

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

University of Montana Course Syllabi

Open Educational Resources (OER)

Fall 9-1-2021

CRWR 410.01: Advanced Fiction Workshop

Emily Anne Ruskovich

University of Montana, Missoula, emily.ruskovich@umontana.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Ruskovich, Emily Anne, "CRWR 410.01: Advanced Fiction Workshop" (2021). *University of Montana Course Syllabi*. 12298.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/12298>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Educational Resources (OER) at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Montana Course Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Professor: Emily Ruskovich
Office: LA 116
Classroom: NAC 009

Office Hours: T 10-12, 3:30-5:30
Email: emily.ruskovich@umt.edu
Classtime: T 12:30-3:20

CRWR 410

PROFESSOR EMILY RUSKOVICH
ADVANCED FICTION

3 CREDITS
FALL 2021

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will run like an MFA fiction workshop. During your workshop, you will listen as your peers and I engage in a thoughtful and rigorous and respectful discussion of your work. The goal of this class is to help you revise—extensively and bravely—short stories and novel excerpts, with attention to various elements of craft and language. We will also read and discuss short stories and craft essays written by the masters of our time.

AUTHORS

Alice Munro, Bonnie Friedman, Gayathri Prabhu, Denis Johnson, Aimee Bender, Kristen Rouperian, Zadie Smith, Tessa Hadley, Joan Didion, Jhumpa Lahiri, Ben Okri, George Saunders, James Baldwin, Antonya Nelson, Lara Vapnyar, Yiyun Li, John Edgar Wideman, Amy Hempel, John Steinbeck, Jennifer Eagan, Lydia Davis, Diane Williams, Lucia Berlin, David Hoon Kim, Peter Orner, Tim Parks, Amelia Gray, László Krasznahorkai, Robert Hass, Benjamin Dreyer

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Please buy a bound, lined notebook (college-ruled, no spirals or perforated edges) or hard-cover journal.
- Your University e-mail account, which you will need to check daily.
- A working Moodle account, which you will need to check daily.
- Dreyer's English* by Benjamin Dreyer

WORKSHOP

Everyone will submit two pieces of fiction for workshop. These stories should be between 10 and 12 pages, double-spaced. I would like at least one of the stories to be new, written specifically for this class. The other story may be an extensive revision of a story or novel

excerpt turned in to a previous class. I expect to see well-edited, well-structured, ambitious and complete stories at this level.

TURNING IN STORIES

Your short story is due by 10 AM one week before it is up for workshop. For everyone's safety during this highly contagious time, we will distribute our stories electronically to limit physical contact.

WORKSHOP ETIQUETTE (A REVIEW)

The Brave Author:

will only listen, will not have a chance at the end of class to ask questions, except for clarification. This is so that you don't have to worry, during your workshop, about preparing a defense in the form of questions. All you have to do during workshop is listen and absorb and take notes for yourself. You will not be put on the spot immediately following such an emotional experience. And because this *is* an emotional experience:

The Workshop:

will be sensitive, considerate, and respectful. We are a community of writers, and we are all in this together. We must strive to critique a story on its own terms. We must strive to find the best possible version of a story. We must be thorough, kind, and honest all at once. To avoid redundancy, we will have a "knocking policy." This means that if someone in workshop says something that you agree with, whether it's criticism or praise, you just knock on the table immediately after it is said, two quick knocks is fine, instead of saying the same thing but in different words. This sounds strange, but you will become very comfortable with it very quickly. This makes sure that we don't all jump on the same thing and overwhelm the writer. It also allows us to cover a lot of ground, and be efficient and thorough, and it also lets the author know very clearly if an opinion expressed in class is widely held by his or her readers, or isolated to one or two. We will make sure that we address both what is working well in the story, and what needs improvement.

CRITIQUES

- 1) E-mail your critique to the author.
- 2) Turn in your critique to me on Moodle. It will be due at 11:30 on the day of the workshop.

POST-WORKSHOP CONFERENCE

The week after your workshop, you will meet with me in my office to debrief the workshop and to discuss your plans for revision.

