Professor Lauren Davila Spring 2020

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Skype: ltdavi 10:30am-1:10pm

Office Hours: TBD in Rob B 470 Mason Global Center 1302A

Introduction to Creative Writing

*“We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.”—Ernest Hemingway*

*“Always listen to criticism, try not to take it personally, and try to let your work exist outside yourself. That way your work can get better and your sensitivities will be protected. Beyond that, persist.” – Louise Erdrich*

Some of you coming into this course consider yourself readers. You read anything and everything you can get your hands on.

Some of you are academics, looking at literary theories and themes rather than only craft. You might be familiar with some or none of the writers we will be studying.

Some of you are creators, maybe writing poetry, nonfiction, scripts, fanfiction or anything else. Or maybe any or all of the genres.

Maybe you’re a combination of all these. Or none of these.

No matter where you are at the start, I want this course to spark creative interests so that you can walk away with a clearer image of who you are, or could be, as a writer. I expect everyone to put in the same amount of effort, whether you consider yourself a writer or not. We will be reading multiple genres and forms which will help you all write your own. We will also be critiquing your classmates work and assisting with the writing process in general.

The main goal for this class is to understand yourself as a reader and as a writer in tandem. Through deep analysis, comprehension, annotation and personal creative writing, I hope you understand how to interpret texts for yourself. And in the process, understand and have empathy for experiences that may look similar or completely different from you.

**Books/Texts**

**Nothing to purchase.** All readings will be provided through links at the end of the syllabus.

**Other Materials**

* Laptop or tablet with keyboard attachment (in and out of class)
* Full access to Google Drive
* Active Mason email account (per University Policy, I will only reply to this account.)

**The Mason Core Program**

English 396 is an exploratory course in the Arts category of [the Mason Core Program](https://catalog.gmu.edu/mason-core/). Students who successfully complete a course in the Arts category must meet the first learning outcome and a minimum of two of the remaining four learning outcomes:

* Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between artistic process, and a work’s underlying concept, and where appropriate, contexts associated with the work.
* Identify and analyze the formal elements of a particular art form using vocabulary and critique appropriate to that form.
* Analyze cultural productions using standards appropriate to the form, as well as the works’ cultural significance and context.
* Analyze and interpret the content of material or performance culture through its social, historical, and personal contexts.
* Engage in generative artistic processes, including conception, creation, and ongoing critical analysis.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Students will be able to:

1. Read for comprehension, detail, and nuance.
2. Assess theme across multiple genres.
3. Identify specific literary qualities of language in texts.
4. Learn how to respond to workshops, both verbally and written.

**Blackboard Usage**

In order to succeed in this course, access to both Mason Blackboard and your GMU email are required. This class uses Blackboard as a primary instructional platform. Please be sure to turn in all assignments electronically on Blackboard unless otherwise stated.

To access Blackboard:

1. Go to <http://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>
2. Enter your Mason UserId and password
3. Click on the “Courses” tab at the top right
4. Click on our course number in your “Course List”
   1. If this course does not appear in your “Course List” menu, please let me know as soon as possible.

**Technology Policy**

You are all required to bring a laptop or tablet with keyboard to class each week; this device should have Wi-Fi connectivity and Google Drive/Docs. We will be using class time to practice comprehension skills, self-assessment, and creative /reflective writing.

Various technologies are important tools for our research and writing. However, when you’re not using your laptop or tablet for class work, shut the lid or turn it off. If you have cellphones out consistently or technology is stopping you from participating in class, privileges will be taken away. Using social media and other sites on your phones and computers not only distracts you, but often distracts neighbors as well. If there is an emergency call or text, please excuse yourself from class as quietly as possible.

**Methods of Instruction**

To begin, this creative writing course is **not** a lecture class. Most, if not all, of our class meetings will be interactive and involve a significant amount of discussion, writing, and collaboration. This class will build off of previous weeks’ themes and class interactions with your peers and myself; therefore, it is important that you are present and actively engaged. Participating in conversation, and specifically workshop, is the single most important thing you can do to succeed in this class.

It is expected that you will:

* complete all readings,
* come to class prepared with all homework completed,
* prep for in-class work,
* annotate workshops from each peer,
* participate meaningfully in discussions,
* ask questions and remain open to new writing techniques,
* and practice writing strategies and techniques.

