

English 486: Intermediate Fiction Workshop

Course	ENG 486 001
Day & Time	T 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Place	Simpkins 308
Instructor	Barbara Harroun
Office	Simpkins 020
Email	BC-Harroun@wiu.edu
Phone	298-1323
Office Hours	T/TH 3:30-5:15 p.m., W 1:00-2:00 p.m. & by appointment

Course Description: 486 Advanced Writing Workshop: Fiction. (3) Further work in the writing of fiction. Prerequisite: ENG 285, 386, or consent of instructor.

English 486 will widen your sense of contemporary short fiction while providing an intensive workshop setting and writing community for your own artful and polished short fiction. This is a reading and writing intensive class at an advanced level. This means only present revised and polished material to the workshop, put time and energy into your analysis of readings and critiques of your peers' work, and stay current with the assigned readings. To write well, you must read widely.

Course Goals

In order to succeed in this class you must:

- have a voracious appetite for reading, thinking critically about, and writing about short fiction.
- have an understanding of and apply the elements that are necessary in crafting artful, **literary** fiction.
- have the ability to read, comment on, and present at length on others' writing *as a writer*.
- give and receive constructive criticism **gracefully**.
- recognize the importance of revision in triggering discovery.
- refine your editing skills and learn the importance of professional manuscript presentation.

Required Texts

Tell Everyone I Said Hi by Chad Simpson

Battleborn by Claire-Vaye-Watkin

The Tenth of December by George Saunders

Materials

- **A notebook**—do NOT come to class without it.
- **Pen and pencil**—do NOT come to class without a writing implement.
- **Two flash sticks**. Always back up your work, and take the precaution of emailing your work to yourself. I do not accept as an excuse, ever, a crashed computer, lost flash stick or a printer that ran out of ink.
- **A pocket folder** for additional handouts and readings.
- **A three-ring binder** for your final portfolio of initial and revised work.
- **Enough copies of your work** for instructor and classmates on your designated workshop days. Copies should be ready to hand out at the beginning of class.

Assignments

- 1) **Four stories (35%) that include a letter to the workshop from the author(required):** 3 full length short stories should be 6(minimum)-15(maximum) pages(10% each), and 1 flash fiction story(5%). These stories must be typed, and as polished as possible. It is your responsibility to

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provide copies for the instructor and your fellow students. No genre fiction. We are studying and attempting literary fiction in this course. No porn, detective fiction, fantasy, science-fiction or romance/supernatural romance. Seriously. We are concerned primarily with telling the truth, and writing stories in which our characters are changed, and the reader is changed in some small way from the experience of reading the work. This semester, learn from the authors we read. All collections required are examples of literary fiction. These writers love language and believe that writing, and telling stories are meaningful acts that help us, as readers, understand the world, our place in it, and our experience of it. If it's not set on the planet earth, if the characters have powers no actual human could have, if the story doesn't address the condition of being human, do not turn it in for workshop. Imagination and creativity are still valued, but we are trying to get to truth, not absolute fantasy. We are interested in art, not only entertainment. This is not to say that art and entertainment are mutually exclusive, but our concern is first and foremost artful, engaging, meaningful short fiction. The letter to the workshop is an opportunity to speak directly to the workshop before we begin critiques. Your letter should be at the end of your story and are an opportunity to point out risks you are taking as a writer, areas you want us to focus our critique on, or specific questions you have.

