Creative Writing: Sydney

Class code: WRTNG-UG 9501 or CRWRI-UA 9815

Instructor Details:
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Class Details:
Creative Writing
Thursdays: 2pm-5pm
Science House

Prerequisites:
None

Class Description:
In this class students are encouraged to consider the intersectional environments (natural, urban, cultural, historical etc.) that they interact with and within, and how their sensibilities differ living away from home to contemplate how a sense of place can be conveyed through writing.

We will engage with a diverse range of readings – featuring many Australian authors – and discuss technical elements and affective poetics to learn how to ‘read as a writer’. Weeks are devoted to crafting the short story, contemporary indigenous storytelling, creative nonfiction, and poetry. Students will complete weekly ‘microfiction’ homework exercises based upon images they take or find, and participate in in-class writing exercises, all of which may contribute to the writing journal submitted with the final work.

The class emphasizes the importance of embodied interaction with the city through a field trip using ‘The Disappearing’ – a downloadable app featuring over 100 site-specific poems spanning a ‘poetic map’ of Sydney, created by The Red Room Company. Students will think about the possibilities of marrying new technologies with writing as they navigate using poems as landmarks.

Students shall workshop their drafts during the course, learning how to effectively communicate critical feedback and how to be receptive to constructive critique. At the end of the course students will have the opportunity to showcase their work.

Desired Outcomes:
- To sharpen students’ analytical skills and abilities to identify the formal elements of texts in order to enhance their own writing and experience of literature.
- To develop students’ ability to produce, draft, edit and polish their own creative work, and equip them with the skills to critique each other’s writing within a supportive workshop environment.
- To deepen students’ knowledge of Sydney’s cultures and histories and synthesise their own experience of place through their writing.
**Assessment Components**

Attendance, discussion, weekly writing exercises, workshop participation, writing journal (to be submitted along with Final Work): 25%

‘Reading as a Writer’ response (1500 words). This response, due in week 7, will take the form of a personal essay on Jennifer Mills’ *Gone*: 25%

Final Work (either 1 short story of 4000 – 6000 words, or a collection of shorter pieces amounting to a similar word count, or a suite of poems approx. 20 pages): 50%

**Assessment Expectations**

A: Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning. Creative work is of a highly sophisticated standard.

B: Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research. Creative work is of a superior standard.

C: Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level. Creative work is of an acceptable standard.

D: Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations. Creative work is of a basic standard.

F: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

**Grade conversion**

NYU Sydney uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

- A=94-100
- A-=90-93
- B+=87-89
- B=84-86
- B-=80-83
- C+=77-79
- C=74-76
- C-=70-73
- D+=67-69
- D=65-66
- F=below 65

Where no specific numerical equivalent is assigned to a letter grade by the class teacher, the mid point of the range will be used in calculating the final class grade (except in the A range, where 95.5 will be used).
Grading Policy

NYU Sydney aims to have grading standards and results similar to those that prevail at Washington Square. At the College of Arts and Sciences, roughly 39% of all final grades are in the B+ to B- range, and 50% in the A/A- range.

We have therefore adopted the following grading guideline: in any non-Stern course, class teachers should try to insure that no more than 50% of the class receives an A or A-. (Stern has a different grading policy that we follow in all Stern courses).

A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that: it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.

Attendance Policy

NYU Sydney has a strict policy about course attendance for students. Faculty will not give students permission to be absent for any reason. Students should contact their instructors to catch up on missed work but should not approach them for excused absences.

All absence requests must be presented by the student to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs. Wherever possible, requests should be made in advance of an intended absence. In the case of illness, the student should contact the Assistant Director, Academic Programs within three days of the absence or as soon as practicable and provide medical documentation. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Assistant Director, Academic Programs.

The faculty will report all unexcused absences to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, and students’ final grades will be negatively impacted by each such absence. Each unexcused absence will result in the deduction of 3 percentage points from the final grade.

Be aware that absences from class may also impact on the participation grade awarded by your instructor.

Students are expected to arrive to class promptly both at the start of class and after breaks. This attendance policy also applies for classes involving a field trip or other off-campus visit. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the agreed meeting point on time.

Late Submission of Work

Written work due in class must be submitted to your instructor during classtime.

Late work should be submitted in person to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs during regular office hours (9:00am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday). In the absence of the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person. Students must also submit an electronic copy of late written work to Turn-It-In within 24 hours.

Work submitted after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) for each day the work is late.

Written work submitted beyond five (5) weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

Plagiarism Policy

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

It is a serious academic offense to use the work of others (written, printed or in any other form)
without acknowledgement. Cases of plagiarism are not dealt with by your instructor. They are referred to the Director, who will determine the appropriate penalty (up to and including failure in the course as a whole) taking into account the codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges.

All written coursework must be submitted in hard copy AND in electronic form. All students must submit an electronic copy of each piece of written work to the plagiarism detection software Turn-it-in. Instructions will be provided to you in class.

