

# English 250

## Introduction to Creative Writing

Fall 2014 | Face-to-Face

**ENGL 250-01: MWF 0900-0950, Grubbs 302**

**ENGL 250-02: MWF 1000-1050, Grubbs 302**

**ENGL 250-03: MWF 1300-1350, Grubbs 302**

# English 250

## Instructor Information

Dr. Lowell Mick White  
Grubbs 401  
MWF 1100-1300 and 1500-1600  
R 1400-1530  
and By Appointment  
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## *Course Description, Goals, and Objectives*

**General Education.** This course counts toward the requirements in General Education for your degree program. General Education is an important part of your educational program at Pittsburg State University that has been designed to implement the following Philosophy of General Education:

**General education is the study of humans in their global setting. The General Education curriculum, therefore, acts as the heart of a university education by developing the capacities that typify the educated person and providing a basis for life-long learning and intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic fulfillment. General education examines the world around us and fosters an understanding of our interactions with the world and our place in the universe. General education celebrates the creative capacities of humankind and helps to preserve and transmit to future generations the values, knowledge, wisdom, and sense of history that are our common heritage.**

**Catalog Description.** Learning methods of writing contemporary poetry and prose; reading poetry and prose as a writer. Open to all students without prerequisite.

**Goals of General Education for this Course.** This course will help you accomplish several General Education goals and objectives, including applying the principles of effective oral communication either in group or individual presentations (Goal 1.1), articulating a problem and developing a logical and reasonable response to it using appropriate sources (Goal 2.2), demonstrating the ability to analyze and synthesize information (Goal 2.4), understanding the relationship between the arts and society in a multicultural environment (Goal 3.v.3), recognizing the value of diverse cultural, national, and ethnic backgrounds (Goal 3.vi.1), and demonstrating an understanding of gender, race, and class within and across cultures (Goal 3.vi.3).

**ENGL 250 places special emphasis on helping you:**

- apply the principles of effective writing (Goal 1.2),
- distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information in solving problems (Goal 2.1),
- apply generalizations, principles, theories, or rules to the real world (Goal 2.3),
- demonstrate an understanding of the creative process, both practical and theoretical, and its relationship to an audience or viewers (Goal 3.v.1), and
- make informed critical responses when exposed to artistic endeavors (Goal 3.v.2).

**Course Objectives.** Upon completion of this course you will be able to:

1. Understand the process of literary creation and the vocabulary of the field.
2. Write coherent poetry and prose employing the appropriate conventions of written English and demonstrating an understanding of the relationships of content, form, and technique.
3. Understand and demonstrate techniques of revision and the crafting of literature.
4. Understand major philosophies of creative writing and literature as they relate to the craft.

**Nature of the Course.** This course introduces students to creative writing experiences that expand their awareness of literature as an art form, of the process and purposes of creative writing, and of aesthetic perception of the written word. It is organized to develop and challenge students' abilities to think creatively and write imaginative and

coherent poetry and prose. Class discussion that emphasizes student work in the workshop/studio tradition and the analysis of literature as a way to understanding possibility and technique is a vital element of the course. The students will write poetry and prose.

**Methods.** This class will be taught **face-to-face** and will approach literature in two ways: by reading and by writing. By reading classic and contemporary short fiction and poetry, students will come to understand the methods and techniques established writers use. By writing, students will come to understand the structure and form of stories and poems from the inside, will understand literature as a living entity, and will develop skills as literary citizens.

**Writing.** Writing is a process that relies on memory and imagination, on deliberation and discovery. In this class you will use the same learned and intuitive methods used by major writers, and you will produce one short story, and at least six poems.

**Reading.** Reading well is crucial to writing well. Reading well—reading carefully, reading wisely—is also crucial to your success in this class. If at some point you encounter works containing language or situations that make you uncomfortable, please continue reading the material in a mature and scholarly manner. It's also important to remember that you do not have to “like” a text in order to learn from it.

