

UNDERGRADUATE CREATIVE WRITING

School of the Arts
609 Kent • New York, NY • 10027
212-854-3774 / writingprogram@columbia.edu
<http://arts.columbia.edu/writing/undergraduate>

FALL 2017 COURSE DESCRIPTION

All students are eligible for seminars and beginning workshops, though space is limited. If the class is full, add your name to the SSOL waitlist and attend the first day.

Students may take only one workshop per semester and two seminars per semester.

Intermediate, advanced & senior workshops require a writing sample. Please visit our 609 Kent office or our website at <http://arts.columbia.edu/writing/undergraduate> for information on Registration Procedures.

BEGINNING WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN1100 Beginning Fiction Workshop

The beginning workshop in fiction is designed for students who have little or no previous experience writing literary texts in fiction. Students are introduced to a range of technical and imaginative concerns through creative exercises and discussions, and eventually produce their own writing for the critical analysis of the class. The focus of the course is on the rudiments of voice, character, setting, point of view, plot, and the lyrical use of language. Students will begin to develop the critical skills that will allow them to read like writers and understand, on a technical level, how accomplished creative writing is produced. Outside readings of a wide range of fiction supplement and inform the exercises and longer written projects.

Instructors

Sec 01 Jarret Leong
Sec 02 Madelaine Lucas
Sec 03 Catherine Powell
Sec 04 Robert Ren

WRIT UN1200 Beginning Nonfiction Workshop

The beginning workshop in nonfiction is designed for students with little or no experience in writing literary nonfiction. Students are introduced to a range of technical and imaginative concerns through exercises and discussions, and they eventually submit their own writing for the critical analysis of the class. Outside readings supplement and inform the exercises and longer written projects.

Instructors

Sec 01 Georgette Mallory
Sec 02 Kalle Mattila

WRIT UN1300 Beginning Poetry Workshop

The beginning poetry workshop is designed for students who have a serious interest in poetry writing but who lack a significant background in the rudiments of the craft and/or have had little or no previous poetry workshop experience. Students will be assigned weekly writing exercises emphasizing such aspects of verse composition as the poetic line, the image, rhyme and other sound devices, verse forms, repetition, tone, irony, and others. Students will also read an extensive variety of exemplary work in verse, submit brief critical analyses of poems, and critique each other's original work.

Instructor

Sec 01 Lily Blacksell
Sec 02 Anne Brink

INTERMEDIATE WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN2100 Intermediate Fiction Workshop

Intermediate workshops are for students with some experience with creative writing, and whose prior work merits admission to the class (as judged by the professor). Intermediate workshops present a higher creative standard than beginning workshops, and increased expectations to produce finished work. By the end of the semester, each student will have produced at least seventy pages of original fiction. Students are additionally expected to write extensive critiques of the work of their peers.

Instructors

Sec 01 Leopoldine Core

Sec 02 Heidi Julavits

WRIT UN2200 Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop

The intermediate workshop in nonfiction is designed for students with some experience in writing literary nonfiction. Intermediate workshops present a higher creative standard than beginning workshops and an expectation that students will produce finished work. Outside readings supplement and inform the exercises and longer written projects. By the end of the semester, students will have produced thirty to forty pages of original work in at least two traditions of literary nonfiction.

Instructor

Sec 01 Sarah Broome

WRIT UN2300 Intermediate Poetry Workshop

Intermediate poetry workshops are for students with some prior instruction in the rudiments of poetry writing and prior poetry workshop experience. Intermediate poetry workshops pose greater challenges to students and maintain higher critical standards than beginning workshops. Students will be instructed in more complex aspects of the craft, including the poetic persona, the prose poem, the collage, open-field composition, and others. They will also be assigned more challenging verse forms such as the villanelle and also non-European verse forms such as the pantoum. They will read extensively, submit brief critical analyses, and put their instruction into regular practice by composing original work that will be critiqued by their peers. By the end of the semester each student will have assembled a substantial portfolio of finished work.

