Creative Writing  
Fall 2009

Course: ENG 131  Section: 94052  Days/Time: Thursday evenings, 6—9 pm  
Room: C-16  Professor: Danielle Zahm  Office Hours: TBA  
Contacts: zahmd@sunysuffolk.edu  Office of Instruction: 548-2575

Required Materials  
Last Night At The Lobster by Stewart O’Nan

Recommended Materials  
A sturdy paper folder  
Standard lined notebook paper  
A dictionary and thesaurus

Course Description  
Creative Writing (ENG131) develops control and style in creative writing, specifically of prose fiction, poetry and plays. Students pursue individual projects and assignments of established forms of creative writing. Discussions pay attention, as well, to development of stronger criteria for self-evaluation and particular needs of a creative writer to gauge his or her audience in order to market his or her work.

Course Thoughts  
In this class we’ll read tons of prose for all the reasons a person usually does: to be entertained, to be surprised or inspired, to participate in our own print culture. But the difference is that as writers of these forms, we will also be reading with an eye to the tricks, strengths, tools, and techniques of other writers. Nobody, the truism goes, can teach you how to write: writers learn for themselves how to do it: from example (reading good work), from experiment and practice, and from feedback (listening to and responding to the comments of others). So, in a nutshell, that’s what this course is about.

This course is very intensely focused on writing. I will give you ample opportunity to practice and strengthen your writing, but in order to improve you must come prepared to write and think about your writing for the entire class period each time you enter the classroom. Participants work from the novel I’ve assigned, readings I give you, in-class exercises and field assignments in preparation for completed, original stories, poems, and one-act plays. Assignments involve working in a variety of writing approaches, including dialogue, point of view, narration, and description. The class is structured as a workshop; students share their work and critiques with the class.
Zahn’s General Introduction
In fifteen weeks, it’s not realistic to expect you to develop fully formed creative works; so, I give you a bunch of writing assignments or exercises to help get you thinking and wondering and writing. You’ll begin these here, take them home and complete assignments each week, with a beginning, middle and end. Towards the middle of the semester, you’ll hand in one polished, revised short story draft based on something you began in class. At the end of the semester, you’ll hand in another revised piece of writing—which may be an extension of your mid-semester draft, or you may choose to work on another sustained piece.
You will all read parts of your work aloud during each class session. This isn’t a yes/no option; it’s something you must do to pass; it will improve your writing tremendously and help your fellow classmates with his or her work. So, if you’re squeamish about sharing your stories with people other than your teacher, you may want to rethink staying. I can assure you you’ll have plenty of support, positive criticism, and encouragement—not only by me, but everyone here.

I’m more than curious about the details, so don’t skimp. Think NOW, from Day One, about making sure your reader can taste, touch, smell, see and hear everything you’re trying to communicate. Feed us with your words. It’s always better to overdo and cull it back later.

I enjoy all sorts of points of views. I don’t censor any language or story ideas. All I do is provide the jumping off point; what you do with the exercises I give you is entirely your choice. My job as your teacher is to show you how to make a sentence stronger, more powerful, and grammatically correct. It’s really up to all of you to wow your audience and create some good, lasting work here.

Course Goals
1. To understand the importance of elements of the craft: image, voice, character, setting and story, to name but a few.
2. To read examples of published creative writing (creative non-fiction, fiction, poetry and even a little drama), as well as examples of student work.
3. To develop skills (for lack of a better word) for revising poetry and prose, and further, to appreciate the process of development and revision.
4. To practice and develop discussion and analysis skills through written and oral assignments.
5. To learn self-motivation for developing your writing from an idea into a polished final draft.

Grading
You’re all different, so there is no set formula for this particular class. You’ll know how you’re doing (A, B, C, D, F) based on completion of all work handed in on time, my comments, how well you’re participating in class, and by checking in with me. If you come to class, try hard, and take the work seriously, then you should have no problem with grades. I break your final grade down the following ways:
Story #1 = 20%
Story #2 = 20%
Exercises = 40%
Journal = 10%
Participation = 10%.

All work is graded based on:

1. **The ambition of the piece**: What I mean by this is how well you use the fundamentals and tools we will be working on in the many exercises we do during the course of the semester.

2. **The success of the piece**: How well does the story/poems/essay achieve what it has set out to achieve.

Costs

**Twice during the semester, you will be required to make copies of your work for the rest of the class (the size of the class will be in the ballpark of 20, plus or minus a few). At the most, this will mean two works of ten pages (double spaced) each.**

**Story and Assignment Submissions**

Twice during the semester each member of the class will have pieces “workshopped.” These pieces will all be due on the same days for everyone (October 8 & November 19). On these days, please bring the appropriate number of copies of your piece (we’ll know by then how many are in the class).

If you turn your piece in late—that is, if you come to class the day it is due and you don’t have it—you will drop one letter grade for the assignment. Technical issues (printers, computers, whatever) are not acceptable excuses.

Here are *submission guidelines*

- Typed, standard 12 point font
- Double-spaced, 1 inch margins
- Numbered pages
- Stapled
- Your name, course name, assignment number, date, and title at the top of the first page
- All drafts must be proofread and spellchecked
- Stories (and any other assignments, including exercises) are expected to be turned in on time (usually at the beginning of class the day they are due). Late stories/exercises will be lowered by one letter grade for each calendar day that they are late.
**Reader’s Journal**

You will keep an informal reader’s journal. With each reading assignment, including your classmates’ works, you are required to write a 1-page, fully developed, handwritten entry with your reaction to the story, poem, chapter and scene assigned based on several specifics.

