Creative Writing: Sydney

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

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: Spring 2015

Creative Writing: Sydney

Wednesday, 9:00am – 12:00pm
February 4 to May 13
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 writing exercises, all of which will 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 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**

- Weekly writing exercises, workshop participation, online forum participation, quiz on Tim Winton’s *The Turning* & writing journal (25%): submitted with Final Work
- ‘Reading as a Writer’ response, 2500 words (25%). This response, due in Week 7, will take the form of an essay on literary techniques in Gretchen Shirm’s *Having Cried Wolf*
- Final Work (50%): either 1 short story (4000 words maximum) OR a suite of poems approx. 20 pages due in Week 14

*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.

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**Grade Conversions**

This course 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

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**Late Submission of Work**

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

Late work should be submitted in person to the Academic Coordinator during regular office hours (9:00am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday). In the absence of the Academic Coordinator, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person. The NYUS staff will mark down the date and time of submission in the presence of the student. 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.

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**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.

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**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 be penalised with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade for every week of classes missed.

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. Repeated absences will result in harsher penalties, including 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.

**Required Texts**


Weekly readings will be posted on NYU Classes.

**Session 1  Sydney Beginnings**

**Wednesday 4 February**

**Class Activities:**

- Introduction to the course
- Create student workshopping schedule (workshops begin Session 3)
- Discussion of narrative openings: How do I begin? Discussion of microfiction with examples
Session 2 Who’s Telling This Story?

Wednesday 11 February

Required Reading:
- ‘How to Become a Writer’ & ‘How to Talk to Your Mother (Notes) – Lorrie Moore (in The Collected Stories, Faber & Faber, 2008)

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

Session 3 Haunted Cities and the Postcolonial Uncanny

Wednesday 18 February

Required Reading:
- Sydney – Delia Falconer (University of New South Wales Press, 2010)
- ‘Five Bells’ – Kenneth Slessor (available online)

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

In-Class Media: Bedevil (dir. Tracey Moffatt, Australia, 1993)

Session 4 Characterisation and Sympathy

Wednesday 25 February

Required Reading:
- ‘Stone Mattress’ – Margaret Atwood (in Stone Mattress, Bloomsbury, 2014)

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

**Session 5  Language**  
**Wednesday 4 March**

**Required Reading:**
- *Rain* excerpt – Kirsty Gunn (Faber & Faber, 1994)
- ‘Still Here’ – Anna Krien (in *The Best Australian Stories: Ten-Year Collection*, Black Inc. 2011)

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

**Session 6  Experimental Realities: Symbolism, Magic, and the Imaginary**  
**Wednesday 11 March**

**Required Reading:**

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

**SPRING BREAK 16-20 MARCH**

**Session 7  Detail, Intention, Design**  
**Wednesday 25 March**

**ASSIGNMENT : ‘READING AS A WRITER’ DUE**

**Class Activities:**
- Student workshop
- In-class writing exercises
Session 8   The Disappearing app: a poetic safari of Sydney

Wednesday 1 April

Guest lecturer: Dr Tamryn Bennett

Required Reading:
- A selection of poetry TBA closer to date

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

Session 9   I Have Been Eating Poetry

Wednesday 8 April

Required Reading:
- A poetry packet will be supplied involving class contributions

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

Session 10   Confession, the Self, and the Epistle

Wednesday 15 April

Required Reading:
- ‘How to Talk to Your Mother (Notes)’ – Lorrie Moore (in The Collected Stories, Faber & Faber, 2008)

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings

Session 11   FIELD TRIP

Wednesday 22 April

Ekphrasis Writing Field Trip to the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Session 12   Endings – Impressions, Resonance

Wednesday 29 April
Required Reading:
- The Ambush’ – Donna Tartt (available online in The Guardian)

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Discussion of endings: letting go.

Session 13  Intensive Editing
Wednesday 6 May

Required Reading:

Class Activities:
- Troubleshooting problems in the major assignments
- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings

Session 14  Form and Adaptation
Wednesday 13 May

Required Reading:

Class Activities:
- Quiz on The Turning
- Watch the film The Turning, various directors
- Final discussion

Assignment: Final Work (50%) due 9.00 am

Your Instructor

Dr 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. 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 W/Q (Australia). Her novel is forthcoming through Scribe Publications in 2015.