

**English 481W**  
**Advanced Creative Writing: Fiction**  
**Three Credit Hours**  
**Spring 2008**

Classroom: Evans 262  
Meeting time: MW 3:4:30  
Dr. Paul Ruffin, Regents Distinguished Professor of English  
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Office Hours: 11-1, 2-2 MW, 11-1, 2-4 TT and by appointment

### **Course Overview**

This workshop-oriented course is designed to provide students an opportunity to subject their creative work to peer review and to hone their critical skills by evaluating books and student and *Texas Review* manuscripts. Everyone is expected to turn in creative works for review (short fiction, familiar essays, novel chapters) and to follow up with revisions after the work is discussed. In order to develop more fully a critical understanding of the theory and processes of literary composition, so essential to improving one's own writing skills, I shall require all students to write and present orally a review of a book of theory (short fiction, novel, familiar essay--whichever he/she chooses) and a contemporary novel or collection of familiar essays or short fiction and to prepare oral and written evaluations of *Texas Review* manuscripts. Students will be introduced to manuscript preparation and current markets for fiction and poetry. We'll probably venture briefly into the printing process and electronic publishing, and whenever possible I'll bring in a visiting writer.

### **Workshop**

Much of the class will take place in workshop fashion with your own work, your own stories forming the central element of the class. The purpose of workshop is not to bolster your own ego while destroying that of your peers. Our purpose is to assist each other in our respective development as writers. The emphasis should be on constructive criticism.

Each student should have at least one story and a revision workshopped.

It must be understood that during workshop periods I might well stop and interject elements relative to workshop discussions.

**Required Texts (provided by instructor):**

Lonnie Busch: *Turnback Creek*  
Mack Dryden: *Fluffing the Concrete*  
Roger Hart: *Erratics*  
Robert Phillis: *News About People You Know*

### **Grade derivation:**

Your course grade will come from these areas: class participation, oral presentations, and writing assignments.

**Class participation**--You will be expected to engage in discussions of student and non-student writings. Though deriving a grade for you in this area may be a subjective process, it can and must be done. If you read carefully and apply your critical skills, you will be able to make a meaningful contribution to class discussions. One ground rule you must always keep in mind: the purpose of these discussions is *to offer construction criticism*, not to undermine anyone's confidence. Reactions to manuscripts should be specific--i.e., you must give reasons why you like or dislike something. It is not enough that you don't like the characters or that you disagree with the premise of the piece, the subject matter, or theme; furthermore, sexual, political, and religious preferences expressed in the piece should be of no consequence so far as critiquing goes. You must have evidence of written response to the materials being evaluated; this may be on separate paper or on the manuscript itself (except for *Texas Review* manuscripts, which must not be marked on). Because of the large number of students in this class, each student will not be allowed a whole class session for workshopping. Sometimes there will be a spillover from one class to another, especially when we take up a good deal of class time with oral reports. (20%)

**Journals**--I encourage students to keep a journal, a chronicle writing experiences for this semester. Journal entries are typically impressions, observations, ideas for stories or poems, bits and pieces of dialog, anecdotes, whatever. As time permits, we'll share journal entries. (10%)

**Writing assignments**--Everyone will be required to submit a minimum of five formal writing assignments: a review of a book of theory, a review of a novel or collection of short fiction, and three evaluations of *Texas Review* manuscripts (the last of which will serve as your final). These in-depth assessments, scattered out over the semester, must be typed, double-spaced, and written like any other formal essay; that is to say, you will be graded on grammar and composition skills as well as your insight and thoroughness in treating the material. In your evaluations you should always provide an abundance of supportive evidence from the text you are working with. More about this later. (50%)

**Creative work**--Though no conventional grade will be applied to creative work, everyone will be required to submit creative material for workshopping (presumably the

most important part of the course); you must provide enough copies for everyone in the class, including your instructor, with a couple of extras for replacement purposes (since one of us will invariably lose one or leave it at home on a given night)--twelve copies ought to do the trick. Your material needs to be submitted to the class the meeting before your work is due for discussion. Everyone will be required to turn in a revision of this work. (20%)

