WRTNG-UG 1546 Content is Key; Editing Short Fiction, Spring, 2016
Room: 1 Washington Pl, rm. 601, Steven Rinehart, sjr7@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Weds 5:00-6:15 Gallatin 506

Description
This class explores the craft of writing, concentrating on the content of fiction—what a story or chapter is ‘about.’ Half of each class is devoted to craft exercises and the remaining half to a traditional workshop approach to discussing student submissions. By the end of the semester we’ll be able to talk intelligently about how you can decide what belongs in a story or chapter and what doesn’t.

Course Objectives/Learning Goals
We will cover some very technical aspects of fiction writing (central conflict, plot, central and supporting characters, etc.) as well as provide a critical forum for student stories. We will address each of the following with the goal of giving students practical techniques for editing and improving their writing:

- What is central conflict?
- What is a central character?
- How is conflict different than plot?
- How does setting reflect the central conflict?
- Why do supporting characters exist?

I use a certain technique for editing stories that I'll explain in the first few classes. Most of the discussion during the semester will draw on that technique, at least as a starting point. Most classes will begin with a craft discussion and discussion of the assignments (see below), followed by a free-form workshop of student work during the second half of the period.

Reading:
There is no required text; occasional outside reading will be assigned from literary websites and online magazines.

Assignments:
Reading/Writing Tasks: Most weeks I'll assign a short homework task related to the discussion for that week: a short response, a reflection, etc. All of those responses must be emailed (i.e., no longhand) and are mandatory.

Original Fiction: Each student must turn in at least 25 pages of original short fiction during the course of the semester, consisting of no less than 2 separate stories or chapters. No revisions will count toward this page requirement. I will read and return, in addition to this requirement, one revision of a piece submitted to the class.

Grading/Attendance/Participation:
This class is a workshop--participation is essential for a passing grade. Every student is expected to offer commentary in the workshop setting on every piece of student work discussed, as well as actively participating in the small group discussions. I will be monitoring participation closely.

Grading weight:
- Weekly tasks completed: 25%
- Workshop participation: 50%
- Quality of original work: 25%
The student's grade will be weighted as shown above, then any unexcused absences will be deducted from the participation portion. Unexcused absences include any absence without prior notification, if possible. If you are ill, do not come to class, just remember that missing one class means missing a week of class. Students missing class for any reason are responsible for gathering the materials required for the subsequent class.

Conferences:
I strongly urge every student to meet with me once during the semester, and I can generally accommodate times outside my office hours with advance notice. There is no requirement for a conference, unless a student submits a revised piece, in which case we'll discuss the piece in conference.

Schedule:
This class builds from basic, stripped-down concepts and builds practice and understanding through homework, reading, and classroom exercises. The following is the order of topics, which may change as the class progresses:

Week 1: Introductions, Expectations
Week 2: What does it mean to say what writing is ‘about?’ Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Reading assignment: “Adina, Astrid, Chipewee, Jasmine,” Matthew Klam.
Week 3: Central conflict, how to define. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. First workshop of student work.
Week 4: Difference between central conflict and plot. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 5: Central characters. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 6: Central characters, cont’d. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 7: Supporting characters. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 8: Spring break
Week 9: Return to Plot. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 11: Setting, cont’d. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 12: Details, major. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 13: Details, minor. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 14: Symbolism. Group discussion and editing assignment from homework. Workshop.
Week 15: Review; final stories.

Electronic devices:
No cellphones are permitted, and I discourage the use of laptop computers during discussions unless they are used to type up group responses.

Academic Integrity:
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)