CREATIVE RESPONSE TO PEER'S STORY

I want us all to remember that we are in this together, even as the writing process itself, while deeply rewarding, can feel very isolating and lonely at times. It is comforting to know that we likely all follow the same path to workshop every week. We go home, we write,

we hope, we make mistakes, we despair, we start over, we get new ideas, we chase false trails, we get inspired, we mope, we delete, we delight, we rush to the finish, we celebrate, we worry... In spite of this, sometimes being in a workshop with other writers can make the act of writing seem even *more* lonely, because, during your workshop, you are the only author in the room and everyone else is a literary critic who knows exactly what you should have done and yet didn't do. This is just an illusion. We all know it, but it's hard to feel it sometimes. That's why I want there to be another form of response—not just constructive criticism—offered in this class. For every student story up for workshop, two of you will write not a letter of critique, but a creative response. When it's your turn to write a creative response, I want you to read your peer's story not as a critic but as a fellow author. I want you to be thinking most of all about how the story makes you *feel*, how it transports you, what it makes you remember, what it makes you want to do in your own fiction. The way you write this is up to you. It can be a poem, a letter, a piece of flash fiction or flash-nonfiction in itself. But it must be creative, with an attention to beauty and language and feeling, and it must directly engage with the author's work. Think of your creative response as a gift of thanks that you will give to the author. Since two of you will be responding this way to every story, one of you will read it aloud at the beginning of the workshop. The other will read it aloud at the end. Though you should feel free to go longer if you feel inspired to do so, I am expecting these to be approximately one page single-spaced.

STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION OF PUBLISHED STORY

You will have the opportunity once this semester to lead a discussion on a published story. The details on this assignment are posted on Moodle, under the heading *Syllabus, Schedule, etc.*

JOURNAL

You will keep a daily log of images. This means one sentence every single day of the semester, of something you see, hear, smell, touch. You will turn this in to me once, before the end of term. More information about the journal is posted on Moodle, under the heading *Syllabus, Schedule, etc.* Your journal will also be where you write your in-class exercises. Please bring this journal to every single class.

POEM

All of us will share a poem that inspires us. You do not have to lead a discussion on the poem. You simply have to post on Moodle a (published) poem you love, and read it aloud to the class. You might say a few words about why it means so much to you, but, mostly, it's just to get us started and to share something small that you love.

ATTENDANCE AND COVID

It is very important that you come to class prepared to participate. But if you are feeling sick *at all*, even very mild symptoms, even if you are vaccinated, please do not come to

class. You will not be required to bring a doctors' note to have your absence excused. If you tell me you are sick, I will trust you, and we will do what we can to get you caught up in school. Likewise, if anyone in your household is experiencing any symptoms of Covid, please do not come to class. This is for the health and safety of us all.

If you do test positive for Covid, please quarantine for 14 days, abiding by CDC guidelines.

If you have to miss class due to illness, please communicate with me ahead of time and stay in touch, so that we can be sure you receive all of the material and information that you need and revise the schedule as necessary.

TARDINESS

Please do not be late. It is extremely disruptive and will cost you points.

FINAL PORTFOLIO

Your final portfolio will consist of at least 15 pages of polished fiction that you have revised many times, as well as a thoughtful self-evaluation, detailing your struggles and triumphs in the writing process. You will receive a more detailed handout on this later.

PARTICIPATION

It is crucial that you participate often in our discussions. This a class that relies almost entirely on your participation. Speak often, speak respectfully, and be prepared with what you will say. Participation is not just how often you speak in class; it's about how you present yourself. Be an active listener.

GRADES (300 POINTS TOTAL)

- (40) 20 points per story submitted to workshop
- (20) Student-led discussion
- (100) Critiques (5 points per critique X 20 critiques total)
- (40) Creative Response to Peer's Story (10 points per critique X 4 responses total)
- (30) Daily Journal
- (30) Participation
- (35) Final Portfolio
- (5) Poem

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me after class or in my office hours. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator, so that I can support you.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code.

PREFERRED NAMES AND PREFERRED GENDER PRONOUNS

I will do everything that I can to ensure that our classroom is a safe and tolerant place where you can feel free to be yourself. If you would like us to call you by a name other than that indicated on my roster, of course let me know right away, so that I can adjust my records. Please also let me know right away which pronouns you prefer.

COVID-19 OFFICIAL POLICIES

For now, we will be meeting in person. But if the delta variant persists and there are outbreaks on campus, we may find it necessary to move to an online or remote model of learning. Please be prepared to do so.

In the meantime, please adhere to the following:

- All students are required to wear a mask indoors, everywhere on campus.
- Absolutely do not come to class if you are experiencing any symptoms at all, even mild symptoms.
- Do not come to class if someone in your household has Covid.
- Please do not congregate outside the classroom before and after class.
- Specific seating arrangements will be used to ensure social distancing and support contact tracing efforts.
- Class attendance will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.
- Please do not drink or eat within the classroom, as this requires mask removal.
- If you are feeling sick or displaying symptoms, please contact Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.

COMPASSION IN THE TIME OF COVID

This is a difficult time for us all. Our lives have been affected in so many ways that it's impossible to guess what any of you are going through. If you are struggling in this class, please talk to me. I will do my best to connect you to any university resources that may help you. I am a reasonable and compassionate person; just communicate with me if you are having trouble in my class, and I will be understanding and do my best to accomodate you during this painful time.