- 2) **Writing Exercises (10%):** Each class will begin with a writing exercise. You will be able to develop these outside of class and we'll have ample opportunity to share them in class. Ideally, you should be able to use each exercise as a springboard for a story.
- 3) **Discussion/Class Presence (10%):** You are required to give your insight on the readings, add to discussion, respectfully debate ideas, and share your work in each class. I will call on students at random to summarize readings, lead us in discussion, or ask students to pose questions to begin our discussions. This takes the place of reading quizzes, which I will give if the majority of the class remains silent. Come to class prepared, take an active role in the class, or lose these points, which comprise a full letter grade.
- 4) **Response/Reflections (10%):** 3 response/reflections (1 per collection); 3 pages, typed. Responses to a particular author's mastery of craft in assigned collections, and a reflection on what you've learned from the authors, your peers, and the instructor, and how you can apply this knowledge in your own work.
- 5) **Revised Fiction Portfolio (15%):** Complete revisions of three of your short stories. These revision should be a massive "re-thinking" and "re-envisioning" in which characters, setting, and plot (among other aspects of craft) can change drastically. Include an essay that addresses how your fiction has deepened, how your reading life has informed your writing life, your writing process for this short "collection", your process of revision, and how you plan to sustain your work as a writer. Also include a personal statement entitled "Why I Write" (1 full page) and a short writer's bio. Stories must be placed in an arrangement that shows conscious thought and produces a desired effect in readers.
- 6) **Typed workshop critiques (20%):** Each story that is workshopped **requires** written comments on the original draft and a one page, typed, critique. Turn in your typed critique, prior to the beginning of class, and hand back the story draft with your typed critique to your peers. Please remember, that at our cores we are all fragile. Your responses are a direct reflection of who you are as a writer. I demand respectful, professional workshop critiques and comments. **If you use hateful, derogatory, disrespectful language that demeans the author of the piece, rather than focusing on the story at hand, you will be asked to leave the workshop permanently.** Focus on the work, give concrete examples, specific suggestions for revision and look at all aspects of craft. *Failure to do as directed, and failure to complete 1 full page, double spaced, 12*

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point font, regular margins will result in a simple zero(0). I want top to bottom of the page. Do not waste space with headings, extra spacing between paragraphs or huge signatures.

- 7) **Conferences:** You are required to conference with me, by appointment, twice during the semester; once before midterm, and once prior to the final fiction portfolio. These will be intensive opportunities to address your progress, your plans, and your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. Plan on spending at least 30 minutes together.

Grading

You must complete all assignments to pass the course. Late assignments will not be accepted without documentation of an emergency or illness.

A+=97-100%	A=94-96%	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=64-66%	D-=60-63%

U/F=59 and below: *Please be aware of and understand the difference between a U and an F. U indicates you attended class, and attempted all work but it wasn't at a passing level. F indicates a failure to attend and/or attempt work.*

Attendance

is necessary to foster your development as a writer and central to developing a sense of community and respect in the classroom. Your input is needed and valued. Tardiness is disruptive and disrespectful, and excessive lateness counts as an absence (anything more than 5 minutes). I keep track of attendance, but do not grant "excused" or "unexcused" absences. You are either here or you are absent. Sleeping or texting in class will result in a marked absence. **If you are absent more than once, without documentation of an emergency or illness, your grade will be docked 1 letter grade for each additional absence. 4 absences equals an automatic F.** If a situation arises during the semester that prohibits you from attending class, I urge you to communicate responsibly with me. Please call me, email me or see me during my office hours. If you miss a class, please consult the class schedule, your classmates, and your instructor. We meet once a week, so each absence is the equivalent of missing an entire week's worth of class.

Workshop Considerations

This class focuses on workshopping original student work, and it is very different from a lecture based class. It requires student participation and discussion. It also requires a level of maturity in being able to divorce yourself from your own work, and to listen to others dissect it in terms of craft.

- 1.) It is important for you to hand in work—finished drafts—that you care about. Don't ask the instructor or your classmates to take seriously what you do not. Start writing early, and work through several revisions before you submit things to the class. Hemingway famously said, "The first draft of anything is shit." Don't turn in first drafts.