**Workshop.** A large part of this course will be devoted to writing workshop. Students will read each other's work and write a short critical response to the work. This will provide helpful feedback to the student writer and, more importantly, provide important experience in critical reading to the student reader.

**Homework.** As specified during the semester, homework may include reading responses, exercises, short writing assignments, and other work that develops writing skills and helps you plan, draft, and revise major writing assignments.

### **My Teaching Philosophy!**

I do not believe that reading and writing are based on “talent,” on mysterious accidents of nature, or on gifts of generous muses. Rather I see reading and writing as skills that can be taught and learned. All my teaching is based on this perspective, a perspective that places the responsibility for success or failure on the individual student. But it is also an extraordinarily liberating perspective, I think, for in a self-directed classroom students can shake off their inhibitions and face what I see as an important truth: that with desire and hard work, anyone can write a competent essay or short story or poem. The skills of reading and writing are there for anybody to use and to learn. Once they are learned—owned, as it were—they become the personal possessions of the learner. I have many

times in my life experienced the transformative power of literature, and I think it is my responsibility as a teacher to help my students achieve transformation, if they want it, to give them the opportunity to learn these skills, to use these tools, to open their lives to literature and to change. Words have power. Words change lives. And I am in the word business.

**“You could tell a story to pass the time.”**

Very early in the semester students become aware that I usually begin almost every class by saying something like:

“So—what’s going on today?”

I ask this question with the hope that a student will speak up and tell me something they have done since class last met. Maybe the student will have had an adventure—gotten arrested or fallen in love—or maybe they will have done something as mundane as taking out the trash. If students seem interested in something particular (or peculiar), we can sometimes improvise a writing exercise. If no one volunteers a story I’ll usually ramble on with a story or three of my own.

Every semester there is a student or two who are very annoyed by this in-class storytelling. They really do get mad! I can see it in their eye-rolling in-class faces and I can really see it in their end-of-the-semester class evaluations.

I find their annoyance both amusing and sad.

I find it amusing because these students are apparently unaware that the class will last a mere 50 minutes no matter how many stories get told.

I find it sad because these students are apparently unaware that stories are at the very heart of what we do in class. Whether through poetry or prose, this class is devoted to increasing our individual and collective understanding of the world we live in. And stories are one of the most important ways we gain this understanding.

Remember this at all times: You have a voice. Your voice is unique. No one knows the stories you know.

Time is limited. Time is running out. Someday, sadly, you will be dead and your untold stories will die with you.

So: seize every chance you get to tell your story...any story....

### ***Required Texts and Supplies***

- Addonizio, Kim. *Ordinary Genius*. New York: Norton, 2009
- Kleon, Austin. *Steal Like an Artist*. New York: Workman, 2012
- Oates, Joyce Carol, ed. *Telling Stories*. New York: Norton, 1998

You will also need the following supplies:

- a few standard-sized file folders with pockets
- one or two notebooks
- Internet access and an email account
- a stapler
- lots of paper

### ***Recommended Texts***

While it is generally agreed that students cannot “learn” to write solely from a book, there are a great many fine books that give detailed and interesting analyses of the various aspects of writing literature. Here are two that previous students have found useful:

- Hills, L. Rust. *Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. New York: Harcourt, 1994.

### ***Grading Policies, Course Topics, Course Schedule, Major Assignment Dates***

In this class you will be expected to go through a process that runs from creation to criticism to rigorous substantial revision. Your work will be judged on quality, improvement, and use of techniques learned in the class, as well as display of competency and/or originality. Students are expected to meet deadlines, and may be additionally assessed by such methods as: papers, quizzes, journals, small group work, in-class writing, and self and peer assessment. Portfolio and revision will account for the largest portion of your grade if you meet the Modified Contract Grading System requirements.