### **Paper Format**

All stories should be typed (computer printed), double-spaced, in a 12-point font with one-inch borders and stapled. No wacky fonts, please. Any assignments longer than two pages must have page numbers. Correct grammar, usage, punctuation and spelling are expected. Work flawed by pervasive mechanical errors will be penalized accordingly. When you submit a revised story at the end of the semester, include the workshop draft in a folder with the revised draft. Always be certain to keep a hard copy and a copy on disk. Title all stories. In the upper right-hand corner, type your name, e-mail address, and the story's word count.

### **Timely Submissions**

All work is due in class. Any late work will be penalized one full grade for each class period it is late. For example, if the assignment is due on Monday and it is submitted to me the following morning, the grade will be reduced one full letter grade. If I receive it in class the following Wednesday, the penalty is the same. Note: Because of the demands of distribution, stories for workshop *will not be accepted late*. Failure to submit the story in class on the date it is due will result in a zero for the story. Extensions will be granted only in advance and only in cases of emergency.

### **Attendance**

If you miss more than four classes for the semester (or two workshops), regardless of the reason, I may drop you from the class. If you know you will be absent in advance, be sure to let me know in advance. You are still responsible for work that you may miss. If circumstances arise during the course of the semester that interfere with your ability to attend class or to complete assignments, see me as soon as possible.

### **Religious Holidays**

Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. See *Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

### **Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that range from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, or collaboration, consult the course instructor. See *Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

**Also note:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

### **Visitors in the Classroom**

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

No cell phones. Period. If a cell phone disrupts class, or if a student is sending or receiving text messages during the course of class, I reserve the right to confiscate the phone for the duration of the class period. In the case of a second offense in the course of the semester, I reserve the right to remove the student from the class.

## **Tentative Schedule (Subject to Revision)**

**Wednesday, January 16**—Introduction to course.

**Monday, January 21**—Introduction to short fiction. **Assignment:** Select for review a book of fiction theory listed at end of syllabus. Follow applicable instructions. Oral presentation and review due Wednesday, January 30.

**Wednesday, January 23**—Further discussion of the elements of short fiction and the familiar essay. **Assignment:** Read *News About People You Know*. Choose your favorite and least favorite story and be prepared to defend your choices.

**Monday, January 28**—Continued discussion about stories from *News About People You Know*.

**Wednesday, January 30**—Presentation of oral reports on books of theory. **Assignment:** Read and write an evaluation of *Erratics*, following the instructions at the end of syllabus. Oral presentation due Wednesday, February 6. Also read and be prepared to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of *Turnback Creek*.

**Monday, January 4**—Discussion of *Turnback Creek*. **Assignment:** Read and be prepared to discuss *Fluffing the Concrete*.

**Wednesday, February 6**—Oral reports on *Erratics*.

**Monday, February 11**—Discussion of *Fluffing the Concrete*.

**Wednesday, February 13**—First workshop

**Monday, February 18**—Second workshop

**Wednesday, February 20**—Third workshop

**Monday, February 25**—Fourth workshop. Assignment: Evaluate a TR manuscript. Oral presentation due Wednesday, March 5

**Wednesday, February 27**—Fifth workshop

**Monday, March 3**—Sixth workshop

**Wednesday, March 5**—Presentation of TR manuscript evaluations.

**Monday, March 10**

No class: Spring Break

**Wednesday, March 12**

No Class: Spring Break

**Monday, March 17**—Seventh workshop

**Wednesday, March 19**—Eighth workshop

**Monday, March 24**—Ninth workshop

**Wednesday, March 26**—Tenth workshop

**Monday, March 31**—Eleventh workshop

**Wednesday, April 2**—Twelfth workshop. Assignment: Evaluation of TR manuscript. Oral presentations due Wednesday, April 9.