1. Write a SHORT summary of **plot**. Use your own words, and in a nutshell tell me what happens in the story. How? Think: Beginning, middle, end.

2. Describe the main **characters** involved in each story, their personalities and choices, even physique if that’s something you found interesting. Write down what you think of these people and why. Take note of the things they do and include this stuff, especially any interesting they say.

3. Make sure to locate where the work takes place (**setting**). Farm? City? Suburbs? Does it matter? Why?

4. Once you read the whole story choose the most important part, (**the scene or moment in which something happens that changes things**) and then discuss your choice—why choose this part and not another?

5. Okay. You’ve read the whole story and answered questions 1-4. Good. Here’s the tricky one: Try and take a guess at the author’s intention of **theme** (what’s the work **REALLY** ABOUT, not what happens—that’s plot). He or she chose to write THIS story, using plot, certain characters, and set it in certain places; the story was probably drafted and revised like 17 times. Is it JUST a face value story, (what you see is what you get) or is the author trying to communicate a message about something bigger? What’s the message?

6. Finally, discuss whether you liked /disliked the work and WHY, fully. How? As you read, keep an eye out for parts that stood out or you could relate to so you can mention them (particular lines or sections of the story that bored you, confused you, made you laugh, cry, or furious…). **How you FELT matters, so write it down.**

**Attendance**

The college policy allows a student to miss one class sessions, that is, one week of class, per semester without penalty. After two missed sessions, you may be dropped from the roster and given a failing grade. **Here's a tip: save your absences for emergencies.**

I will not automatically record a "W" grade for students who stop showing up in this course; instead, I will record a grade of "F" which signifies you did not pass the course but were enrolled until the end of the semester. Withdrawals are granted ONLY to students who have withdrawn officially; you must do this through the Registrar.
Finally, it’s always smart to check your email on the day of class to be aware of any sudden changes; weather, car or emergency issues may prevent me from getting here. I will make sure to give you notice.

**Lateness**
Class begins at 6:00 P.M. Don’t be late. Coming to class late or leaving class early equals half an absence (i.e., two tardies equal one absence). Persistent lateness can prove to be devastating for you in this class—a student can easily go beyond the absence limit and, therefore, be unable to pass the class just by being late on a regular basis. I do not take the habit of tardiness lightly—it is very disruptive in a writing course and, quite honestly, it annoys me.

**Late assignments**
All work must be completed and/or handed in on the due date, during class time. Papers will be typed, double-spaced, paragraphed, titled, spell-checked, and proofread for gross grammatical errors by you, an outside reader, and hopefully with a WRITING TUTOR.

**Classroom Responsibilities and Expectations**
- Arrive on time
- Be prepared & eager to participate
- Have paper, pen, assignments
- Turn off all unnecessary electronic devices
- Be tolerant and patient of classmates’ and professor’s opinions
- Collect at least three email contacts from class. If you’re absent, you’re responsible for work missed and returning to class prepared. Don’t always rely on me; get back up.

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is copying someone else’s work or idea and handing it in as your own. Should you be caught plagiarizing, you fail the course and will be reported to the administrative authorities for further action. There’s absolutely NO NEED to even consider using anyone else’s ideas when producing work in this class. The primary purpose of this class and all college endeavors is to encourage INDEPENDENT, CRITICAL and CREATIVE THINKING. It would be a great mistake and misfortune to forfeit the one voice you have by using another’s.

**Writing Tutors**
If you need extra help, basic tutoring is available for you in the Academic Skills Center in Orient 220. Call 548-2594 for an appointment. If you do not understand an assignment or need more guidance, contact me at dzahm72@yahoo.com.

**Conferences**
We may meet for one-on-one conferences one or two times over the course of the semester. You can always reach me through email with questions/concerns. If you need to make an appointment to see me, let me know and I will make arrangements.

**Dates to Remember**
10/8 Story 1 Due
Tentative Schedule
9/10 Introduction to class, syllabus, and email exchange. Class expectations. HW: Read “Adults Alone” and “Child’s Play”, write summaries for each and bring to next class. Go to library, school bookstore, or local bookstore and get O’Nan’s novel. Read pgs 1-40.


9/24 In class readings of #1. Revision discussion. Collect Exercise #1. Story #1 discussion/expectations. O’Nan. HW: Read O’Nan pgs 82-122. Song lyrics with summary.


10/8 COLLECT STORY 1 & distribute to class. Finish O’Nan. HW: Summaries for every story read—one copy for author & one copy for me, please.

10/15 Class stories readings and discussion. Last names Arceri—Hartley. HW: Finish reading stories & writing summaries. 1 copy for me, and one for author!

10/22 Last names Jones—Vasso. Class stories discussion.


11/12 Films and dialogue. Collect Exercise #4. HW: Make copies of STORY 2 for Zahm & rest of class!

11/19 Films and dialogue. Collect Exercise #4. COLLECT STORY 2. Distribute copies to entire class. HW: Read all stories & write summary for each one. Make copy of summary for author and Zahm.

11/26 NO CLASS

12/3 Class stories & readings of Story #2. Last names J-V.

12/10 Class stories & readings of Story #2. Last names A-H.

12/17 Last Day of class (Student conferences)