

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY, MADRID

Department of English

ENGL 3060 M01 Creative Writing

Fall Semester, 2017

3 Credit Hours, TR 5:30-6:45 pm, San Ignacio Hall Room B

Prof. Cary Barney, MFA (cary.barney@slu.edu)

Office Hours MW 4:30-7:00 pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The aims of this course are to help students explore their own creative impulses and to help them learn and sharpen skills and techniques through practice and through analysis of others' work. The first five weeks of the course will include work on poetry and short fiction, and students will try their hand at both through in-class writing exercises and homework. Thereafter, class sessions will focus on group discussion of student work, with additional instruction tailored to the specific needs of the class. There will also be a few classes on writing drama.

OUTCOMES: Students who do the work in this course will learn how to:

General:

- Approach creative writing as a communicative act with readers
- Be sensitive to the rules and parameters each work creates for itself
- Write the poem or story, not the meaning
- Avoid aimless ambiguity
- Give (*) and take constructive criticism
- Assimilate criticism for effective revision
- Read and revise their work with a critical eye

Poetry:

- Develop an instinct for line
- Use rhyme and other sonic devices without falling into obviousness or cliché
- Use meter and other rhythmic devices interestingly and creatively
- Use established forms without being used by them
- Avoid, or creatively twist, clichéd images and phrases
- Capture images in words with precision and originality
- Develop and sustain metaphor
- Read their own poems aloud clearly and effectively (*)

Fiction:

- Understand and use basic concepts of character, motivation, and conflict
- Create characters and events worthy of the emotional investment of readers
- Generate conflict and plot from character
- Recognize and avoid formulaic influences (Hollywood, best sellers)
- Think and write in defined, identifiable scenes
- Know where to begin and end a story
- Use different narrative strategies and points of view
- Write concise descriptive prose which appeals to the senses
- Avoid excessive omniscient exposition
- Use dialogue to explore character and situation

All of these outcomes will be assessed through ongoing evaluation of each student's written work, with the exception of those marked (*). The giving of constructive criticism, informed by careful reading of others' work and a clear desire to be supportive and helpful, will be evaluated through class discussion as part of the Participation portion of each student's grade. Students will not be graded on reading aloud, but are encouraged to practice and develop the skill for it.

GRADING POLICY:

- 15% Poetry Project, First Draft
- 25% Poetry Project, Revision
- 15% Short Fiction Project, First Draft
- 25% Short Fiction Project, Revision
- 20% Preparation (homework) and participation

POETRY PROJECT: For this project, you will write at least five full pages of poetry. This could mean five page-length poems; one, two or three longer poems; many shorter poems (such as *haiku*); or a combination of the above. There are no restrictions on form or content except the following:

1) NEW WORK ONLY. Do not include any poems you wrote or were working on prior to the beginning of this semester.

2) NO SONG OR RAP LYRICS. Bob Dylan got away with “the vandals took the handles” because he *sang* it. Although rhyme is OK and in some cases encouraged, most song lyrics sacrifice *everything* to rhyme. Remember: a poem is its own music.

Poems which grow out of homework assignments or in-class exercises are acceptable provided they are fully developed and revised.

FICTION PROJECT: For this project, you will write a short story at least seven pages (double spaced) in length. Again, there are no restrictions except:

1) NEW WORK ONLY (see above).

2) NO NOVELS. The story must be complete in itself. If you’re ten pages in and nothing’s happening, or you’re still introducing new characters or digressing into flashbacks, you’re writing a novel. Find a simple and compelling character and situation in it, throw everything else out and start over.

3) Avoid GENRE. Hard-boiled detectives, science fiction scenarios, supernatural occurrences and mechanical plot contrivances tend to distract from character, conflict and narrative strategy, and are often an easy way out for writers who can’t or won’t apply themselves to more fundamental aspects. The best genre writers work from inside their characters, just as I’m encouraging you to do.

4) Don’t be a slave to autobiography. Use your imagination. Invent. Lie. “Fiction is the lie that tells the truth.”

Again, work which grows out of homework assignments or in-class exercises is acceptable provided it is fully developed and revised.

DUE DATES FOR PROJECTS: Both projects, in first draft form, will be due **Tuesday, October 10**. Revisions may be submitted any time after October 19. Portfolios, including all drafts of both projects, are due **Thursday, December 12**.

