Creative Writing: Sydney

Class code  WRTNG-UG 9501 – 001 or CRWRI-UA 9815 – 004

Instructor Details  Dr Anna Westbrook  aw93@nyu.edu  0424 473 527 (mobile)
Consultations by appointment
Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails.

Class Details  Fall 2015

Creative Writing: Sydney

Wednesday 12:00 – 3:00pm
September 2 to December 9
Room 202
NYU Sydney Academic Centre

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 and poetry. Students will complete weekly ‘microfiction’ homework exercises based upon images they take or find, and participate in in-class exercises to develop writing practice.

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 workshop their drafts during the course, learning how to effectively communicate critical feedback and how to be receptive to constructive critique. This takes the form of a discussion in-class and students are required to submit written critical feedback on their classmates’ drafts in an online forum. At the end of the course students will have the opportunity to showcase their work at a reading night to the rest of the NYU Sydney student body and invited faculty.

**Desired Outcomes**

As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Sharpen analytical skills and abilities to identify the formal elements of texts in order to enhance their own writing and experience of literature.
- Develop 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.
- Deepen knowledge of Sydney’s cultures and histories and synthesise their own experience of place through their writing.

**Assessment Components**

**Workshop participation and online forum peer draft critique**: 15%

**Weekly Homework submission**: 15%

‘Reading as a Writer’ response (1500 words). This response, due in Week 7, will take the form of a reflection on literary techniques in Gretchen Shirm’s *Having Cried Wolf*: 20%

**Final Work** - either 1 short story (4000 words maximum) OR a suite of poems approx. 20 pages due in Week 14 OR experimental work by negotiation: 50%

*Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component will result in failure of the class.*

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade 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.

**Grade 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.

**Grade 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.

**Grade 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.

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

---

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Should work be submitted as a hard copy, or electronically?

Unless otherwise specified, all written work must be submitted as a hard copy. The majority of written assignments must also be submitted electronically via NYU Classes. All in-class presentations must be completed during class time.

Who may submit a student’s work?

Each student’s assigned work must be handed in personally by that student. The student may not nominate another person to act on his/her behalf.

When and where should the work be submitted?

The hard copy of any written work must be submitted to the instructor at the beginning of class on the date the work is due. If the assignment due date falls outside of class time, work must be submitted to the Staff Member on duty in Room 2.04 during prescribed Office Hours (11:30am-12:30pm and 2:30-3:30pm Mon-Thu), or by appointment with the Academic Programs Coordinator. Each submitted item of work received in Room 2.04 will be date and time stamped in the presence of the student. Work submitted in Room 2.04 will not be considered “received” unless formally stamped.

What is the Process for Late Submission of Work?

After the due date, work may only be submitted under the following conditions:

- Late work, even if an extension has been granted, must be submitted in person by appointment with the Academic Programs Coordinator. Each submitted item of work must be date and time stamped in order to be considered “received”.

- 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 weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension receives a mark of zero, and the student is not entitled
to feedback for that piece of work.

- Because failure to submit or fulfil any required course component will result in failure of the course, it is crucial for students to submit every assignment even when it will receive a mark of zero. Early departure from the program therefore places the student at risk of failing the course.

---

**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.

Penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism are severe and are dealt with by the Director, NYU Sydney, not your instructor. Your home school will be notified and you will be dealt with according to the standards of that school. The codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges are outlined in the respective school’s academic resources.

---

**Attendance Policy**

Study abroad at Global Academic Centres is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades. The class roster will be marked in the first five minutes of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalised by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to two unexcused absences. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

---

**Classroom Expectations**

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period.

- Arrive to class on time.
- Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
- Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media,
no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.

- Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
- The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
- Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.

### Religious Observance

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Assistant Director, Academic Programs in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

### Provisions to students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Centre for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.

### Required Texts


Weekly readings will be posted on NYU Classes in Resources. It is a course expectation that you have done the readings and prepared sufficiently to discuss them in class.

