

# English 2250 Syllabus

**Instructor:** Lisa Bickmore

**Office:** AD 238A

**Hours:** T & R 11 a.m.-1 p.m.; other hours by appt. and/or online.

**Phone/voicemail:** 957-4686

**E-mail:** Lisa.Bickmore@slcc.edu

**Introduction to the Course:** 'Introduction to Imaginative Writing' courses have traditionally been taught with a focus on the practices and genres of creative writing. Typically, that meant you write some poetry, some fiction, and some of a third genre which often was drama and now more often is creative nonfiction. Genres have usually grounded a course like this, because imaginative writers have usually been practitioners of one (occasionally more) genre, the boundaries of which have been fairly stable.

In this class, we're going to try to liberate the creative writing class from these strictures by encouraging all sorts of play: to explore what poet Joyelle McSweeney calls the 'flexing and flexible fabric' that is language. To me, this means that you try to discover what language can do, without, at least at first, trying to meet the conventions of genre. During the first half of the semester, we're going to try

*Soundplay, wordplay & figurative language:* We will find out the ways jokes, riddles, puns, rhymes, and rhythms are woven through everything we make out of language. We'll also learn about figures made of language, some of which have to do with soundplay and wordplay, others of which focus on imaginative connections between things and ideas.

*Imitation & Parody:* We'll be trying to replicate or exaggerate interesting texts, to gain an expanded sense of what people can do with language, as well as to take the opportunity to enter a dialogue with other texts.

*Ghosts & Palimpsests:* We'll consider the ways that our own new texts can be inhabited by the spirits of other texts--other stories, poems, essays, television shows, advertisements, movies.

*Representing & Appropriating:* We'll consider the ways that writers, in creating characters or telling stories, seek to represent the world as they see it. We'll also talk about the ways that representation nearly always includes appropriation--seizing the opportunity to put one's imprint and definition on the contested terrain of the world.

*Graphic Texts:* We'll consider how all writing is graphic (see the etymology of the word graphic), but also consider the different ways that writers seek to

integrate the image and the word.

*Change & Metamorphosis*: The very act of writing transforms--a blank page into a page inscribed with markings. The root of *write* in English (different than most other Indo-European languages, apparently) is ultimately an Indo-European root that means 'to cut, write, or tear'--taking the parchment and making something new out of it. We'll consider how change and metamorphosis drive nearly every piece of writing.

*Publication*: We'll consider a spectrum of types of publication, ranging from conventional literary magazines to online journals, zines and e-zines, alternative print publications like broadsides and postcards, and distros. At the conclusion of the class, we'll produce a class publication of our own, to be hosted on the web.

After we've worked outside of genres in the above ways, we'll consider three genres: *poetry*, *fiction*, and *hybrid prose* genres such as prose poems, the lyric essay, and other species of non-fiction prose. While working in these genres, you'll be preparing a selection of the work you've done during the semester for a portfolio of your work, using the comments and feedback you've received from your peers and from me.

**General Education Portfolio:** Each student taking General Education courses at SLCC will maintain a General Education electronic portfolio. Instructors in every Gen Ed course will ask you to put at least one assignment from the course into your ePortfolio and accompany it with reflective writing. Remember, you build **one** ePortfolio and use it in all your Gen Ed courses.

In addition, your ePortfolio will allow you to include your educational goals, describe your extracurricular activities, and post your resume. When you finish your time at SLCC, your ePortfolio will then be a multimedia showcase of your educational experience. For detailed information including a Student ePortfolio Handbook, video tutorials on each ePortfolio platform, classes, locations and times of free workshops and locations of in person help, visit the website: [www.slcc.edu/gened/eportfolio](http://www.slcc.edu/gened/eportfolio) <<http://www.slcc.edu/gened/eportfolio>>

In English 2250, you will post your course portfolio to the General Education portfolio as the signature assignment for the course.

**Books:** You are not required to buy any books for this course. Virtually all of the readings will be online, which you will access through links keyed to each learning module. For the first paper, I will ask you to read one of a short list of

books and respond to it. For the second paper, I will ask you to do some research outside the links I've given you module to module.

**How the course works:** I've framed all this work in a series of learning modules. You can access these through the learning modules icon on the left hand side of the WebCT, or from the home page, where there will be an icon labeled Learning Modules. In each module, I include

*A list* of the learning outcomes for the module;

*A video presentation* of ideas and materials relevant to the module;

*Links* to readings;

*A discussion question* (linked to the discussion forum; these discussions have time limits, so you'll want to post your own comments and respond to your peers within that time frame);

*A writing assignment*; and

*A prompt* for posting your own writing assignments and those of your peers.