REVISION: All project work written for this class is expected to be revised. Students are expected to open-mindedly weigh criticism received from peers and from the instructor, whether this advice is finally followed or not, and to cultivate a critical attitude toward their own writing which allows them to revise in a detached, clear-headed manner. Students with a “holy art” attitude that revision is a violation of the spirit of the work should prepare to change their minds or drop the course. Failure to revise either or both of the two projects will result in a considerably lower grade for the course.

HOMEWORK: Homework assignments will be described in class and posted in detail on SLU Global. These assignments are fun! Do them, or the following class will be very dull, and your Participation grade will suffer.

READINGS AND CRITIQUES: An important element of this course is learning to give and take criticism. Everybody will read everything everybody else writes. This sounds like a tall order, but class size is reduced for this reason. All poems and stories, plus revisions, will be posted on SLU Global. We will critique each others’ work in class. These critiques are meant to be positive and helpful, not threatening. You are expected to participate in critiques and classroom discussions. This entails critical reading, thinking and listening, and generosity in sharing your thoughts and opinions. Come to class prepared and willing to discuss the readings assigned for that day. Active and useful participation requires effort from your part. Just coming to class does not count as participation. I will keep track of your participation during discussions and in-class activities.

PARTICIPATION: In order to get credit for your presence in the classroom, you must participate as described in the previous two sections.

- An “A” in participation means you almost always participate in class.

- **“B” in participation** means you frequently participate in class.
- A **“C” in participation** means you sometimes participate in class.
- A **“D” in participation** means you seldom participate in class is
- An **“F” in participation** means you rarely or never participate in class.

READING: Failure to read lets your fellow writers down and deprives them of your constructive criticism. It also counts against your Participation grade.

EXAMS AND QUIZZES: There are no exams planned for this class. However, pop quizzes may be given if I get the impression that not everyone is doing the reading. Grades on these will be reflected in the preparation/participation portion of your grade.

BEING HERE: Three unexcused absences are permitted (but by no means encouraged). Any unexcused absences in excess of three will result in a lowered grade. Lateness is cumulative. Eight or more absences, excused OR unexcused, will result in automatic failure. **No coming and going!** Use the bathroom before class. If you get up and leave in the middle of class, you will not be allowed back in. If you know that you’ll have to arrive late or leave early, let me know in advance and sit by the door so your departure won’t distract others.

You are expected to be present mentally as well as physically. MOBILE PHONES and MP3 DEVICES must be turned off before you enter the classroom. **LAPTOPS and TABLETS** may be used only in the front row, for purposes directly related to classroom activity at that moment. Students using them for any other purpose, or who use their phones or text in class, will be told to leave and will be marked absent for the day.

COMMUNICATION: All email communication from the instructor will go to students’ sl.u.edu email accounts. Students should check these accounts daily or have mail forwarded to a preferred address. (sl.u.edu accounts are linked to Banner and SLU Global, so they’re handy.)

ACCOMMODATION STATEMENT: In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Academic Dean’s Office (San Ignacio Hall) or by going to <http://www.sl.u.edu/madrid/learning-resources>.

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations **must** contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Once successfully registered, the student also **must** notify the course instructor that they wish to access accommodations in the course. Please contact Disability Services at disabilityservices-madrid@sl.u.edu or +915 54 58 58, ext. 230 for an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about the student’s eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services. For more information about academic accommodations, see "Student Resources" on the SLU-Madrid webpage.

Note: Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one are encouraged to contact Disability Services.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM: *Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors.* The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy can be accessed on the Provost’s Office website at: http://www.sl.u.edu/Documents/provost/academic_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%2006-26-15.pdf.

Additionally, SLU-Madrid has posted its academic integrity policy online: <http://www.slu.edu/madrid/academics>. As a member of the University community, you are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions and appeals.

The professor will review these matters during the first weeks of the term. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program or the Academic Dean of the Madrid Campus.

I shouldn't have to bring this up in a creative writing class, but it has happened in the past, so: ***plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Project work which contains extensive, intentional plagiarism will receive an automatic F with no option to revise.*** All work submitted for this course must be your own and created for this class. Be advised that digital plagiarism is easy to detect for the same reasons it's easy to commit. In the instance of a suspicion of plagiarism or other form of academic dishonesty it should be remembered that the instructor has the right to require the student to prove (by quiz, interview, or other means) that they are the author of submitted work. Inability to do so will result in a report to the committee for academic dishonesty.