You can earn a **B** for the course by:

- Completing the writing assignments
- attending class regularly and seeing me for conferences
- submitting assigned exercises each week on time
- completing all other writing goals, activities, and assignments promptly
- submitting a final 6-12 page revised story which in my judgment consis-

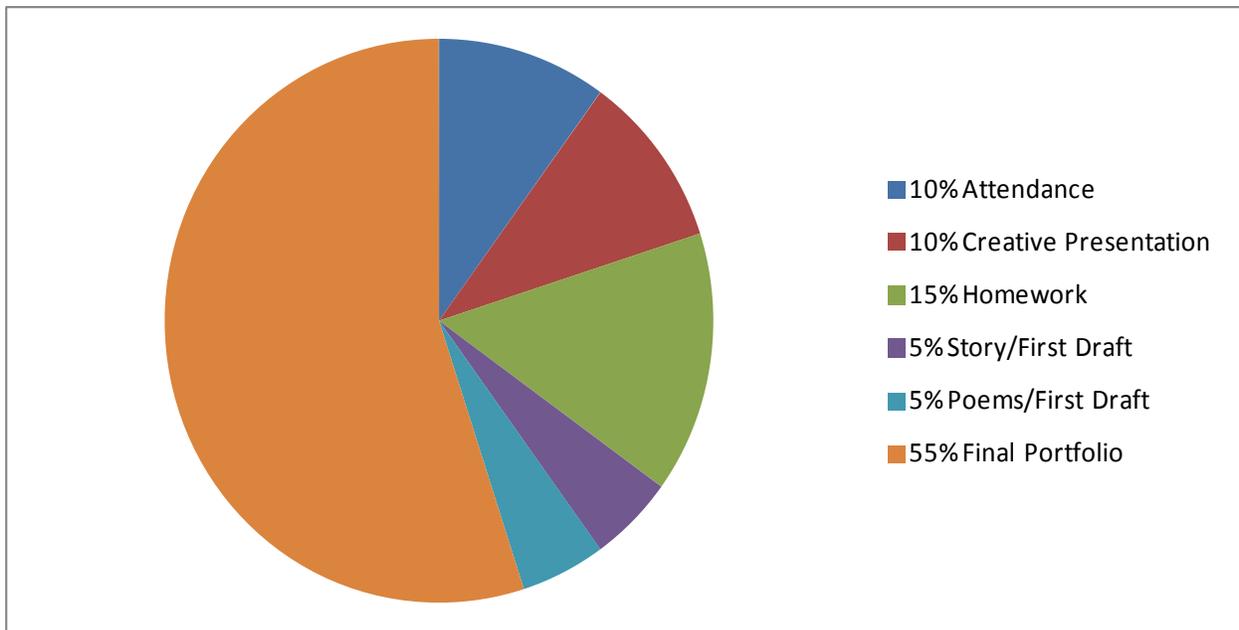
- tently exhibits a good-faith effort to incorporate all assigned fiction writing techniques
- submitting 6 poems to the workshop and the final portfolio with at least four substantial revisions which in my judgment consistently exhibit a good-faith effort to incorporate all assigned poetry writing techniques

You can earn an **A** if, in addition to meeting the above standards, your work exhibits

- success in achieving originality of language and image in the contemporary fiction and poetry idioms
- shows evidence of substantial, serious, rigorous revisions

Submitting assignments late will affect your grade. Excessive absences will affect your grade. Failure to complete reading assignments will affect your grade.

For students whose performance does not warrant a grade of B, grades will be figured using the following percentages:



### ***Major Due Dates***

Creative Group Participation Response	Friday, August 29
Story First Draft Due	Monday, October 6
Poems First Draft Due	Monday, October 6
Final Portfolio	Friday, December 12

### ***Homework and Extra Credit***

For the first seven weeks of class there will be multiple homework assignments per class day. That might sound like a lot, but the assignments are actually pretty short. They will include:

- **Fiction Reading Assignment.** Usually a short story. Read the story, write a response of about 150 words, and post the response to Canvas.
- **Poetry Reading Assignment.** Usually a passage from the Addonizio book. Read the passage and write a response of about 150 words.
- **Fiction Writing Assignment.** Write a piece—the beginning of a story, a joke, an idea—based on the daily prompt. In the classroom I like to time these assignments, so I will suggest that you time them also. Write for about 7 minutes and post your writing to Canvas.
- **Poetry Writing Assignment.** This will usually consist of writing a poem to one of the prompts in the Addonizio book or a prompt posted to Canvas. Post your poem to Canvas.