For the purpose of this class, between reading and writing, you should be averaging 15 hours weekly. I would like all of you to leave this class an effective creative writer and genre reader, which is a result of time and open-mindedness. Students who attend regularly, actively participate during class, and thoughtfully complete all readings/viewings will succeed in this class.

**Grades and Completion Policy**

Grades will be broken down as follows:

A+ 100-97.5% | A 97.4-93% | A- 92.9-90% | B+ 89.9-87.5% | B 87.4-83% | B- 82.9-80% | C+ 79.9-77.5% | C 77.4-73% | C- 72.9-70% | D 69.9-60% | F below 60%

You will receive a midterm grade based on the work of the first half of the semester, which you can view in PatriotWeb. The midterm grade’s purpose is to help you understand how well you are doing so that you can make any adjustments necessary. It is not meant to predict your final grade, as the work in the second half of the semester may be weighted more heavily. Feel free to make an appointment with me to discuss this midterm grade.

**Assignment Standards**

* An “A” level grade (90-100%) marks an essay that engages the reader in a provocative conversation. Even more than in a “B” essay, the writer anticipates and responds to possible reader questions, uses a wide range of supporting evidence, structures arguments and analyses to create a fluid reading experience, provides unexpected insights, and/or uses language with care and facility.
* A “B” level grade (80-89%) highlights a strong example of college writing and thinking. In addition to meeting the “C” level requirements, the writer of such an essay goes further in some way(s): he or she demonstrates some insight into the “gray areas” of the topic, provides original or very thorough support that is tightly woven into the overall argument, and/or creates prose that reads smoothly at both the sentence and paragraph levels. The essay has few sentence-level errors and/or may demonstrate a lively voice or style.
* A “C” level grade (70-79%) denotes competent college-level writing and achievement. The writer responds to the specified rhetorical situation: he or she meets, to some degree, all the assignment requirements, and employs some key strategies for communicating his/her ideas to his/her targeted audience. The essay has a central focus, presents some support, and moves from point to point in an orderly fashion; sentence-level errors do not significantly prevent comprehension. Essays that do not meet these criteria will not earn a “C.”
* “D” and “F” level essays do not meet the basic expectations of the assignment.

**Course Requirements and Grading Percentages**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ASSIGNMENT** | **% of FINAL GRADE** | |
| Engagement (including models) | 200 points (20%) | |
| Workshop Feedback | 200 points (20%) | |
| Midterm | 150 points (10%) | |
| Workshop Submissions |  | |
| 1 genre of your choice | 150 points (15%) |
| 1 other genre | 150 points (15%) |
| Final Portfolio (w/ 1 workshop revision and 1 unsubmitted choice in last genre) | 200 points (20%) | |

**Major Assignments**

Detailed prompts will be available on Blackboard for each assignment

**Engagement**

Please be attentive in class. Speak up. Offer suggestions. You will not receive a high grade if you are not participating. I also ask that in addition to the readings, if you are up for workshop during a specific week, you bring a poem/prose text in that the class can discuss as a whole. Be prepared to speak on it for 5 minutes max. Look at the engagement section below for more information.

**Workshops**

You will be up for workshop 2 times this semester. You will be submitting one prose and one poetry submission. You will be divided up across each week, and your submissions should correspond with the themes. We will be discussing the workshop process more in depth the first day of class and that weekend.

**Midterm**

This will be a 4-5-page paper on a genre outside of your comfort zone. At this point, I want you all to assess how you would model. A lengthy assignment sheet will be posted with very pointed questions.

**Final Portfolio**

This will be turned in as a google doc to me directly.

1. A title page with an original title that captures the spirit of your semester-long writing
2. A table of contents organized by week and theme
3. A craft prologue that explains the decisions you made throughout the portfolio and through the semester. Look at the way you have grown as a writer throughout the semester in your writing, your responses to your peers, and how you assess models.
4. All the written work you produced over the course of the semester
5. Both workshops from the semester with plans for revision. This plan should be bullet points of at least 1 page. Also list 3 possible literary magazines you could submit your pieces to.
6. **Extra credit:** One unsubmitted “workshop” based off of the weekly themes in the genre you didn’t workshop.