Title IX Statement:

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University.

If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX deputy coordinator, Marta Maruri, whose office is located on the ground floor of Padre Rubio Hall, Avenida del Valle, 28 (mmaruri@slu.edu; 915-54-5858, ext. 213) and share the basic fact of your experience with her. The Title IX deputy coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the SLU-Madrid's Counseling Services on the third floor of San Ignacio Hall (counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu; 915-54-5858, ext. 230) or Sinews Multiplettherapy Institute, the off-campus provider of counseling services for SLU-Madrid (www.sinews.es; 917-00-1979). To view SLU-Madrid's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web address: <http://www.slu.edu/Documents/Madrid/campus-life/SLUMadridSexualMisconductPolicy.pdf>.

INFORMATION REGARDING THE COLLECTION OF STUDENT WORK FOR ASSESSMENT: In order to maintain quality academic offerings and to conform to accreditation requirements, SLU-Madrid regularly assesses its teaching, services and programs for evidence of student learning. For this purpose, SLU-Madrid keeps representative examples of student work from all courses and programs on file, including assignments, papers, exams, portfolios and results from student surveys, focus groups and reflective exercises. Copies of your work for this course may be kept on file for institutional research, assessment and accreditation purposes. If you prefer SLU-Madrid not to retain your work for this purpose, you must communicate this decision in writing to your professor.

GENERAL GRADING CRITERIA FOR ALL PROJECTS:

An **A** Project demonstrates:

- excellent understanding of form and structure
- a highly confident use of techniques discussed in class
- consistent control of style
- consistent seriousness of intent
- very strong organic connection between form and content
- in revision, shows thoughtful, well considered response to criticism*

A **B** Project demonstrates:

- very good understanding of form and structure
- consistent willingness to try techniques discussed in class
- fairly consistent control over style
- considerable seriousness of intent
- strong organic connection between form and content
- shows adequate response to criticism in revision *

A **C** Project demonstrates:

- adequate understanding of form and structure
- some willingness to try techniques discussed in class
- intermittent control over style
- some seriousness of intent
- intermittent connection between form and content
- shows little response to criticism in revision *

A **D** Project demonstrates:

- demonstrates inadequate understanding of form and structure
- little willingness to try techniques discussed in class
- shows poor control over style
- shows little or no seriousness of intent
- very little connection between form and content
- shows no response to criticism in revision *

An **F** Project demonstrates:

- no understanding of form or structure
- no effort to assimilate techniques learned in class
- no control over style
- no connection between form and content
- is not revised
- conscious plagiarism

* PLEASE NOTE: “response to” does not necessarily mean “compliance with.” It is expected that, in revision, writers will take criticism into account, whether that means following suggestions or intelligently rejecting them. In either case, writers should demonstrate as fully as possible, through the work itself, the reasons for their choices.

SPECIFIC GRADING CRITERIA FOR POETRY AND SHORT FICTION PROJECTS

Grade	Poetry Project	Short Fiction Project
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is consistently creative and expressive in its use of sonic devices • rhyme, if used, is thoughtful and creative, with no distortion in content • shows great expressive control over line and stanza • fully and memorably develops its imagery and/or ideas • uses language with consistent freshness and surprise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops interesting, complex characters • generates story naturally from characters and their conflicts, without forcibly imposing plot • shows excellent choice of scenes, developing them fully and proportionally • feels complete, with a fully satisfying structure • shows excellent, expressive control over language • exhibits excellent choice and control of POV
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pays close attention to sound, though perhaps clumsily at times • rhyme, if used, may in some cases be too “easy” or clichéd, or mildly distort content • shows a good understanding of line and stanza, though with some inconsistency • develops its imagery and/or ideas coherently, if a bit obviously or not as fully as possible • uses language creatively, though with some clichés 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops some interesting, complex characters, though others may be less fully formed • generates story mostly from characters, though some plot points may be forced • develops many scenes fully, though others less fully, and proportion may be off • feels reasonably complete, with minor structural problems • shows good, though perhaps inconsistent, control over language • exhibits good choice of POV, though control may be inconsistent
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may use some sonic devices, but inconsistently • rhyme, if used, is “easy” or clichéd and distorts content considerably • shows little sense of line or stanza • develops its imagery and/or ideas inconsistently or incoherently • falls consistently into clichéd phrases and images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has mostly undeveloped characters • for the most part, imposes plot on characters, often falling into genre clichés • develops very few of its scenes fully, and shows little attention to proportion • feels incomplete, unfinished, or without an ending • shows little control over language • uses POV inconsistently, resorting too easily to omniscience
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pays no attention to sound or rhythm • “easy” rhyme takes over and completely destroys coherence • shows no sense of line or stanza • develops no discernible idea or image • consists of nothing more than clichés 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has no satisfactorily developed characters • is a plot summary rather than a story • has no adequately developed scenes • shows no sense of structure • shows no attention to language • shows no attention to or control over POV
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contains plagiarism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contains plagiarism