Beginning in the eighth week of class, your workshop comments will count as homework assignments:

- **Workshop Assignment.** You will read and comment on the story and poems of the other students. Post your critiques to Canvas.

Homework assignments will be due at the times listed on Canvas. Late homework submissions will be accepted for 24 hours past the due date, and awarded ½ credit. After 24 hours, the homework dropbox will close.

Occasionally, **Extra Credit** will be offered. These credits will count the same as a homework assignment.

### ***Writing: The Stories***

The stories you will not write: You will not write stories that take place in the future, or on other planets, or on alternative, fantastic Earths. You will not write stories about orcs or

elves or princesses, about unicorns or talking toothbrushes. You will not, in other words, write fantasy or science fiction.

I would further advise you to avoid writing stories dealing with perverse and violent crime—stories, for example, that deal with serial killers, serial rapists, school shooters, creepo stalkers, etc. I have read dozens and dozens of student stories dealing with these allegedly transgressive topics, and I've never read a good one. They require little imagination, and yet are quite difficult to write. Don't bore me. Don't waste your time. Be creative.

I would even further advise you to not be racist or misogynist in your writing. If your writing is unacceptable, I will call you out in class, which you will probably find embarrassing. Think about what you are writing. Think about what kind of story you are really telling.

The stories you will write: You will write stories that take place on and in this everyday (but often very magical) world. In other words, you will be writing standard, literary fiction.

### ***Writing: The Poems***

You will not be writing formal poems, or poems that rhyme. Instead you will write poetry that relies on image and metaphor, poetry that works toward discovering emotion and meaning.

### ***Writing: The Final Portfolio***

On Friday, December 12, you will submit a portfolio of your best writing. The portfolio will consist of:

1. Your short story, revised.
2. Your best six poems, revised.

You will also include a response of 250-500 words to your own work, discussing your writing process and mentioning anything you want me to know about your writing.

**I really do expect the work in your portfolio to be revised. Please understand that revision does not mean merely correcting a few grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors (though that of course is important). Revision means re-envisioning your work—re-imagining it, re-creating it, transforming it into something better than what you started with.**

### ***A Few Words on Feedback and Revision***

*I am not a prescriptivist professor and this will not be a prescriptivist class. I am not going to assert dictatorial control over your life and write your poem or story for you.*

However, I will criticize your work. I will offer feedback in the form of a rubric and by making a few textual annotations. I might say something like, “The ending doesn’t work—you probably want to fix the last four paragraphs.” Then it will be up to you, the writer, to find a way to make the fixes.

***I will always be happy to meet with you and discuss your writing! I can show you the many options you have as a writer, and the artistic ramifications of each option.***

In the end it will be up to you as a writer to seek out my advice, to choose a course of revision for your writing, and to make those revisions work. You are responsible for the quality of your work.

Here are five additional things to remember about workshop and criticism:

1. You can’t please everyone.
2. If it does seem that you’re pleasing everyone, something is probably wrong.
3. Your readers don’t know more than you do. (Except me).
4. You don’t have to take your classmate’s suggestions unless they fit your overall artistic intention.
5. You are the boss of your writing.