**Monday, April 7**—Thirteenth workshop

**Wednesday, April 9**—Presentation of TR manuscript evaluations.

**Monday, April 14**—Fourteenth workshop

**Wednesday, April 12**—Fifteenth workshop

**Monday, April 21**—Sixteenth workshop

**Wednesday, April 23**—Seventeenth workshop

**Monday, April 28**—Eighteenth workshop

**Wednesday, April 30**—Nineteenth workshop

**Monday, May 5**—Twentieth workshop

**Wednesday, May 7**—Twenty-first workshop. Assignment: Final evaluation of TR manuscript due Wednesday, May 15.

**Monday, May 12**—Twenty-fourth workshop

**Wednesday, May 14**—Twenty-fifth workshop. Final evaluation of TR manuscript due.

## **Books of Fiction Theory (more or less):**

### **Fiction, general:**

*The ABC's of Writing Fiction* (Ann Copeland)  
*The Art & Craft of Novel Writing* (Oakley Hall)  
*Beginner's Guide to Getting Published* (Editors of *Writer's Digest*)  
*The Best Writing on Writing and The Best Writing on Writing II* (Jack Heffron)  
*Breathing In, Breathing Out: Keeping a Writers' Notebook* (Ralph Fletcher)  
*The Complete Guide to Fiction Writing* (Barnaby Conrad)  
*Conceiving the Heavens: Creating the Science Fiction Novel* (Melissa Scott)  
*The Craft of Fiction* (William Knott)  
*Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem* (Donald Murray)  
*Creating the Story* (Rebecca Rule and Susan Wheeler)  
*Creating Fiction from Experience* (Peggy S. Curry)  
*Creating Short Fiction* (Damon Knight)  
*Creative Nonfiction* (Philip Gerard)  
*Creative Writing: The Art of Lying* (Edward Loomis)  
*The Fiction Dictionary* (Laurie Henry)  
*Fiction Writer's Handbook* (Burnett)  
*Fiction Writer's Workshop* (Josip Novakovich)  
*For All Time: A Complete Guide to Writing Your Family History* (Charely Kempthorne)  
*The Handbook of Short Story Writing, Vol. I* (Writer's Digest)  
*The Handbook of Short Story Writing, Vol. II* (Writer's Digest)  
*How To Write a Children's Book and Get It Published* (Barbara Sevling)  
*How To Write and Sell Your First Novel* (Oscar Collier)  
*How To Write a Short Story* (Michael Joseph)  
*How To Write Short Stories* (Sharon Sorenson)  
*Idea Catcher* (Editors of Story Press)  
*Into the Deep: A Writer's Look at Creativity* (Susan McBride Els)  
*Look, Think, and Write* (Leavitt and Sohn)  
*Mastering Fiction Writing* (Kit Reed)  
*The Novel Sentence* (Robert Goodspeed)  
*Professional Fiction Writing* (Jean Owen)  
*Revision* (Kit Reed)  
*Theme and Strategy* (Ronald Tobias)  
*Thirty Steps to Becoming a Writer and Getting Published* (Scott Edelstein)  
*The 38 Most Common Fiction Writing Mistakes (And How To Avoid Them)* (Jack Bickham)  
*The Triggering Town* (Richard Hugo)  
*Turning Life into Fiction* (Robin Hemley)  
*Turning Memories into Memoirs* (Denis Ledoux)  
*The Writer's Digest Handbook of Novel Writing*  
*Writer's Mind: Crafting Fiction* (Richard Cohen)  
*Writing Fiction* (R.V. Cassill)  
*Writing for Money* (Loriann Hoff Oberlin)



*Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular* (Rust Hills)

*Writing Personal Essays* (Sheila Bender)

*Writing Short Fiction for Pleasure and Profit* (Marian Gavin)

*Writing the Short Story: A Hands-On Writing Program* (Jack Bickham)

There are, of course, hundreds of other books that could be on this list; if you find one you'd like to report on, I ask only that you allow me approve it.