You should consider this weekly work--if you complete one learning module per week, you'll be on track to finish the course on time. You should plan to check the course site several times a week--to view the course material and do the reading; to post your own work; to participate in discussions and peer review.

In addition to doing the weekly work, you will write *two papers* for the class (see descriptions below).

### **Student roles and responsibilities in this course**

#### *A student in English 2250*

- will participate in weekly discussions in a timely fashion
- will read all assigned materials in order to participate knowledgeably and fully
- will write regularly (three or four times a week) in a writer's notebook
- will also write in response to weekly writing assignments and post these assignments in a timely fashion (within the specified time frame)
- will confer twice during the semester with the instructor (using e-mail, phone, or chat--or face to face, if you prefer)
- will contact the instructor if s/he has questions about the course or about assignments
- will read and respond to the work of peers with diligence, care, and thoughtfulness, and in a timely manner (within the specified time frame)

- will use the response of instructor and peers to revise her/his work meaningfully.

## **Instructor roles and responsibilities in this course**

*You can expect that your instructor*

- will post high quality course materials that will stimulate you as a writer and help you to learn more about imaginative writing
- will respond to your writing with useful and timely commentary
- will respond to your communications, such as e-mails or phone messages, in a timely manner
- will treat you and your writing thoughtfully and respectfully.

'Responding to your writing in a timely manner' normally means 'within a week (sometimes a little longer) of your having posted it.'

'Responding to your communications in a timely manner' normally means within a day.

Treating your writing 'thoughtfully and respectfully' does not mean that I will not offer criticisms of it. It does mean, though, that I believe that every student's writing deserves to be taken on its own terms. If I suggest that something about your piece of writing doesn't work well, you should understand that I mean that, from my perspective as an experienced reader and writer, I see it that way. Your writing is always yours to do with as you will. I hope that you will take my comments as coming from a great deal of experience, as well as from my sincere desire to see you reach your own goals as a writer.

**Writer's Notebook:** I will ask you to keep a writer's notebook or journal, and I will ask you to submit it electronically twice during the semester, so that I can give you some feedback on the kinds of writing you're doing there (as well as to make sure that you're doing it).

**Consultations:** I will also ask you to consult with me twice during the semester about your writing--once early in the semester and once toward the end, when you're doing the work of putting your portfolio together. These consultations can take several forms. You can schedule a time to chat; you and I can have a conversation on the phone; we can have an e-mail consultation; and, of course,

you're always welcome to schedule a face-to-face meeting with me, if you prefer and if that's convenient for you.

**Audio comments and e-mail:** I will sometimes, maybe even often, audio record my comments on your work and send it to you as an mp3 file. This mp3 file will come to you attached to any e-mail, which you will receive in your MyPage e-mail. I will try to alert the class when I have sent a batch of comments, but it's your responsibility to check your college e-mail regularly, and to let me know if for some reason you cannot open the mp3 file I send. Generally, it's an easy fix, but there can be no fix if I don't know that the file didn't work. Keep checking your e-mail and let me know.

### **Grading Breakdown:**

Weekly participation in discussion 125 pts.

Weekly drafts and peer review 125 pts.

Paper 1 100 pts.

Paper 2 100 pts.

Portfolio 350 pts. [at your second consultation, I'll ask you to submit a preliminary portfolio for my review and response; this should help you prepare the final portfolio.]

Participation in the class publication 100 pts.

Consultations (two during the semester) 50 pts. each, total of 100 pts.

**Paper #1:** Read one of the books listed below. Summarize the book's major ideas. What is the most valuable advice you found in this book for you as a writer?

Wild Mind, Natalie Goldberg

On Writing, Stephen King

Writing Down the Bones, Natalie Goldberg

Bird by Bird, Anne Lamott

The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life, Julia Cameron

You can easily find these books in libraries and bookstores, as they are popular guides to the writing life.

Your paper should be about two to three pages, should cite from the text and should be documented using MLA format. You should also draw from your own experience in discussing your reading of the book you selected.

**Paper #2:** Investigate one of the means of publication we discussed in the module on publication: a print literary journal, an online literary journal, a zine, book publishing, or a distro. In your research, you should find out

- something about the scope of the means of publication you've investigated.
- Who does it reach and not reach?
- Who does it include and exclude in the publication process?
- What advantages does the form of publication you've investigated have, and what disadvantages, compared to what you know about other means of publication?

You should carefully explain what you found in your research, which should be as thorough as you can make it. You should cite liberally from the contents of the literary publication in order to give the reader a sense of the publication. Your paper should be about three or four pages long.