### ***Tentative Schedule***

Week One

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>08/18</i>	<i>08/20</i>	<i>08/22</i>
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b><i>9:00pm 08/19</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 08/20</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 08/22</i></b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Syllabus	Kleon, 1-67	Kleon, 68-140
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Introduce Yourself	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt

Week Two

<i>Class Date</i>	08/25	08/27	08/29
<b><i>In-Class Activity</i></b>	Presentations	Presentations	
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	9:00pm 08/25	9:00pm 08/25	9:00am 08/29
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Response to Presentations, Selection from Matt Bell	Response to Presentations, Selection from Matt Bell	Hemingway, "Indian Camp" (Oates, 102-105)
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Three

<i>Class Date</i>	09/01	09/03	09/05
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b>Labor Day</b>	9:00am 09/03	9:00am 09/05
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Labor Day	Carver, "Why Don't You Dance?" (Oates, 491-496)	O'Connor, "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" (Oates 461-471)
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Labor Day	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Four

<i>Class Date</i>	09/08	09/10	09/12
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	9:00am 09/08	9:00am 09/10	9:00am 09/12
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Cheever, "Goodbye, My Brother" (Oates 122-140)	Jen, "In the American Society" (Oates 676-690)	Jones, "The Pugilist at Rest" (Oates 676-690)
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Five

<i>Class Date</i>	09/15	09/17	09/19
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	9:00am 09/15	9:00am 09/17	9:00am 09/17

<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Addonizio, pp 19-34	Addonizio, pp 35-43	Addonizio, pp 44-54
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Poetry Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Poetry Prompt

Week Six

<i>Class Date</i>	09/22	09/24	09/26
<b>Homework Due Date</b>	<b>9:00am 09/22</b>	<b>9:00am 09/24</b>	<b>9:00am 09/26</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Addonizio, pp 55-60	Addonizio, pp 61-73	Addonizio, pp 81-91
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Poetry Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Poetry Prompt

Week Seven

<i>Class Date</i>	09/29	10/01	10/03
<b>Homework Due Date</b>	<b>9:00am 09/29</b>	<b>9:00am 10/01</b>	<b>9:00am 10/03</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Addonizio, pp 99-108	Addonizio, pp 109-119	Addonizio, pp 120-134
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Poetry Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Poetry Prompt

Week Eight

<i>Class Date</i>	10/06	10/08	10/10
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	<i>TBD</i>	Workshop	Workshop
<b>Homework Due Date</b>		<b>9:00am 10/07</b>	<b>9:00am 10/09</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	<i>TBD</i>	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	<i>TBD</i>	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Nine

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>10/13</i>	<i>10/15</i>	<i>10/17</i>
<b><i>In-Class Assignment</i></b>	Workshop	Workshop	<i>Fall Break</i>
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/12</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/14</i></b>	<b><i>Fall Break</i></b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	<i>Fall Break</i>
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt	<i>Fall Break</i>

Week Ten

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>10/20</i>	<i>10/22</i>	<i>10/24</i>
<b><i>In-Class Assignment</i></b>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/19</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/21</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/23</i></b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Eleven

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>10/27</i>	<i>10/29</i>	<i>10/31</i>
<b><i>In-Class Assignment</i></b>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/26</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/28</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 10/30</i></b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt

Week Twelve

<i>Class Date</i>	11/03	11/05	11/07
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	9:00am 11/02	9:00am 11/04	9:00am 11/06
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Thirteen

<i>Class Date</i>	11/10	11/12	11/14
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	9:00am 11/09	9:00am 11/11	9:00am 11/13
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt

Week Fourteen

<i>Class Date</i>	11/17	11/19	11/21
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	9:00am 11/16	9:00am 11/18	9:00am 11/20
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Fifteen

<i>Class Date</i>	11/24	11/26	11/28
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	<i>Turkey/Football</i>	<i>Turkey/Football</i>
<b>Homework Due Date</b>	9:00am 11/23	<i>Turkey/Football</i>	<i>Turkey/Football</i>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	<i>Turkey/Football</i>	<i>Turkey/Football</i>
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Poetry Prompt	<i>Turkey/Football</i>	<i>Turkey/Football</i>

Week Sixteen

<i>Class Date</i>	12/01	12/03	12/05
<b>Homework Due Date</b>	9:00am 12/01	9:00am 12/03	9:00am 12/05
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>			
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Finals Week

<i>Class Date</i>	12/08	12/10	12/12
<b>Assignment Due Date</b>			<b>Final Portfolio Due</b>

Additional reading assignments will probably occur throughout the semester....