Instructor

Sec 01 Anais Duplan

ADVANCED WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN3100 Advanced Fiction Workshop

Building on the work of the Intermediate Workshop, Advanced Workshops are reserved for the most accomplished creative writing students. A significant body of writing must be produced and revised. Particular attention will be paid to the components of fiction: voice, perspective, characterization, and form. Students will be expected to finish several short stories, executing a total artistic vision on a piece of writing. The critical focus of the class will include an examination of endings and formal wholeness, sustaining narrative arcs, compelling a reader's interest for the duration of the text, and generating a sense of urgency and drama in the work.

Instructors

Sec 01 Porochista Khakpour

Sec 02 Alexandra Kleeman

WRIT UN3200 Advanced Nonfiction Workshop

Advanced Nonfiction Workshop is for students with significant narrative and/or critical experience. Students will produce original literary nonfiction for the workshop, with an added focus on developing a distinctive voice and approach.

Instructor

Section 01 Kate Zambreno

WRIT UN3300 Advanced Poetry Workshop

This poetry workshop is reserved for accomplished poetry writers and maintains the highest level of creative and critical expectations. Students will be encouraged to develop their strengths and to cultivate a distinctive poetic vision and voice but must also demonstrate a willingness to broaden their range and experiment with new forms and notions of the poem. A portfolio of poetry will be written and revised with the critical input of the instructor and the workshop.

Instructor

Section 01 David Tomas Martinez

SENIOR WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN3101 Senior Fiction Workshop

Seniors who are majors in creative writing are given priority for this course. Enrollment is limited, and is by permission of the professor. The senior workshop offers students the opportunity to work exclusively with classmates who are at the same high level of accomplishment in the major. Students in the senior workshops will produce and revise a new and substantial body of work. In-class critiques and conferences with the professor will be tailored to needs of each student.

Instructor

Sec 01 Mitchell Jackson

SEMINARS

WRIT UN2110 Approaches To The Short Story

The modern short story has gone through many transformations, and the innovations of its practitioners have often pointed the way for prose fiction as a whole. The short story has been seized upon and refreshed by diverse cultures and aesthetic affiliations, so that perhaps the only stable definition of the form remains the famous one advanced by Poe, one of its early masters, as a work of fiction that can be read in one sitting. Still, common elements of the form have emerged over the last century and this course will study them, including point of view, plot, character, setting and theme. John Hawkes once famously called these last four elements the “enemies of the novel,” and many short story writers have seen them as hindrances as well. Hawkes later recanted, though some writers would still agree with his earlier assessment, and this course will examine the successful strategies of great writers across the spectrum of short story practice, from traditional approaches to more radical solutions, keeping in mind how one period’s revolution—Hemingway, for example—becomes a later era’s mainstream or “commonsense” storytelling mode. By reading the work of major writers from a writer’s perspective, we will examine the myriad techniques employed for what is finally a common goal: to make readers feel. Short writing exercises will help us explore the exhilarating subtleties of these elements and how the effects created by their manipulation or even outright absence power our most compelling fictions.

Instructor

Sec 01 Sam Lipsyte

WRIT UN3119 What Happened Was: Approaches to Plot and Dramatic Structure

Typically, the word "plot" produces either anxiety in writers or a sense of overconfidence. Must a story or a novel have one? When is a plot a *plot* and not just a series of random events, connected by too much willfulness on the part of the author? How much should coincidence come to bear when designing a plot? Should an overreliance on plot deem a work to be classified as "genre writing" rather than a work of literature? And how, within this context, does one understand F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous claim that "character is plot, plot is character"? This class will attempt to answer these questions by examining the mechanics of plot, and how a machine can become an art form. The syllabus will include a variety of fictional works ranging the murder mystery to the so-called plotless novel. In-class discussions and writing assignments will focus on the strategies these different novels and stories deploy as a way to understand structure, sustain dramatic irony, and make use of dramatic tension. Readings may also include essays on plot by writers such as E. M. Forster, Elizabeth Bowen, Milan Kundera, and Charles Baxter, among others.