**Extra Credit Opportunities**

Extra Credit Opportunities (ECO) will be available in certain situations. These ECOs will not do the job of making up for a semester of poor work. ECOs will be posted on Blackboard; these can be Writing center or Library workshops, readings on campus, and New Leaves panels.

Each ECO boosts your grade by 2 percentage points. You may earn a total of 6 extra points. In some instances, this may add up significantly– enough for an entire grade jump.

In order to receive credit from any of these events or workshops, you must submit by email a 500 word write-up within 3 days of the workshop/event you attended. In addition to listing the title, date, and time of the workshop, this write-up should discuss the information that you learned from the workshop/event and how you will use those skills in this class and in your future classes.

**Late Work/Absent Policy**

Because life happens, you have one “free” absences to use throughout the semester. Save it for when you really need them. YOU CANNOT MISS THE DAYS YOU ARE UP FOR WORKSHOP. All other absences, except those resulting from mandated government, military service, or a documented illness will result in a zero for that day’s in-class engagement. If you are absent, you are still responsible for work and workshop responses.

I *will* *not* accept any assignments unless you have been granted an extension. **Extensions may be granted in certain situations– please come speak to me well before the due date. I am not able to assist if I am in the dark on the situation.**

If you miss class, you should contact a peer for notes on the missed lesson. If you anticipate an extended absence due to documentable major illnesses or other such rare occurrences, notify me immediately via email so that we can make arrangements for you to stay on track.

**Class Participation and Engagement**

Engagement is made up of at least three parts: presence, preparedness, and contribution. Just being in class does not mean you are engaged. You earn full points for a class period only by being on time and actively engaged. Active engagement will involve you asking/answering questions, listening actively, and engaging with tasks at hand. **If active engagement makes you uncomfortable or anxious, please come and speak to me so we can establish a different way of tracking your engagement score.**

You can be in class and earn no engagement credit if you are disengaged, napping, doing work for another class, or are rude or disruptive. Make sure you have all assignments completed and are ready for the day’s activities.

The following are some additional engagement guidelines:

* No earbuds during class. Believe me, I can see Airpods.
* Participate actively in all assigned work. AKA speak with your peers
* Contribute to large group discussions. Volunteer so I don’t have to cold call.
* Arrive at class on time and well prepared. Or shoot me an email if you’re running late.
* Complete online and typed homework either on their home computers or in one of the campus computer labs. "My computer broke" is not a valid excuse for missing an assignment.

**Nondiscrimination and Inclusivity**

In this class, there may be times when discussions of personal views and beliefs may occur organically. These conversations may stem from events that are current, cultural, religious, and/or political in nature. While there will be times disagreements will arise (with me or your peers), I will expect your comments and questions to be respectful and richly add to the conversation we are having. This class is one in which we will be actively learning and expanding our worldview and as such, this is a safe space in which to learn from each other. Each person, viewpoint, and experiences are to be respected and validated both in and out of the classroom.

**I cannot stress the importance I am placing on this nondiscrimination/inclusivity policy.** Discrimination will not be excused and conversations that veer into attacking, tearing down, disrespecting your peers or me will be cut short. This classroom will be a space for inclusivity and learning; diversity of thought and experience is encouraged and expected. For more information, refer to [GMU’s nondiscrimination policy](https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/non-discrimination-policy/) and [Mason’s diversity statement](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement) more in-depth:

“GMU is committed to providing equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or age. GMU shall adhere to all applicable state and federal equal opportunity/affirmative action statutes and regulations.”

**Contact Me**

I have given you my email address at the top of the syllabus. I do check my email regularly so please reach out to me when/if necessary. Per Mason policy, you must email me from your Mason account. If you do not send your email from your Mason account, I won’t respond.

Before you reach out to me, please do the following. I beg of you.

1. **Search for it**– Before you email me, check Blackboard, check the syllabus, and message a classmate. Chances are your question can be answered through one of those avenues.
2. **Google it**– Please don’t reach out with something that can be found on the first page of a search result. If you search and still can’t find something, or you need it further explained, then send an email explaining where you have looked to try to answer the question.
3. **Plan for it**– Reach out to me as soon as you feel yourself struggling. We can work together but the further on in the semester it gets, the less likely we will be able to work to actively change something. And don’t wait until the last second waiting for an extension that won’t be granted.

