syllabus

description. This semester we shall conceive of fiction writing as a possibility space, a locale just outside our comfort zones where we can and should take multiple chances in order to imagine in new ways, explore fresh strategies for finding and cultivating story ideas, re-view what it is we’re doing and why, what fiction is and why, and, at the end of the day, understand better what the great Samuel Beckett meant when he wrote: “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” While we shall sharpen such conventional fiction writing gestures as style, scene, and character development, we shall also question the often unconscious assumptions behind those gestures; attempt various methods of generating adventurous narratives that resist, rethink, and/or expand the very notion of rules in fiction writing; visit a number of important concerns/trends/obsessions in contemporary fiction; discuss marketplace (ir)realities; hone our critical reading and manuscript editing capabilities; and strengthen our problem-solving muscles from brainstorming to final revision—all in an honest, friendly, fierce workshop environment.

pre-requisite. Students must have taken intermediate fiction-writing (ENGL 2600 and 3510)—no exceptions.

content warning. Some of the writings in this course may include material that some students find offensive. Such material may include—but is not limited to—obscenity, profanity, representations of sexuality, violence, religion, politics, encounters with controversial issues in the media, etc. Students who feel that this may be a matter of concern should consider taking another class.

evaluation methods. Requirements will include: at least one finished story (7 pages); various in-class and out-of-class exercises (length to be determined by assignment); two written reviews (1 page each) of out-of-class public readings by established authors (usually on Wednesday or Thursday evenings); remarkably active class participation; reading and responding thoughtfully and respectfully to other students’ work and to that of established writers; attendance at a conference with the professor for a conversation about your writing; and one end-of-the-semester public reading of a new piece of your own fiction.

grading. Final grades will be calculated on a 100-point system:

25 finished short story
25 exercises
25 attendance, participation, responses
10 reviews (5 each)
10 public reading
05 small-group meeting

**letter grade values.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>84-86</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>80-83</td>
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<td>60-63</td>
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**attendance.** You are expected to attend all class sessions, to arrive on time and stay for the entire class session, to bring with you any texts under discussion, and to participate actively in our conversations.

**participation.** This course is discussion-based and highly interactive. You are required to be present in all senses of the word—i.e., genuinely involved. While active participation is essential, it is also essential that you respond respectfully, expressing differences of opinion without silencing, excluding, interrupting, or monopolizing. Failure to participate will hurt your grade considerably.

**absences, late arrivals, early departures.** Each unexcused absence after the second will lower your final grade for the course by one letter grade. Two late arrivals or early departures will count as one absence.

**due dates.** Assignments are due at the beginning of the class for which they were assigned.

**late assignments.** No late assignments will be accepted.

**success in the course.** Successful students in this course typically demonstrate a high degree of intellectual/creative curiosity, as well as an ability to respond positively to feedback from their instructor and peers. An “A” student not only does well on written assignments, but is prepared (not only has read the material, but actively brings insights and questions to the class), turns in assignments on time, and contributes meaningfully and consistently to discussion.

**accommodations.** Reasonable accommodations will be made for any documented disability. Please refer to the student handbook and the disabled student services office for information about providing documentation.

**writing & workshop format.** Unless otherwise instructed, please type all stories, exercises, reviews, etc. on plain white paper; double-space each page; leave one-inch margins on all sides. *When your story is up in a workshop, please make enough copies for everyone in the class and distribute those copies in class one week before the workshop.*

**required text.** *New American Stories*, ed. Ben Marcus; *Architectures of Possibility*, Lance Olsen.
classes & readings.

Aug.  23  Introductions. Young-Hai Chang & Heavy Industries: “Traveling to Utopia” (online).
        25  Young-Hai Chang & Heavy Industries: “Bust Down the Doors!” (online).


Sept.  1  AoP: 45-82 (one exercise: 77-78). New American Stories: “Hammer and Sickle.”


     22  No Class.


Oct.  4  AoP: 153-172 and 173-183 (one exercise: 165-166 or 177-178).
     6  No Class.

    11  Fall Break.
    13  Fall Break.

18  Workshops. AoP: 207-213.

25  Workshops. AoP: 244-251.
27  Workshops.

Nov.  1  Workshops.
     3  Workshops.

     8  Workshops.
     10 Workshops. Discuss & sign up for small group meetings.

15  Workshops. Discuss public fiction readings & what makes a successful one.
17  Workshops.
22  Workshops. Conclusions?
24  Thanksgiving Break.

29  Small group meetings.
Dec. 1  Small group meetings.

6  Public fiction readings.
8  Public fiction readings.

**Further Readings.** For those interested in doing further reading about the craft and possibilities of fiction writing, the following is a brief annotated handful of helpful works to get you started and keep you going.

Strunk, William C., and White, E.B. *Elements of Style.* If you ever need a clear clean explanation of correct usage and writing mechanics, this is the briefest and most helpful. You can find it online.