Instructor

Victor LaValle

WRIT UN3123 An Earnest Look at Irony

In this seminar, we will examine works by several accomplished writers of fiction, and a few crackerjack poets, in order to determine what, precisely, we mean when we talk about irony on the page and what, precisely, we mean when we talk about earnestness. How are these very different effects (and affects) achieved? What are their benefits to the student author? What pitfalls, perceived or otherwise, attend the allure of each? What is the relationship of humor to earnestness, and of seriousness to irony? Is the absence of irony really the same thing as earnestness? Does the absence of earnestness somehow necessitate irony?

With an eye toward technique, we will attempt to answer these and further questions by time spent among the words of those who fall all along, though often refuse to stay put on, the earnest-ironic continuum. Students will be expected to write three stories or essays throughout the semester, exploring for themselves this treacherous but eminently skiable slope.

With readings from Robert Frost, Stevie Smith, Charles Baudelaire, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), James Joyce, Raymond Carver, James Baldwin, Vladimir Nabokov, Joan Didion, Donald Barthelme, George Saunders, Virginia Woolf, Zadie Smith, Gertrude Stein, Jamaica Kincaid, James Agee, Isak Dinesen, David Foster Wallace, Lydia Davis, Clarice Lispector, and Paul West.

Instructor

TBD

WRIT UN3124 The Competitive Body: Literary Portrayals of Sports & Athleticism

Competitive sport dominates much of modern American life, yet it has been largely neglected as a subject for literature. Roland Barthes suggests that there may be a fundamental incompatibility between athletes and intellectuals, while sports journalist Robert Lipsyte has spent a career elaborating upon his popular taxonomy of "jocks" and "pukes." Lingering notions of Cartesian dualism undoubtedly contribute to this divide, as well as increasing skepticism towards the binary win-lose logic of sport. Art's tendency to complicate rather than simplify, to intimate rather than prescribe, seems at odds with the easy trajectory that sport provides. Mirroring the structure of competitive contests, all stories necessarily end in victory or defeat.

The radical feminist writer Kathy Acker frames the struggle to write about sport somewhat differently. In "Against Ordinary Language," her essay on bodybuilding, Acker wonders whether the split is not between camps of people, but rather between languages. How do we articulate a language that is speechless? How do we "read" and "write" the figures that the body makes through space? How do we derive meaning from an activity that is, etymologically-speaking, useless, frivolous, and inconsequential?

This course will be preoccupied with the above questions. The literary texts we will read and discuss are essentially texts of translation that bring the language of the body onto the page. We will read works of literary fiction as well as critical essays and sports histories. Taken together, these texts will illuminate different ways to “read” sport—as portrait, as metaphor, as metonym. We will also learn how to contextualize sport within the larger political, economic, and social systems in which we are all players.

Instructor

Anelise Chen

WRIT UN2211 Traditions In Nonfiction

The seminar provides exposure to the varieties of nonfiction with readings in its principal genres: reportage, criticism and commentary, biography and history, and memoir and the personal essay. A highly plastic medium, nonfiction allows authors to portray real events and experiences through narrative, analysis, polemic or any combination thereof. Free to invent everything but the facts, great practitioners of nonfiction are faithful to reality while writing with a voice and a vision distinctively their own. To show how nonfiction is conceived and constructed, class discussions will emphasize the relationship of content to form and style, techniques for creating plot and character under the factual constraints imposed by nonfiction, the defining characteristics of each author's voice, the author's subjectivity and presence, the role of imagination and emotion, the uses of humor, and the importance of speculation and attitude. Written assignments will be opportunities to experiment in several nonfiction genres and styles.