**Inclement Weather/Class Cancellation**

If the weather is poor, check the GMU website at <http://www.gmu.edu/> and look for a scrolling banner announcing delays or closings. You can also sign up for Mason Alert to have university closures and other critical information e-mailed or texted to you. If the university is closed for weather or other emergencies, check your Mason e-mail and class announcements on Blackboard for instructions and schedule modifications. If class is cancelled, we’ll do our best to stay on track and engaged even if our face-to-face meeting is disrupted. This could come in the form of an online activity, a YouTube video, or syllabus schedule adjustments.

**Statement on Plagiarism**

Plagiarism means using words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient.

**Outside Resources**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please visit the Office of Disability Services ([ODS](http://ds.gmu.edu/)) as all accommodations will be arranged through their office. Accommodations won’t be tendered until you have submitted the ODS Official accommodation letter to me.

English as a Second Language (ESL) students have resources reading available to them on campus. The Writing Center (below) has a specific, semester-long program to assist ESL students; information can be found [here](https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/tutoring/esl-writing-support). Workshops and Tutoring at the Language Resource Center in Mason’s Global Center are also available. To register for reading, speaking, and writing support, please visit their [website](https://intomason.mywconline.com/).

Writing Center tutors can help you at any stage of the writing process. In addition to free individual tutoring sessions (by appointment) at a variety of campus locations, they have an [outstanding website](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu) that offers resources for student writers. Appointments can be made for face-to-face meetings, online draft uploading known as OWLs, and video sessions. The Main Writing Center Office is located in Robinson B.

Librarians in the Fenwick and Johnson Center libraries (and at the libraries in Arlington and Prince Williams campuses) are available to help with any research help you may need. Be sure to show up with your assignment/specific questions or contact the library online. The [library’s website](http://library.gmu.edu) offers tutorials, research resources, and databases that we’ll use throughout the semester. Please familiarize yourself with the library website and source offerings.

Counseling and Psychological Services ([CAPS](http://caps.gmu.edu/)) offers free counseling and academic workshops. Services are provided by professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors. CAPS’ individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs are designed to enhance students’ personal experience and academic performance. In addition, CAPS is offering Therapist Assisted Online (TAO), a 24/7, online program providing support for mental health concerns, such as anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts.

The Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education ([ODIME](http://odime.gmu.edu/)) supports our diverse student and faculty population. The office is committed to the success of all members of the Mason community. Throughout the year, it sponsors a variety of programs for students and faculty. It works specifically with African Heritage, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian/Pacific American, Native American, and LGBTQIA+ populations.

The Office for Academic Integrity ([OAI](http://oai.gmu.edu/)) works to promote and support academic integrity throughout the university community by educating its members, fostering an environment where students can be recognized for high levels of integrity, creating opportunities for leadership and personal growth, and upholding the university honor code through a student-based honor committee. If plagiarism is ever a discussion that needs to be had, OAI will be contacted.

**Registrar’s Office and Important Dates**

Contact the registrar for information about student records and transcripts; registration, including adding or dropping the course; the Schedule of Classes or University Catalog; academic policies and degrees; student eligibility for NCAA athletic participation; Veteran’s educational benefits; and tuition status.

The full academic calendar and final exam schedule is available through the registrar’s website, but here are some key deadlines:

August 26: First Day of Classes

September 3: Last Day to Add Classes

September 9: Final Drop Deadline (with 100% tuition refund)

September 17: Final Drop Deadline (no tuition refund)

December 7: Last Day of Classes

**\*Note**: As of Fall 2018, students that drop after the 14th day of the semester will have a W on their transcript. Per the Registrar’s Office, “Grades of W are considered attempted hours, which means they are used to determine academic progress. Both the university’s standards for academic standing and Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for financial aid are affected by these attempted hours. W grades do not affect GPA.”  More details are available [here](http://registrar.gmu.edu/drop-withdrawal-deadlines-faqs/).