***Distinguished Visiting Writers and other Special Events***

Several writers and scholars will be visiting campus this spring to present their work. You will be encouraged to attend these events—they will count as valuable extra-credit assignments.

- Friday, August 22: Open Mic at TJ Leland's
- Thursday, September 11: Thomas Fox Averill, Fiction Writer

- Thursday, October 2: Pamela Kingfisher, Women's Studies Lecture Series
- Thursday, October 9: Chinelo Okparanta, Fiction Writer
- Thursday, November 13: Joy Harjo, Poet

### ***Other Pertinent Course Information***

***Syllabus Supplement.*** Important university policies can be found on the Syllabus Supplement:

<http://www.pittstate.edu/dotAsset/eb3c8820-1c48-4f7e-aae8-8ccf74dc449a.pdf>

Or go to the Registrar's Office page, click on "Forms," and look for the Syllabus Supplement.

***Attendance.*** You are expected to attend class according to the times published in the fall schedule of classes. Students who arrive more than 20 minutes late will have their attendance mark reduced by one-half.

***Authorized Absences.*** Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. You are responsible for providing evidence to substantiate "authorized absences." If you know in advance that you will miss a class, you are responsible for informing me. Excessive unexcused absences (more than three) will result in the final course grade being lowered at least one letter grade. Students who have not attended at all or who have been excessively absent from may be dropped from the course.

***Classroom Behavior.*** I define disruptive classroom behavior as anything that interferes with my ability to conduct the class or as anything that distracts students from the instructional program. This can include sleeping, talking, TEXTING, reading the newspaper, or playing with your phone (always remember to turn off your phone when you enter the classroom and keep it OFF your desk). Please pay attention. PLEASE RESPECT YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS. Disruptive or inappropriate behavior can be cause for dismissal from this course; except in the most egregious cases, you will receive a warning.

***Food:*** Please do not inflict your eating habits on the rest of the class!

***Incomplete.*** An incomplete grade may be assigned in rare instances when a student is unable to complete a course due to circumstances beyond his/her control. You must have completed a majority of the coursework to be eligible for this consideration..

***Mid-Semester Grades.*** Grades reported at mid-semester will be based on homework, presentations, weekly writing assignments, and in-class assignments. This is not 50% of

your final grade.

**Final Grades.** Grades are not negotiable. Your final course grade will be based on your work in the course. If you are concerned about a grade, please see me during office hours or make an appointment.

**E-mail and Fax.** Because of security issues, I will not discuss grades via email or fax. I will, however, be happy to answer email questions about the readings or assignments.

### ***Academic Integrity***

According to the PSU Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities, "Education at the university level requires intellectual integrity and trust between faculty and students. Professors are obliged to master their subject and present as fair an account of it as possible. For their part, students are obliged to make an honest effort to fulfill both the letter and the spirit of course requirements. Academic dishonesty violates both integrity and trust. It jeopardizes the effectiveness of the educational process and the reliability of publicly reported records of achievement."

The Code defines academic dishonesty as "unethical activity associated with course work or grades." This can include:

- Giving or receiving unauthorized aid on examinations.
- Giving or receiving unauthorized aid in the preparation of notebooks, themes, reports, papers or any other assignments.
- Submitting the same work for more than one course without the instructor's permission.
- Plagiarism.

For more information on Academic Integrity, please see the Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities:

<http://www.pittstate.edu/audiences/current-students/policies/rights-and-responsibilities/academic-misconduct.dot>

### ***Americans with Disabilities Act***

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you be-

lieve you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Office at

<http://www.pittstate.edu/office/eoaa/>

***Final Note***

When the person who is grading your papers writes a syllabus, or hands you anything that says, “These are my values—this what I’m looking for,” you can believe them

