

Syllabus for English 254-F16-CPE Online
Writing & Reading Imaginative Literature
Instructor: Callum Angus
email: csangus@umass.edu
Phone: (315) 323-3643

Course Description

When you write down a story or a poem for yourself, it's a private feeling of beauty and pride. And so it should be: putting ideas down on paper (or screen) and dreaming characters to life is no small feat. But it can be tempting to hoard your own words for fear that others might not understand what you have to say. By enrolling in this class you've made the bold statement that you want to become a contributing citizen of the literary world; you want to talk about the ideas behind your own work, that of your classmates, and published work all with equal fervor. For the next 14 weeks, we'll all strive to make this online community into our own private literary world where we boldly write our lives and imaginations down and invite others to read them.

As writers, you will gain confidence in your ability to produce inspired work, and you'll begin to see how revision can help you get closer to your goal. As critics, you will become practiced in constructive feedback. Rather than suggesting ways you would change your peer's work, I will ask you to locate and discuss the work's ambitions: what does the piece aspire to do? What feelings is it trying to evoke? How it can get closer to these desired effects?

You will primarily be tasked with reading and responding to the creative output of your peers. However, you'll also be reading short stories, poems, and one novella. Shorter works can be accessed free in the e-Reserves located in the Course Readings content area, but there are 2 required books you are responsible for obtaining on your own:

Required Texts (these can be purchased through Amazon.com links on the course's Spire page)

Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*

Plus additional course materials linked in e-Reserves and posted in weekly lectures (full reading list at the end of the syllabus).

***Also, if you happen upon something outside of class that you find wondrous or even just a little insightful, you are highly encouraged to share with the class in the Discussion Forum!*

Goals & Requirements

This course is intended to be a combination of peer workshop and a study of craft. Everyone will be workshopped by their classmates twice over the course of the semester, and as part of your final portfolio you will be required to revise one piece based on workshop feedback. **The overarching goal is for you to leave this course energized, having produced and revised creative work where you have further developed your style after reflecting on feedback from your peers and myself.**

Getting in Touch & Finding Out What's Going On

It is my goal to establish an open line of communication with each of you. Even though we probably will not meet face to face, I want you to feel that you can come to me with any questions, creative, logistical, or otherwise. There are several ways to get in touch with me, and to get your questions answered:

- 1) **Email:** Please feel free to email me anytime at csangus@umass.edu. I will always strive to respond within 24 hours (often much sooner) with the exception that **I do not respond to email on Saturdays**. I check my email frequently, and prefer it over Blackboard's Message tool. I will of course respond to Blackboard messages as well, but please use email whenever possible.
- 2) **Ask A Question Forum:** If you have a question about Blackboard or how this course works, please post first in the Ask A Question forum. I will strive to respond within 24 hours. Please also check this forum periodically, and offer an answer if you see an unanswered question. This will help immensely, and then I won't need to continuously answer the same questions repeatedly through email -- leaving me more time to read your wonderful writing!
- 3) **Phone:** You can call me (315-323-3643) between the hours of 8am and 6pm, except on Saturdays. Feel free to leave a voicemail if I'm unavailable when you call. I will do my best to return your call, within those same hours.
- 4) **Weekly Office Hours:** Throughout each week I will check in on our shared Blackboard space at least once, usually several times. However, every **Sunday from 1-4pm, and Wednesday from 8:30-9:30pm**, I will be actively logged in to Blackboard to answer questions, engage in forums, and address any outlying concerns.
- 5) **Weekly Announcements:** Weekly announcements will be posted Sunday afternoons. These will serve as your weekly creative call to arms. I'll highlight new creative writing prompts and exercises in the Creative Forum, what we're reading in the coming week, as well as give you helpful reminders of what's due.

Grading Breakdown: 500 Points Available

Additional rubrics will be available on Blackboard.

150 points	Creative Forum Submissions	Two workshop submissions in prose and poetry at 75 points each.
100 points	Discussion Forum	Each discussion post is worth 5 points .
100 points	Workshop/Creative Forum Participation	Based on frequency and quality of your creative forum responses to peers and writing prompts.
100 points	Final Portfolio	50 points for a complete portfolio, including creative work and reflection 50 points for substantial revision of one piece
50 points	Response Papers	25 points available per paper

Forums: Creative & Discussion Forums

In this course there are two types of forums you will be graded on:

1) the **Creative Forum** (also called the “Workshop”)

Over the course of the semester every student will have their creative output workshoped **at least** twice. Your first submission will be short fiction, 8-12 pages. Your second submission will be 1-3 poems. The week before we are scheduled to workshop your writing, you must post your submission in the Creative forum so your peers and I can read it over the weekend and prepare to respond the following week. Your official feedback from me on creative submissions will take the form of a private letter, but I will also engage in the comment area.

Creative forum submissions are due Wednesdays by midnight. Responses are due the following Wednesday by midnight. Once enrollment is finalized, a submission rotation will be posted and added to the course outline. The creative forum is also where you'll find periodic creative writing prompts that will factor into your participation grade (see below).

2) the **Discussion Forum**

Our discussion of assigned readings will take place in the Discussion Forum. But keep in mind that the focus of this course is your own creative work; discussions of readings is considered secondary. In light of this, all discussion questions and weekly lectures for the entire course will be posted at the beginning of the semester. The questions might ask you whether or not narrators of stories need to be likeable. Or if there's a distinction between literary fiction and genre fiction. Or any number of things! There are no right or wrong answers to discussion questions. Rather, I want you to engage with readings and with your peers to figure out for yourself what you think about these topics and why you hold the opinion you do.