**Course Schedule:**

**\*Can be edited at any time throughout the semester**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week 1** | | | |
| **Jan 24** | **Introductions; Writing in general; craft decisions** |  |  |
| **Week 2** | | | |
| **Jan 31** | **Time** | [The Future Looks Good](https://pankmagazine.com/piece/the-future-looks-good/) by Lesley Nneka Arimah  [I Have a Time Machine](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/91496/i-have-a-time-machine) by Brenda Shaughnessy | 2 workshops |
| **Week 3** | | | |
| **Feb 7** | **Childhood** | [Go Ahead: Write About Your Parents, Again](https://brevitymag.com/craft-essays/go-ahead-write-about-your-parents-again/) by Tarn Wilson  [Introducing Mother Nature](https://brevitymag.com/nonfiction/introducing-mother-nature/) by Michael J. Soloway  [I Invite My Parents to a Dinner Party](https://poets.org/poem/i-invite-my-parents-dinner-party) by Chen Chen | 4 workshops |
| **Week 4** | | | |
| **Feb 14** | **Love** | [The Love of My Life](https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/321/the-love-of-my-life) by Cheryl Strayed  [Mountain Dew Commercial Disguised As A Love Poem](https://www.rattle.com/mountain-dew-commercial-disguised-as-a-love-poem-by-matthew-olzmann/) by Matthew Olzmann | 3 workshops |
| **Week 5** | | | |
| **Feb 21** | **Culture and Food** | [Simple Recipes](https://is.muni.cz/el/1421/podzim2016/SAKS11/um/Thien-Simple_Recipes.pdf) by Madeleine Thein  [Friday Night Mariachis](https://brevitymag.com/current-issue/mariachis/) by Kelly Shire  [Halcyon Kitchen](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/146237/halcyon-kitchen) by Kiandra Jimenez | 3 workshops |
| **Week 6** | | | |
| **Feb 28** | **Locale** | [Goodbye To All That](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxlbXRyYW5lcG9ydGZvbGlvfGd4OjFlYjE3ODYwOGY4MDk4ZTE) by Joan Didion  [Los Angeles](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58180/los-angeles-56d23c544a77e) by Ben Fama | 4 workshops |
| **Week 7** | | | |
| **March 6** |  | MIDTERM (No Class) |  |
| **Week 8** | | | |
| **March 13** |  | SPRING BREAK |  |
| **Week 9** | | | |
| **March 20** |  | Extended Spring Break |  |
| **Everything below follows Covid-19 impact** | | | |
| **Week 10** | | | |
| **March 27** | **Nature** | [St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves](https://1.cdn.edl.io/PNYONEfw15WBM6xTjqiCnP8sH3lKkHsH4bIy5kvG7GZfeByR.pdf) by Karen Russell  [My Love for Nature](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/90290/my-love-for-nature) by Fatimah Asghar |  |
| **Week 11** | | | |
| **April 3** | **Spirituality** | [The Invention of Familiars](https://brevitymag.com/nonfiction/the-invention-of-familiars/) by Kathryn Nuerenberger  [The God Who Loves You](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43386/the-god-who-loves-you) by Carl Dennis  [Salutations](https://pankmagazine.com/piece/salutations/) by Christopher Rose |  |
| **Week 12** | | | |
| **April 3** | **POV** | [Beginning, End](https://granta.com/new-voices-jessica-soffer/) by Jessica Soffer  [Kanye West Is Not Picasso](https://lithub.com/here-is-that-leonard-cohen-poem-about-kanye-west/) by Leonard Cohen |  |
| **Week 13** | | | |
| **April 10** | **Trauma** | [To The Jellyfish Who Stung](https://honeyandlimelit.wixsite.com/website/to-the-jellyfish-who-stung) by Jessica Beck Albert  [A Primer for the Punctuation of](http://www.pas.rochester.edu/~tobin/lj/2008/09/Foer.pdf)  [Heart Disease](http://www.pas.rochester.edu/~tobin/lj/2008/09/Foer.pdf) by Jonathan Safran Foer |  |
| **Week 14** | | | |
| **April 24** | **Form** | [Time and Distance Overcome](https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102235226?storyId=102235226#102237046) by Eula Biss  [The Fire Cycle](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56022/the-fire-cycle) by Zachary Schomburg |  |
| **Week 15** | | | |
| **May 1** | **Genre** | [Fable](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/30/fable-by-charles-yu) by Charles Yu  [The End of Science Fiction](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54641/the-end-of-science-fiction) by Lisel Mueller |  |
| **Final**  **portfolio** | **Due by May 8 at 11:59pm** | | |