### Session 1  Sydney Beginnings

**Wednesday September 2**

**Required Reading:**

**Class Activities:**
- Introduction to the course
- Create student workshopping schedule (workshops begin Session 3)
- Discussion and comparison of examples of narrative openings: How do I begin?
- Discussion of microfiction with examples
Session 2  Styles of Narration

Wednesday September 9

Required Reading:
- ‘How to Become a Writer’ – Lorrie Moore (in The Collected Stories, Faber & Faber, 2008)
- ‘Poinsettias’ – Myfanwy Collins (in Pank 6.06/June, 2011)

Class Activities:
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

Session 3  Plot: Conflict & Suspense

Wednesday September 15

Required Reading:
- ‘Stone Mattress’ – Margaret Atwood (in Stone Mattress, Bloomsbury, 2014)
- ‘Hills Like White Elephants’ – Ernest Hemingway

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

Session 4  Character

Wednesday September 22

Required Reading:
- ‘A Romantic Weekend’ – Mary Gaitskill (in Bad Behavior, Sceptre, 1988)

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

Session 5  Language

Wednesday September 29
Required Reading:
- ‘This Condition’ – Lydia Davis (in *The Collected Stories*, Picador, 2009)

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

FALL BREAK: 5-9 October

Session 6  Symbolism, Magic, and the Imaginary
Wednesday October 14

Required Reading:
- ‘Mrs. Fox’ – Sarah Hall (BBC Short Fiction Prizewinner, 2013)

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings
- Assessment One discussion

Session 7  Haunted Cities & the Postcolonial Uncanny
Wednesday October 21

Required Reading:
- READINGS FOR THIS WEEK WILL BE PROVIDED IN CLASS

Class Activities:
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

ASSIGNMENT: ‘READING AS A WRITER’ DUE (20%)

Session 8  The Disappearing: a poetic safari of Sydney
Wednesday October 28

Guest lecturer: Dr Tamryn Bennett

Required Reading:
• READINGS FOR THIS WEEK WILL BE PROVIDED IN CLASS

Required field trip/excursion: We will be using The Red Room Company’s ‘The Disappearing’ app to take a poetic safari of Sydney’s The Rocks.

Session 9  Field Trip to Sculpture by the Sea
Wednesday November 4

Required Reading:
• READINGS FOR THIS WEEK WILL BE PROVIDED IN CLASS

Required field trip/excursion: We will be walking the annual ‘Sculpture by the Sea’ coastal trail and undertaking writing exercises to augment our discussion of ekphrasis.

Session 10 Prose Poetry, Cult & ‘Experimental’ Fiction
Wednesday November 11

Required Reading:
• ‘Octet’ – David Foster Wallace (in Brief Interviews with Hideous Men, Little Brown, 1999)
• excerpt from No Limit – Holly Childs (Hologram, 2014)
• ‘After I Was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned’ – Dave Eggers (in How We Are Hungry, McSweeney’s, 2004)

Class Activities:
• Student workshop
• Discussion of readings

Session 11 Plot: Compression & Epiphany
Wednesday November 18

Required Reading:
• ‘The Ambush’ – Donna Tartt (available online in The Guardian)
• ‘Connie Bronson’ – Marilynne Robinson (in Paris Review #100 Summer/Fall, 1986)

Class Activities:
• Student workshop
• Discussion of readings
Session 12 Affect: Impressions, Resonance

Wednesday November 25

Required Reading:

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings

Session 13 Intensive Editing

Wednesday December 2

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Discussion of editing techniques
- In-class editing exercises

Session 14 Sydney Endings

Wednesday December 9

Class Activities:
- Course reflection
- Masterclass on writing and publishing opportunities
- Discussion of final assessment

Assignment: Final Work (50%) due 5:00pm, Wednesday December 9.

Your Instructor

Anna Westbrook (Ph.D., University of New South Wales) has presented at many conferences and writer’s festivals around Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. In 2015 she taught a sold out masterclass workshop on writing for the Sydney Writers’ Festival. 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, Scum, Cuttings, and WQ (Australia). Her debut novel, Dark Fires Shall Burn, is forthcoming through Scribe Publications in early 2016.