

Writing Fiction

ENGL 237/238/239 Summer 2012
MTWTh 9:30 – 11:20am, R206

CASSIE CROSS

Office Hours: T & W 12-1pm, E-mail cross.cassie@gmail.com

“Hemingway studied, as models, the novels of Knut Hamsun and Ivan Turgenev...Ralph Ellison studied Hemingway and Gertrude Stein. Thoreau loved Homer; Eudora Welty loved Chekhov. Faulkner described his debt to Sherwood Anderson and Joyce; E.M. Forster, his debt to Jane Austen and Proust. By contrast, if you ask a twenty-one-year-old poet whose poetry he likes, he might say, unblushing, “Nobody’s.” In his youth, he has not yet understood that poets like poetry, and novelists like novels; he himself likes only the role, the thought of himself in a hat. Rembrandt and Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Gauguin, possessed, I believe, powerful hearts, not powerful wills. They loved the range of materials they used. The work’s possibilities excited them; the field’s complexities fired their imaginations. The caring suggested the tasks; the tasks suggested the schedules. They learned their fields and then loved them. They worked, respectfully, out of their love and knowledge, and they produced complex bodies of work that endure. Then, and only then, the world flapped at them some sort of hat, which, if they were still living, they ignored as well as they could, to keep at their tasks.”

-Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*

"I tried not to select stories because they illustrated a theme or portion of the national experience but because they struck me as lively, beautiful, believable, and, in the human news they brought, important."

-John Updike, Introduction to *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*

The 7 weeks of this course will be divided into two parts; we will begin the semester discussing the work of others (what inspires us, what we admire, specific techniques, etc.) and close by discussing our own work. Readings for this course will be from our required text, *Method and Madness: The Making of a Story* by Alice LaPlante (ISBN: 978-0-393-92817-4), as well as handouts of contemporary fiction, in addition to your own work.

Writing is hard. Even published authors struggle with it. A creative writing workshop can be a warm, comfortable and exciting space, which is what I hope to create this semester. Finding fellow writers who you trust to put time and thought into your work, as well as be respectful during workshop, is invaluable. Our aim in workshop is not to tear anyone down—or, on the opposite spectrum, to resist commenting in order to make someone feel better—but to give real, honest responses to the words on the page.

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to * distinguish between plot and story * show, rather than tell, by using specific details, * develop scenes * create believable characters through description, action, scene, and dialog * create and sustain tension * establish and sustain a point of view * control sentence structure, length and word choice to create a particular tone and mood * critique, revive, and edit works in progress.

The requirements of this course will be (and grade weighted as):

- Short Story 15%
- Creative Portfolio 20%
- Workshop Comments 15%
- Story & Workshop Evaluation 10%
- Responses to Readings 20%
- Participation 20%

Short story. In this class I expect you to produce and share one completed short story. Each student will sign up for one workshop date. On this date the class will read and discuss his/her story. Your story must be submitted in electronic format by 5pm two days before your story will be workshopped.

Creative Portfolio. You will be completing short, creative exercises in class throughout the quarter. These exercises will typically be 1-2 pages and focus on different elements of fiction writing; setting, character, point-of-view, etc. I will give you feedback but not grades. You are responsible for collecting (and revising) what you think are the best of these exercises for inclusion in your creative portfolio. You should have at least 6 pages of your best work in this portfolio to be graded (about 3 exercises.)

Workshop. Responding to writing will help you to think more critically and objectively about your own writing, therefore the comments you give to your classmates during workshop are an important part of your grade. Students who take the time to read and evaluate their classmates' work will do well in this class. Students should come to class with at least **one half page of typed, single-spaced written comments** about each story to be discussed during the class period.

Story & workshop evaluation. After your workshop, you will consider the comments you received. You will write a short evaluation of how you might proceed in a thoughtful revision of your story, based on these comments. (We will not have enough time to do a revision this quarter.) Were any comments particularly on point? How did the workshop influence how you think about your story? If you were to revise, what steps would you take and why? This evaluation, in place of a revision, is due on the final day of class, August 9.

Responses to the readings. For each assigned reading, you are required to write a short response (200-300 words). Please bring these responses with you to class on the day the story is to be discussed. Read like a writer. Notice what moves the author has made to create the intended effect of this story. How does she/he use detail, plot, character, etc.? What was your favorite part of the story and why?

Participation. Missing more than two weeks of class is grounds for failure, regardless of your performance when you do attend class. Consistent tardiness will impact your grade. Attendance and participation are closely related; if you are not here, you cannot participate. During the weeks of workshop, it is especially important that you be present and on time to class. In addition to attendance, part of your participation grade includes the extra reading and writing assignments cover during class. If you consistently miss these assignments or show up unprepared for class, it will affect this portion of your grade.

Plagiarism is a counterproductive, non-writing behavior that is unacceptable in a course intended to aid your growth as a writer. Plagiarism is grounds for probation or suspension from Bellevue College as well as for failure in this course. **I will not tolerate it**, and will report any instance of plagiarism I find to the Vice President of Student Services. Plagiarism results in an immediate failing grade on that assignment. If the plagiarism offense is severe enough, you will fail the course.

Writing Lab. The Writing Lab offers one-on-one help with writing, including class assignments, college applications, resumes, and more. Make an appointment by calling ahead (564-2200) or stopping by (D204).

Disability Resource Center. If you are a student who has a disability or learning challenge for which you have documentation or have seen someone for treatment, please register with The Disability Resource Center. If you are eligible, you will be provided with an accommodation letter, which you must review with me **the first week of class**. More information can be found at: www.bellevuecollege.edu/drc