Instructor

Mark Rozzo

WRIT UN3210 The Modern Arts Writer

This course will examine the lineaments of critical writing. A critic blends the subjective and objective in complex ways. A critic must know the history of an artwork, (its past), while placing it on the contemporary landscape and contemplating its future. A single essay will analyze, argue, describe, reflect and interpret. And, since examining a work of art also means examining oneself, the task includes a willingness to probe one's own assumptions and biases. The best critics are engaged in a conversation -- a dialogue, a debate --with changing standards of taste, with their audience, with their own convictions and emotions. The best criticism is part of a larger cultural conversation. It spurs readers to ask questions rather than accept answers about art and society.

We will read essays that consider six art forms: literature; film; music (classical, jazz and popular); theater and performance; visual art; and dance. At the term's end, students will consider essays that examine cultural boundaries and divisions: the negotiations between popular and high art; the aesthetic of cruelty; the post-modern blurring of and between artist, critic and fan. The reading list will include such writers as Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Elizabeth Hardwick, Roland Barthes, (literature); James Agee, Manny Farber, Pauline Kael, Zadie Smith (film); G.B. Shaw, Willa Cather, Ralph Ellison, Gerald Early, Lester Bangs, Ellen Willis (music); Eric Bentley, Mary McCarthy, C.L.R. James (theater); Leo Steinberg, Frank O'Hara, Ada Louise Huxtable, Maggie Nelson (visual art); Edwin Denby, Arlene Croce, Elizabeth Kendall, Mindy Aloff (dance); Susan Sontag, Anthony Heilbut, John Jeremiah Sullivan (cultural criticism)

Instructor

Margo Jefferson

WRIT UN3213 The Literary Reporter

The literary reporter is a protean character, both on and off the page. She is an astute observer of the world, filtering her observations through a lens that is both critical and personal. In this seminar, we will consider the many ways a writer can report and report back on the world by looking at examples from multiple literary traditions, including participatory journalism,

longform narrative journalism, cultural criticism, memoir, biography, and war reporting. We will question what it means to author another person's story, interrogate the fiction of the narrative "I", and explore the complex intersections of race, class, gender and privilege in both reporting and writing. Readings will include Joan Didion, James Agee, Janet Malcolm, Martha Gellhorn, Ted Conover, Suketu Mehta, Jon Krakauer, Alison Bechdel, Roland Barthes, Bertolt Brecht, Michel Foucault, Hasan Blasim, Xingjian Gao, and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. Students will have the opportunity to do some reporting of their own, which they will use to write two short papers.

Instructor
Meehan Crist

WRIT UN3315 Poetic Meter And Form

This course will investigate the uses of rhythmic order and disorder in English-language poetry, with a particular emphasis on 'formal' elements in 'free' verse. Through a close analysis of poems, we'll examine the possibilities of qualitative meter, and students will write original creative work within (and in response to) various formal traditions. Analytical texts and poetic manifestoes will accompany our reading of exemplary poems.

Each week, we'll study interesting examples of metrical writing, and I'll ask you to write in response to those examples. Our topics will include *stress meter, syllable-stress meter, double and triple meters, rising and falling rhythms, promotion, demotion, inversion, elision, and foot scansion*. Our study will include a great range of pre-modern and modern writers, from Keats to W. D. Snodgrass, Shakespeare to Denise Levertov, Blake to James Dickey, Whitman to Louise Gluck, etc. As writers, we'll always be thinking about how the *formal choices* of a poem are appropriate or inappropriate for the poem's *content*. We'll also read prose by poets describing their metrical craft.

Instructor
Joseph Fasano

WRIT UN3317 Trauma & Its Aftermath: Poetry, Memory, Hybridity

It is 2017. The history of literature has, in many ways, become inseparable from the history of trauma, a statement that only seems to be growing more true with the passage of time. How can the lyric turn outward to become a relevant and necessary reflection of contemporary times, especially given the current political climate and the way the internet's lightning pace has revolutionized how we receive and process (mis)information. How does William Carlos Williams's adage that "It is difficult to get the news from poems yet men [sic] die miserably every day for lack of what is found there" hold up in today's world? What is poetry's role and responsibility in a society where it's become difficult or impossible to even get the news from the news?

