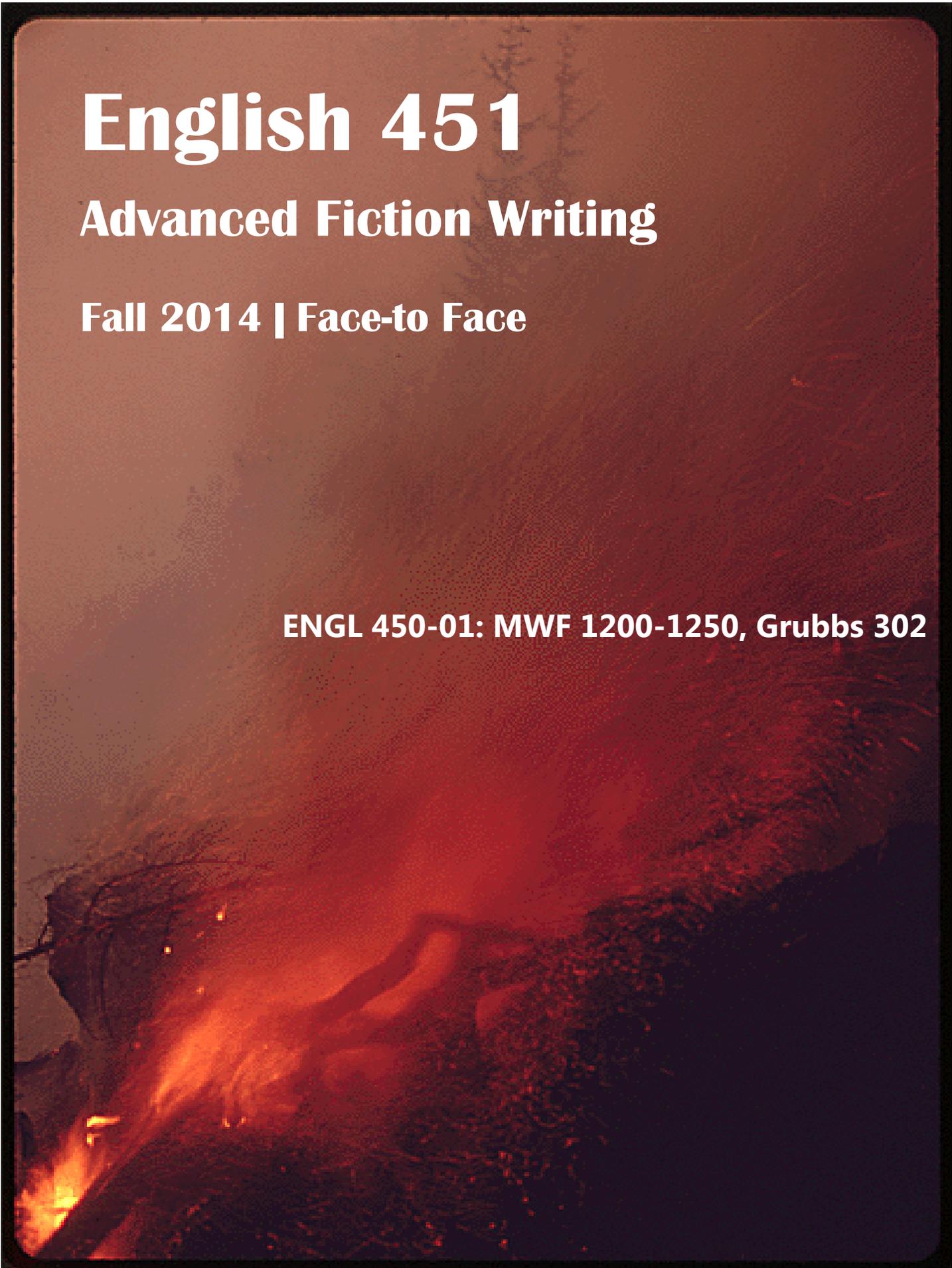


# **English 451**

## **Advanced Fiction Writing**

**Fall 2014 | Face-to Face**

**ENGL 450-01: MWF 1200-1250, Grubbs 302**



# English 451

## Instructor Information

Dr. Lowell Mick White  
Grubbs 401  
MWF 0800-0900, 1100-1200, and 1400-1600  
R 1400-1530  
and By Appointment  
lwhite@pittstate.edu

## *Course Description and Prerequisites*

**English 451:** Advanced work in fiction writing. The prerequisites are ENGL 250 Introduction to Creative Writing and ENGL 351 Fiction Writing.