You'll notice above that there is no “required” number of discussion posts for you to post over the semester. Rather there are **100 points allotted to discussion**. Each post is eligible for **a maximum of 5 points**, depending on the depth of your analysis or response. This works out to a little less than 2 posts a week to receive full credit.

I will be engaging in the discussion forum on a weekly basis, as I expect you to do as well. That said, we all run on different schedules. You may work ahead if you like, and it's ok if you fall behind, but keep in mind that as we progress through the semester, **I will close each week's discussion forums after 10 days** to prevent too much “catch up” work at the end of the term. For example, if Week 2's discussion “On Genre & Expectation” is scheduled to start on September 14, then I will close it to new posts on September 24. Even after a discussion is closed you will still be able to see and read all the posts. You may post as far ahead as you like, but keep in mind that the goal of discussions is to engage with your peers and myself. The best way to do this is to stick with the weekly schedule in the course outline.

Workshop/Creative Forum Participation

This is an online class, and so our workshop will function differently than one taking place in a physical classroom. Even though you may never meet your classmates in person, you are still expected to read their work carefully, with compassion and real curiosity. Listen closely to your peers, and value their feedback—they are all readers and writers, and will bring new revelations to your view of your own work. If you stick to these principles, workshop can be a space where we learn new truths about our own writing we

didn't know before and a welcoming community of people who strive for the common goal of good writing and greater understanding for a better world.

In light of this, your Workshop Participation grade will be broken down into **three categories**:

- 1) **Peer response.** As your peers post new creative forum submissions weekly, you are responsible for writing a short letter in response that contains feedback and constructive criticism (see Workshop Guidelines on the course site)
- 2) **Writing Prompts.** Creative writing prompts, often inspired by the readings and discussions, will be posted periodically. Your creative responses count toward participation, and may also provide some inspiration for your workshop submissions.
- 3) **Writing Community.** This is a more holistic category that I review in a midterm evaluation and at the end of the semester. Are you replying to your peer's creative work? Are you replying to peers in the discussion forum? Are your responses careful, considered, and clear? These will all demonstrate commitment to writing community.

Response Papers (Due by the end of the course)

You will be required to submit 2 response papers over the course of the semester. They must be submitted by the last day of the course, but you may submit these at any time. It would be wise to complete them before the end of the semester when you'll be working on the final portfolio. Response papers are short, 2-3 page analytical essays that include your reaction, perception, or opinion of the story/work, backed up with evidence and quotes from the text. You may write your response papers on any of the readings we discuss. A good strategy is to write them after contributing to the Discussion Forum for that week's reading.

Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester you will turn in a final portfolio, consisting of one revision of a creative piece on which you received feedback in workshop, and a short reflection on your writing process. Portfolio length will vary depending on what piece you choose to revise, but in general it should be no less than 8 pages minimum.

Late Work

Late work will not be accepted under any circumstances. If you know ahead of time that you have a commitment that might interfere with you uploading work, then upload work ahead of time. If you have an unexpected personal emergency that interferes with your ability to do work for this class, please email me as soon as possible and I will work with you to help you complete the assignment for credit.

Help & Technical Support

For any questions related to class content, readings, grades or general questions about this course, please feel free to call or email me using the contact information at the top of this syllabus, or on the home page for this course. For technical issues accessing resources on Blackboard, please refer first to the resources listed below.

24/7 Help Desk Information

Please visit the 24/7 UmassOnline Helpdesk website (<http://uma.echelp.org/>) for technical assistance with Blackboard Learn and related issues. On the 24/7 UmassOnline Help Desk page, students can receive technical support through a rich self-help knowledgebase or professional assistance via phone (**1-855-757-7055**), chat, and email. This help desk is the primary technical support service for students.

eLearning - Continuing and Professional Education

The eLearning department is a unit within Continuing & Professional Education providing administrative and technical support for online students and instructors using Blackboard Learn. For issues that are not resolved by our help desk, the eLearning department can be reached at **elearning@cpe.umass.edu**.

Below is an abbreviated list of weekly readings and themes. This list is subject to change throughout the semester, so **always read weekly lectures for the week's official reading assignment**. For a more detailed list of assignments, please see the Course Outline. Most readings are available in the e-Reserves starting 9/6/2016.

Week 1: Welcome & Introductions

Week 2: On Genre & Expectations Shelley Jackson, *Simon Says*
Carmen Maria Machado, [The Husband Stitch](#)
Truman Capote, [Miriam](#)

Week 3: Fiction: Experience, Will, or Fate?

Margaret Atwood, *Happy Endings*
George Saunders, *How to Tell a Story* (VIDEO)

Week 4: Character: The Good, Bad & The Unreliable

Junot Diaz, *Edison, New Jersey*
ZZ Packer, *Brownies*

Week 5: Plot & Pacing

Flannery O'Connor, *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*
Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*

Week 6: Literature's Other

The Lover contd.

Week 7: The Surreal

Italo Calvino, *The Distance of the Moon*

Week 8: Outside Systems

Angel Nafis, *BlackGirl Salve: A Non-Fable*
Rachel Glaser *Pee on Water*
Judith Wright, *The Cycads*

Week 9: The Poem & The Speaker

Elizabeth Bishop, *The Fish*
Dana Ward, *A Kentucky of Mothers*
Sylvia Plath, *Tulips*

Week 10: Concentrated Language and Expanded Meaning

Justin Chin, *Grave*
Evie Shockley, *where we are planted*

Week 11: Freedom Through Form

Kiki Petrosino, [Crusaders](#)
Terrance Hayes, [Linear Notes for an Imaginary Playlist](#)

Week 12: Contemporary Poetry

Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

Week 13: What can a poem do? The Visual Poem

Don't Let Me Be Lonely contd.

Week 14: Revisions (Final Portfolio Due Date TBA)