**Required Text(s)**

The following will be made available:

Excerpts from:
- *Negotiating With The Dead* – Margaret Atwood
- *The Singing* – Stephanie Bishop
- *How It Feels* – Brendan Cowell
- *Candy* – Luke Davies
- *Sydney* – Delia Falconer
- *The Lieutenant* – Kate Grenville
- *You’ll Be Sorry When I’m Dead* – Marieke Hardy
- *Praise* – Andrew McGahan
- *Indelible Ink* – Fiona McGregor
- *On Passion* – Dorothy Porter
- *Box the Pony* – Scott Rankin and Leah Purcell
- *Animal People* – Charlotte Wood

Full text:
- ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ – Raymond Carver
- ‘The Lap Pool’ – Robert Drewe
- ‘Swallowed Words: Bringing Up and Aboriginal Past in the City’ – Kristina L Everett
- ‘Hills Like White Elephants’ – Ernest Hemingway
- ‘Cold Snap’ – Cate Kennedy
- ‘Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice’ – Nam Le
- ‘Bliss’ – Katherine Mansfield
- ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- ‘Five Bells’ – Kenneth Slessor
- ‘Iceland’ – Eliot Weinberger

Students will need to obtain a copy of:


**Supplemental Text(s) (not required to purchase as copies are in NYU-S Library)**

Supplemental material will be posted in the online discussion group or distributed in class.
Session 1
February 14
- “Sydney Beginnings”
- Introduction to the course
- Create student workshopping schedule (workshops begin Session 3)
- Discussion of narrative openings: How do I begin?
- **Read for next class:** Sydney excerpt – Delia Falconer, ‘Five Bells’ – Kenneth Slessor, ‘Narrating’ – John Mullan

Session 2
February 21
- “Who’s Telling This Story?”
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

Session 3
February 28
- “Who Reads Short Fiction Anyway?”
- Student workshop
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings
- **Read for next class:** ‘Cold Snap’ – Cate Kennedy, ‘The Lap Pool’ – Robert Drewe, ‘Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice’ – Nam Le

Session 4
March 7
- “Sprints, Hand Grenades and Other Single Effects”
- Student workshop
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings
Session 5
March 14
• “A Question of Style”
• Student workshop
• In-class writing exercises
• Discussion of readings

Session 6
March 21
• “Details, Illuminated By A Flash”
• Student workshop
• In-class writing exercises
• Discussion of readings
• **Read for next class:** ‘Iceland’ – Eliot Weinberger, ‘Down the Hatch’ – Marieke Hardy

Session 7
March 28
• ‘Stranger Than...’
• Student workshop
• Discussion of readings
• In-class writing exercises
• Read for next class: a selection of poetry TBC closer to date

**SEMESTER BREAK**

Session 8
April 11
• Excursion using The Red Room Company’s The Disappearing app: a poetic safari of Sydney
• Read for next class: a poetry packet will be supplied involving class contributions
Session 9
April 18
• “I Have Been Eating Poetry”
• Student workshop
• Discussion of readings and excursion homework
• In-class writing exercises
• Read for next class: Box the Pony excerpt – Leah Purcell & Scott Rankin, The Lieutenant excerpt – Kate Grenville, ‘Swallowed Words: Bringing Up and Aboriginal Past in the City’ – Kristina L Everett

Session 10
April 19
DUE TO PUBLIC HOLIDAY
• “Haunted City”
• Student workshop
• Watch an extract of Box the Pony and Redfern Now
• Discussion of readings
• Read for next class: TBA

(NO class on April 25)

Session 11
May 2
• Guest lecturer TBA
• Read for next class: ‘Ending’ – John Mullan

Session 12
May 9
• “Endings – Sick With Joy and Relief”
• Student workshop
• Discussion of endings: letting go.
• Read for next class: On Passion excerpt – Dorothy Porter, Negotiating With The Dead excerpt – Margaret Atwood,

Session 13
May 16
• “Are Our Most Violent Poltergeists Books?”
• Troubleshooting problems in the major assignments
• Student workshop
• Discussion of readings
• Read for next class: finish Lilian’s Story – Kate Grenville

**Session 14**

- Watch Lilian’s Story dir. Jerzy Domaradzki

May 23

- Readings of students’ work

FINAL WORK DUE Friday May 24

**Your Instructor**

Anna Westbrook is a PhD candidate at the University of New South Wales where she tutors and lectures in Creative Writing. She has presented at many conferences and writer’s festivals around Australia. She was the recipient of the Sydney University prize for Best Honours thesis in Gender & Cultural Studies, a Marrickville Council Arts Development Grant, the Australian Society of Authors Mentorship award, and has been shortlisted for the Australian Vogel. Anna has been anthologized in *Herding Kites* (Affirm Press) and online in *The Disappearing*, and published in magazines *harlequin creature* (USA), *The Bastille* (France), *Voiceworks*, *Slit* and *WQ* (Australia).