## *Learning Outcomes and Course Objectives*

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, 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 from the inside, will understand literature as a living entity, and will develop skills as literary individuals. By the completion of this class students will:

- Produce approximately 11,000 words of original, competent writing
- Elevate the quality of their writing in both critical and creative genres
- Develop a critical understanding of short fiction

- Enhance their enjoyment of serious literature and film
- Engage in writing as an open-ended process
- Understand methods of revision
- Understand the importance of revision to the writing process
- Recognize the relationship of writer and audience
- Experience writing both as an individual and community activity

**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 at least four short stories. You will practice writing in and out of class with informal assignments, and you will also write a series of short response papers that analyze the readings and help to develop your understanding of literary forms.

**Reading.** Reading well is crucial to writing well. Reading well—reading carefully, reading wisely—is also crucial to your success in this class. Remember: you do not have to “like” a text to learn from it.

**Workshop.** The majority of this course will be devoted to different kinds of writing workshops. Students will read each other’s work and write a short critical response to the work, which will provide helpful feedback to the student writer and important experience in critical reading to the student reader.

**In-Class Work.** On many class days we will write in class and we will read our writing out loud. You are expected to participate in these activities and in other class discussions and collaborative activities. **ALWAYS BRING PENS (OR PENCILS) AND PAPER TO CLASS.**

### **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 Materials***

The required text for this class is:

- Butler, Robert Olen. *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction*. New York: Grove Press, 2005.

A number of other texts will be posted to Canvas.

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 from a book, there are a great many fine books that give detailed and interesting analyses of the various aspects of writing literature. These include:

- Singleton, George. *Pep Talks, Warnings, and Screeds*. Cincinnati: Writers Digest Books, 2008.
- Hills, L. Rust. *Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction*. New York: Vintage, 1991.
- King, Stephen. *On Writing*. New York: Pocket, 2002.

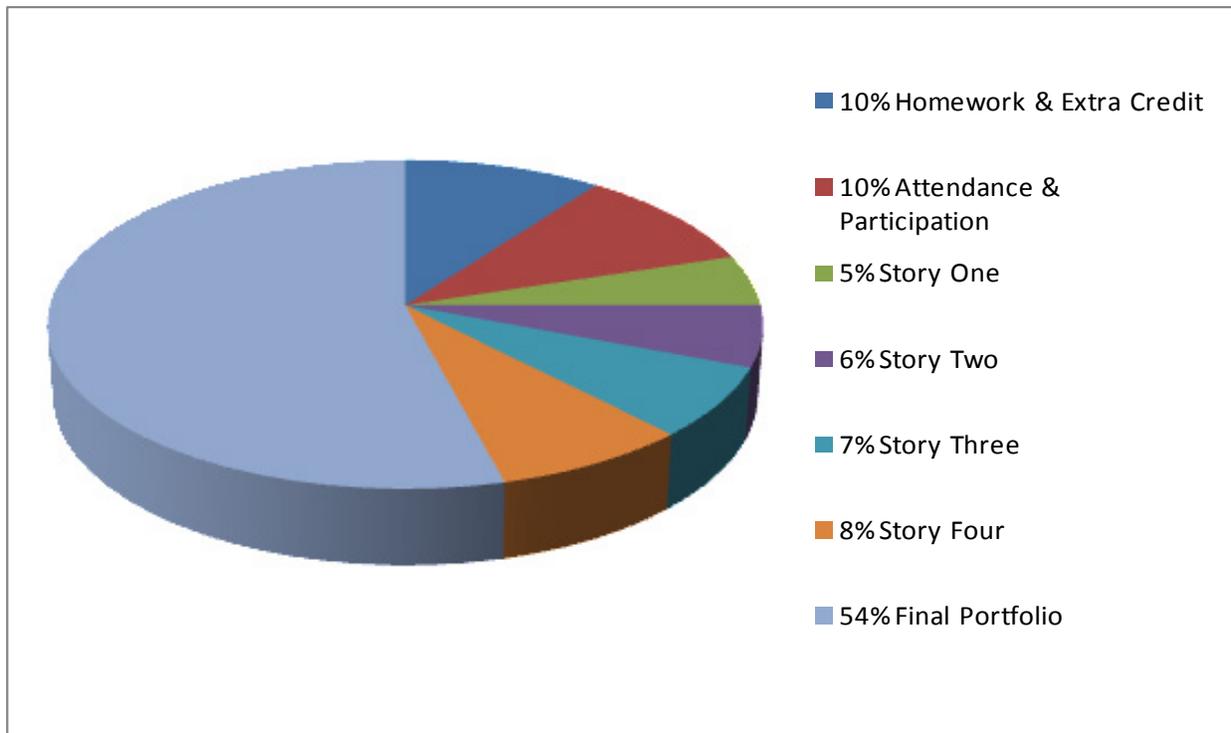
### ***Grading Policies***

Grading

This course will use the standard letter grading scale:

A = 100...90, B = 89...80, C = 79...70, D = 69...60, F = 59...0

## Grade Determination



## Major Due Dates

Story One: "Coming of Age"	Monday, September 8
Story Two: "Boy Meets Girl"	Monday, September 29
Story Three: "Stranger Rides into Town"	Monday, October 13
Story Four: "Hero Sets Off...."	Monday, October 27
Final Portfolio	Monday, December 8

## Homework and Extra Credit

There will usually 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 chapter from the Butler book. Read the chapter, write a response of about 150 words, and post the response to Canvas.

- **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.

Beginning in the fourth 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 36 hours past the due date, and awarded ½ credit. After 36 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.

### ***The Four Basic Stories***

The late critic and novelist John Gardner once claimed that there are but three basic sto-

ries:

- Boy meets girl / girl meets boy
- Stranger rides into town
- Hero sets off to seek her/his fortune

For this class we will add another basic story:

- Coming of Age

Gardner may well have meant this as a polemic, as something to argue over in class (and, by all means, if in your reading you find a story that falls outside this description, please bring it to the attention of the class and let us argue over it). However, for the purposes of our class, we will take Gardner's paradigm at face value, and you will write one story of each type.

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

On Friday, December 8, 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 writing or write your poem or story for you.*

I will, however, 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 your many options 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>	08/18	08/20	08/22
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b>9:00pm 08/19</b>	<b>9:00am 08/20</b>	<b>9:00am 08/22</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Syllabus	Butler, Chapter 1	Butler, Chapter 2
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Introduce Yourself	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Two

<i>Class Date</i>	08/25	08/27	08/29
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b>9:00am 08/25</b>	<b>9:00am 08/27</b>	<b>9:00am 08/29</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Butler, Chapter 3	Butler, Chapter 4	Butler, Chapter 5
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Three

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>09/01</i>	<i>09/03</i>	<i>09/05</i>
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b><i>Labor Day</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/03</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/05</i></b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Labor Day	Butler, Chapter 6	Butler, Chapter 7
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Labor Day	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Four

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>09/08</i>	<i>09/10</i>	<i>09/12</i>
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>			Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/08</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/10</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/11</i></b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Butler, Chapter 8	Butler, Chapter 8	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Five

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>09/15</i>	<i>09/17</i>	<i>09/19</i>
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/14</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/16</i></b>	<b><i>9:00am 09/18</i></b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Six

<i>Class Date</i>	09/22	09/24	09/26
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b>9:00am 09/21</b>	<b>9:00am 09/23</b>	<b>9:00am 09/25</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Seven

<i>Class Date</i>	09/29	10/01	10/03
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b>9:00am 09/28</b>	<b>9:00am 09/30</b>	<b>9:00am 10/02</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Eight

<i>Class Date</i>	10/06	10/08	10/10
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b><i>Homework Due Date</i></b>	<b>9:00am 10/05</b>	<b>9:00am 10/07</b>	<b>9:00am 10/09</b>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Nine

<i>Class Date</i>	10/13	10/15	10/17
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<i><b>In-Class Assignment</b></i>	Workshop	Workshop	<i>Fall Break</i>
<i><b>Homework Due Date</b></i>	<i>9:00am 10/12</i>	<i>9:00am 10/14</i>	<i>Fall Break</i>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	<i>Fall Break</i>
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction 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>
<i><b>In-Class Assignment</b></i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<i><b>Homework Due Date</b></i>	<i>9:00am 10/19</i>	<i>9:00am 10/21</i>	<i>9:00am 10/23</i>
<i>Homework Critical Reading and Response</i>	Student Work	Student Work	Student Work
<i>Homework Creative Writing</i>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Eleven

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

Week Twelve

<i>Class Date</i>	<i>11/03</i>	<i>11/05</i>	<i>11/07</i>
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<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b>Homework Due Date</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	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Thirteen

<i>Class Date</i>	11/10	11/12	11/14
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b>Homework Due Date</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>	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Fourteen

<i>Class Date</i>	11/17	11/19	11/21
<i>In-Class Assignment</i>	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop
<b>Homework Due Date</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	Fiction Prompt	Fiction Prompt

Week Fifteen

<i>Class Date</i>	11/24	11/26	11/28
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<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>	Fiction 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	Fiction 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>		

***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 15 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 believe 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