Creative Writing: Reading and Critique Procedures

Session Assignments

After our individual meetings (October 24 & 26), I will assign dates on which your poetry and fiction projects will be read and critiqued by the class as a whole. Each of you will be assigned two dates, one for each project. In each class we will critique the work of as many as three writers. We will discuss optimal dates and I will assign dates as closely in agreement with you as I can. Bear in mind the following:

- 1) The closer the date is to the end of the term, the less time you will have to assimilate and use the criticism you get from class.
- 2) However, the draft that your classmates read and critique may be either the first draft you submit Tuesday

October 17, or a later draft taking into account my comments and/or any others you receive on your own, from classmates or anyone else. I encourage you to air your work outside of class.

3) In the interest of fairness, you may be given an early date for one project and a late one for the other. I will discuss this with each of you and attempt to accommodate your priorities.

Once your reading/critique days are assigned, you must stick to them! If any problems arise, please let me know far enough in advance so I can switch you with someone.

Consider the Thursday of the week prior to your in-class date the deadline for submitting the current draft of your work to me. This is to be done electronically, through my email (cbarney1@slu.edu). All work should be submitted in .pdf or Word format. Please don't assume I can open documents in other formats.

Reading and Critiquing

By late Thursday night, all work to be critiqued the following week will be up on SLU Global. It is your responsibility as students in this class to carefully and critically read it all over the weekend, so that you can make helpful, detailed comments to your fellow writers. Take notes so you don't need to rely on memory.

You are expected to contribute substantially to the discussion of each project in class. This will be taken into account as part of your Participation grade. I hope I don't need to give pop quizzes to make sure you're all doing the reading! I will, however, if too many of you are silent in class.

There are a few important points to make about critiques:

1) The most useless comment you can make about anybody's work is "It's perfect. I like it the way it is. Don't change anything." Every work of poetry or fiction, no matter how good it already is, can always be improved upon.

2) Criticism should be positive. The purpose of our "crit sessions" is to help the writer and the work, not to show off our critical faculties, and certainly not to leave others' work in smoldering ruins. This doesn't necessarily have to affect the *content* of a comment, merely its form. It's the difference between "This story doesn't work" and "This story would work better if..." A good first step with this approach is to identify, or at least guess at, the author's *intention*, and then think how the poem or story might be changed in order to better serve that intention. Also, there is always something to like, or potentially like, that you can comment on, even one good line in a poem full of bad ones.

3) Part of the purpose of critiques is to help the writer who can't see the forest for the trees, or a particular tree in the forest. Sometimes a writer lost in details might miss the larger picture, or an apparently insignificant detail the author has overlooked can grow in importance in revision and become central. The sharper your eye for detail, the more helpful you will be.

4) Be aware that you're reading early drafts. Grammar and spelling are important, but don't nit-pick. Correcting comma usage in a paragraph that might get cut may be beside the point.

Being Critiqued

If you are on the receiving end, remember: hear everybody, listen to a select few (including yourself). You can't please everyone. Always ask yourself, who understands what I'm trying to do? Who just doesn't get it?

You must bring, and hand in, a list of at least three specific questions to ask about your work so that the session will be purposeful for you. "What did you think?" is a vague question that is hard to answer and often counterproductive. Take notes. When you think you've heard enough (but not too soon), say "Thank you."