- 2.) You need to remain silent during classroom discussion of your story. Take notes. Listen closely, openly and without defensiveness. The workshop does not judge you as a person; it is meant to help you become a better writer. It is not a therapy session or an encounter group or a TV talk show. It is important to remember, that as an audience, we don't care if the events actually happened to you. We are not concerned with your past traumas or heartbreaks and we aren't trained therapists equipped to assist you in dealing with them. This sounds harsh, but it is true. I often hear students say, "But this actually happened." We will treat every story and

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exercise as fiction, not autobiography, and we, as apprentice writers, will consider it in terms of art. Art serves humanity. This workshop does not serve your ego; this workshop serves your art. As a writing community, and as workshop, our job is to point out what as writers we often can't see in our own work—where the writing succeeds and where it fails. As the one in the workshop hot seat, this is truly difficult, but remember that the critique is about also honing your writer's eye, and finding a community of writers that you will entrust with your work even after the class is over.

3.) After workshop you may ask 3 questions of the class pertaining to your work and/or workshop discussion. Do not defend or explain what you were attempting to achieve in your work. We will deal with what is actually written on the page.

4.) *Stories must be double spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman font. Workshop copies are due the class BEFORE your workshop. Stories must be stapled prior to class, and should be printed front and back. Please don't make us wait on you. If stories aren't ready to be passed out at the start of class(exactly at 5:30 p.m.), you will forfeit your workshop. Do not test me on this. Every semester, this is an issue. Writing fiction is an art and a discipline. Present work you are proud of and present it on time. If you have questions regarding formatting your story, check out the following: <http://www.shunn.net/format/story.html>*

5.) When we respond to others' work, we do so with respect and compassion. Your written and verbal responses should be constructive and you should read as a writer reads—with an eye towards elements of craft that are working and/or are problematic. Your written responses should summarize the story briefly, address what is working specifically, and what is not working, along with suggestions to strengthen the piece. Your responses must be typed and ready to be turned in on workshop days. **I will not take responses late.** Print out one copy of your response for the author and one copy for me to grade.

Student Conduct

We are building a learning and writing community, which means creating and maintaining an atmosphere of respect. In this classroom you may encounter ideas, values, beliefs and perspectives that are different from your own. We will freely exchange ideas, but intimidating or disrespectful language or behavior has no place in our exchanges, our classroom, or at Western Illinois University. No texting, emailing, or placing/receiving calls during class. No iPods on or ear buds in during class. Turn off your cell phone before class. Excessive disruption will result in following the procedure dictated by WIU.

Plagiarism

You must do your own work in English 486. Any act of plagiarism will result in an F grade in this course. If you have any doubts about whether or not you are using your own or others' writing ethically and legally, ask me. Work cannot be handed in for credit in 386 that is or was written for another class (say, for example, ENG 285 or 386), either here or elsewhere, even if it is much revised. Work you did in high school is best left there. The whole idea of ENG 486 is to give you new occasions to write, for you to discover fresh ways to imaginatively deal with the world around you. Please submit work written only during the current term. Western Illinois University's official Academic Integrity Policy is found at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>. Please read it, in its entirety and see me with any questions you may have.

Disability Support Services

“In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s) you must obtain

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documentation of the need for an accommodation through Disability Support Services and provide it to the instructor. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor's attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512 for additional services.”

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Please be advised of your rights and responsibilities as a student at Western Illinois University by visiting <http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php>.

Important Dates

August 19, Mon. -- Classes Begin

August 30, Fri. --Last day to withdraw from course or university with 100% refund

September 2, Mon. -- Labor Day -- No Classes/University Closed

September 16: Chad Simpson, 12:30 talk on the importance of place in art. 4:00 p.m. reading, Q & A and book signing at the University Art Gallery

October 18, Fri. -- Fall Break -- No Classes

October 21, Mon. -- Classes Resume

October 27, Sun.—last day to drop a class or withdraw from the university

November 25-29, Mon.-Fri. -- Thanksgiving Break -- No Classes

November 28-29, Thurs.-Fri. -- Holiday -- University Closed

December 2, Mon. -- Classes Resume

December 9-13, Mon.-Fri. -- Final Exam Week

This syllabus is subject to change. This class will be notified of changes due to University closings, severe weather, class progress, incorrect statements in this document, and unexpected demands on the instructor.