and handles all information confidentially. Requests for accommodation must be made at the beginning of the semester. For more see: cornerstone.wustl.edu/DisabilityResources.aspx
**Title IX Resources:** The university has designated the Title IX Coordinator identified below to coordinate its compliance with and response to inquiries concerning Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex (including sexual harassment and sexual violence) in the university's educational programs and activities. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources by contacting Jessica Kennedy (Title IX Coordinator) at jwkennedy@wustl.edu or 935-3118. Additionally, employees of Washington University who are in a position of authority, including instructors, are obligated to report cases of sexual harassment or assault brought to their attention. All information reported to Jessica Kennedy will be handled as confidentially as possible. For more help, including resources and accommodations for victims of sexual assault, contact Kim Webb (Director of the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center) at kim_webb@wustl.edu or 935-8761, visit the RSVP Center in Suite 435, Seigle Hall, or go to shs.wustl.edu/SexualViolence

**Bias Reporting:** The university has a process through which students or other community members who have experienced incidents of bias, prejudice or discrimination, or who have witnessed such incidents against others, can report to the Bias Report and Support System (BRSS) team. See: brss.wustl.edu

**Mental Health:** Mental Health Services’ professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends or family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression. Find more here: shs.wustl.edu/MentalHealth

**Writing Resources:** The Writing Center offers free writing advice to all Washington University students. The tutors will work with students on any kind of writing project, including your essays for this class. They can help at any stage of the writing process, including brainstorming, developing and clarifying an argument, organizing evidence, or improving style. Instead of editing or proofreading papers, the tutors will emphasize the process of revision and teach students to edit their own work. To make an appointment call 935-4981 or go to Level 1 of Olin Library. Find more here: writingcenter.wustl.edu