You will *not*, however, be allowed to explain or defend your work. If only one or two people in the class “get” what you’re trying to do, you’re in good company (ask Emily Dickinson or Samuel Beckett). If *nobody* does, and you’re tempted to enlighten us, remember: *if you have to explain it, it’s not working*.

Each critique will last a maximum of 15 minutes. You are encouraged to follow up outside of class with those whose comments you’ve found most useful.

Some random observations for writers:

1. There are no rules...
2. ...except the rules your poem, story or play makes for itself.
3. Follow them...
4. ...or break them, but on purpose.
5. First drafts are allowed to be terrible.
6. Good writing is in the rewriting.
7. Be a sponge.
8. Find your hour.
9. Lie, invent, distort. It’s your right.
10. Don’t imagine you’ll ever get rich doing this.
11. Write what you know.
12. Write what you don’t know.
13. Always finish what you start.
14. Don’t rewrite before you write.
15. If your inner critic isn’t helping you write, tell it to shut up.
16. Control ambiguity. Don’t let it control you.
17. Call a spade a spade. Don’t write in code.
18. If you have to explain it, it’s not working.
19. Don’t worry about being original. We’ve all been there before, but never with you.
20. Hear everybody; listen to a select few. Including yourself.
21. Always enjoy yourself. If you don’t enjoy writing it, we won’t enjoy reading it.
22. Don’t write the meaning. Write the (poem, story, play).
23. Beware of surprise endings. They’re often a sign of desperation.
24. Punctuation and grammar are not your enemies.
25. Always carry something to write with and to write on! Don’t let this happen to you:

These are not the lines that came to me
while walking in the woods
with no pen
and nothing to write on anyway.

They are gone forever [...]

- Billy Collins, “Lines Lost Among Trees”

SYLLABUS (subject to change)

Tuesday, September 5: Introduction. Self evaluation. Writing sample.

Thursday, September 7: Seeds, prompts, and other ways to start writing.

Tuesday, September 12: POETRY – Image versus idea; metaphor. **Homework due: snapshot poem.**

Thursday, September 14: SHORT FICTION – Plot versus story. **Homework due: anecdote.**

**Sunday, Sept. 14: Last Day to Drop Classes Without a Grade of W or Add Classes
Last Day to Choose Audit or Pass/No Pass options**

Tuesday, September 19: POETRY – Varieties of language. **Homework due: transformed anecdote.**

Thursday, September 21: SHORT FICTION – Character, motivation, relationships, dialogue. **Homework due: Latin and Anglo-Saxon short poems.**

Tuesday, September 26: POETRY – Rhyme and other word music. **Homework Due: dialogue scene.**

Thursday, September 28: SHORT FICTION – Narrative voice and point of view. **Homework Due: sound worksheet.**

Tuesday, October 3: POETRY – Line, meter, stanza. **Homework due: narrative voice variations on same scene.**

Thursday, October 5: SHORT FICTION – Showing versus telling. **Homework due: meter exercise.**

Tuesday, October 10: **FIRST DRAFTS DUE (POEMS, SHORT FICTION).** POETRY – Reading aloud. In-class reading of poems (1 each).

Thursday, October 12: **HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

Tuesday, October 17: NO CLASS; INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

Thursday, October 19: NO CLASS; INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

Tuesday, October 24: DRAMA – From Beats to Scenes

Thursday, October 26: DRAMA – Language for the Theatre

Monday, October 30: Last Day to Drop a Class and Receive a Grade of W

Tuesday, October 31: Reading and critique of student work

Thursday, November 2: Reading and critique of student work

Tuesday, November 7: Reading and critique of student work

Thursday, November 9: **HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

Tuesday, November 14: Reading and critique of student work

Thursday, November 16: Reading and critique of student work

SHOW WEEK – please come to the play (Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*)

Tuesday, November 21: Reading and critique of student work

Thursday, November 23: Reading and critique of student work

Tuesday, November 28: Reading and critique of student work

Thursday, November 30: Reading and critique of student work

Tuesday, December 5: Reading and critique of student work

Thursday, December 7: Reading and critique of student work

Tuesday, December 12: DRAMA – Visual Playwriting. **ALL PORTFOLIOS DUE.**

Friday, December 15, 3:30-6:30: Designated Final Exam time. Final in-class reading of poems and story excerpts.