This class will study poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid texts that stem from, speak to, and call out all types of historical and personal trauma, from the beginning of the last century to current day. What are the different ways writers have used form, or a lack of it, to convey traumatic experience? How does a writer both remember and manipulate memory in the service of recreating trauma for the reader? Why do so many hybrid texts seem to take trauma as their core subject?

Instructor
Marni Ludwig

WRIT UN3014 Structure & Style

This seminar explores fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama, as related disciplines. While each genre has its particular opportunities and demands, all can utilize such devices as narrative, dialogue, imagery, and description (scenes, objects, and thought processes). Through a wide variety of readings and writing exercises, we will examine and explore approaches to language, ways of telling a story (linear and nonlinear), and how pieces are constructed. Some student work will be briefly workshopped.

Instructor

Sec 01 TBD

WRIT UN3016 Walking

As Walter Benjamin notes in *The Arcades Project*: “Basic to flânerie, among other things, is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor. The flâneur, as is well known, makes ‘studies’.” This course will encourage you to make “studies” – poems, essays, stories, or multimedia pieces – based on your walks. We will read depictions of walking from multiple disciplines, including philosophy, poetry, history, religion, visual art, and urban planning. Occasionally we will walk together. An important point of the course is to develop mobile forms of writing. How can writing emerge from, and document, a walk’s encounters, observations, and reflections? What advantages does mobility bring to our work? Each week you will write a short piece (1-3 pages) that engages your walks while responding to close readings of the assigned material.

Instructor

Sec 01 Jon Cotner

WRIT GU4310 Witness, Record, Document: Poetry and Testimony

This seminar takes up the terms witness, record, and document as nouns and verbs. What is poetry of witness? Documentary poetry? Poetry as (revisionist) historical record? What labor and what ethical, political, and aesthetic considerations are required of poets who endeavor to witness, record, or document historical events or moments of trauma? How is this approach to poetry informed by or contributing to feminist theories, aesthetic innovation, and revisionist approaches to official histories? Course materials include: 1) essays that explore the poetics and politics of "poetry of witness" or "documentary poetry"; 2) a range of contemporary American poetry that has been classified as or has productively challenged these categories; 3) and audio, video, and photographic projects on which poets have collaborated. Our encounters with this work will be guided by and grounded in conversations about ideas of "truth," "text," the power relations of "documentation," and issues of language and representation in poetry. We will also critically examine the formal (rhyme, rhythm, diction, form, genre, point of view, imagery, etc.) and philosophical components and interventions of the work we study and create.

Instructor

Deborah Paredez

WRIT GU4014 Translation Seminar: Through a Glass Darkly: German Romantic & Gothic Tales of Wonder and Horror

"Open to juniors and seniors by permission of the instructor - please email the professor a brief (1-2 paragraphs) explanation of your interest in the course material."

We’ve all been frightened by horror stories at some point in our lives, but how is this fear achieved? It’s all too easy for attempts to inspire fear to fall flat, resulting in anything from camp to farce. Truly frightening literature involves a feat of storytelling by which disbelief is so thoroughly suspended as to render the reader vulnerable to the most improbable fears. We are perhaps most nakedly human when confronted by what unsettles us. By carefully reading these classic works of (mostly) nineteenth century wonder and horror, we will study the ways in which these effects are achieved and the ways in which

writing about the supernatural serves the writers' political and psychological goals. Throughout the semester, we'll also be talking about issues of translation when applicable. The course has three main goals: 1. to acquaint students with the general history of wonder/horror writing in the German Romantic and Gothic traditions; 2. to get students thinking about translation and the ways it impacts how we read; and 3. to inspire students to explore the use of the techniques employed in these works for use in their own writing.

Instructor

Susan Bernofsky