RHET 3160 Course (3 credit hours)
Fall 2017
The American University in Cairo
The Department of Rhetoric and Composition

Course information:
- Rhet 3160, Fiction Writing
- Sun/Wed. 2-3:15
- Hatem C121
- Prerequisite: 3070

Instructor information:
- Gretchen McCullough
- gretchen@aucegypt.edu
- X2031
- Waleed P106, near the Writing Center
- Office Hours: 11:30-2:00 and by appt.

Course Description: This course focuses on the craft and discipline of fiction writing. Students study writers in the Arab and Western literary tradition, and from that study, they learn the fundamentals of rhetorical and literary strategies in fiction, understand how to transform small ideas from daily life into fiction, consider how their cultural background affects how they tell stories, and develop a broadened familiarity with cultures different from their own. Students will also learn how to critique other students’ stories in workshops and how to revise and develop their own work.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
Students will be able to:
- Analyze and evaluate a variety of fictional texts
- Understand how cultural context can impact rhetorical techniques in storytelling
- Identify various rhetorical strategies in fiction: point of view, setting, plot, dialogue, description and character
- Write fully developed fictional narratives that engage readers

Course Material:

Exercises from these texts will be used in the course. Readings will be scanned and available on Blackboard.


Goldberg, Natalie. Writing Down the Bones. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1986. (A number of short exercises which inspire students to use their memory and imagination. These are good starting points for stories.)


Carlson, Ron. Ron Carlson Writes a Story. St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 2007. (Essays about how details from daily life can be transformed into fiction.)
Readings for the course: Students will study a variety of writers from the Middle East and from other parts of the world.


Course Outline:

Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

Week 1: Sept. 6th. Introduction to the course. Writing as a Process. Generating Ideas. Keeping a Notebook. Finding the Story: Exercises from Natalie Goldberg and Janet Burroway. Exercise #1 due on Obsessions and/or other Exercise from Burroway. (For Sept. 10th.)


Week 3: Sept. 17th & 20th. Characters in Movement: Read Ibrahim Aslan’s story “The Little Girl in Green” and excerpt from Nile Sparrows. Also read Alia Mamdouh’s “Presence of the Absent Man.” Exercise #2b. on a Character in Movement. (For Sept. 17th.) Students choose a writer for their Book Talk. They consult with the instructor. Sept. 21st: Islamic New Year.


Week 6: October 8th & 11th. Point-of-View: Who is telling the story? Why? Read the excerpt from Sonallah Ibrahim’s “The Committee.” And Mohamed Barrada’s “Life by Installments.” Exercise #5 on Point-of-View. (For October 8th.) Students identify a well-known story or fairy tale and tell the story from an unpopular character's point-of-view.
Week 7: October 15th & 18th. Place: Where are we? Read the excerpt from Ibrahim Abdel Meguid’s novel No One Sleeps in Alexandria and the excerpt from AbdelRahman Munif’s Endings. Exercise#6: Using objects in a place. Objects are linked to character. (For October 18th.)


Week 9: October 29th & November 1st. Mini-Workshops in class on October 29th. The Significant Detail. Read Emily Nasrallah’s “A House Not Her Own” and the excerpt from Hanna Mina’s Fragment of Memory and the excerpt from Naguib Mafouz’s Palace Walk.

Week 10: November 5 & 8th. The Importance of Revision. How to revise. Students have conferences with the instructor about how they might revise their work. Excerpts from Charles Baxter and Ron Carlson. Conferences on Stories.


Week 14: Book Talks for both lessons, December 3 & 6. Oral Presentations.

Week 15: December 10th: Practical tips on Publication. Poets and Writers Magazine. Local possibilities for publication. How to distinguish which magazines are suitable for your work. Finding your target audience. Last Day of Class, December 13th. Student read an excerpt from their revision due on Dec. 13th.

*The final project for this course will be the revision of one of the short stories.

Please note that all Upper Division courses require a full semester project (written or multi-modal) that demonstrates all course learning outcomes.

Selected upper division course papers/projects are evaluated by the Department’s Assessment Committee using the following criteria:

- **Content**
  - **Development** – employs critical and creative thinking skills for content definition, analysis and problem-solving
  - **Coherence** – demonstrates effective organization and sequencing of ideas to address a clear rhetorical situation

- **Presentation**
  - **Conventions** – applies genre-appropriate document layout, citation style, and discourse
  - **Language Accuracy** – observes grammar, mechanics, voice and tone as appropriate to the genre
Grades and Grading in this Course
A. Available Grades in the Course (Note: D- and IP grades are not available in this course)

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* “I” grades only available under very rare circumstances.

B. Grade Breakdown:

- **Low-Stakes: Short Exercises**: 10%
- **Workshop Critiques**: 10%
- **Book Talk**: 10%
- **Story #1**: 10%
- **Story #2**: 20%
- **Radical Revision of Story #1 or 2 (Final Project)**: 25%
- **& One page reflection on the Creative Process**: 5%
- **Participation**: 10%

= 100%

Descriptions of Assignments:

**Low-Stakes Short Exercises.** (10%) These exercises serve as starting points, exploration and practice of fictional techniques. They are important for learning the craft, but will not be judged as finished pieces. Students will work on a number of short exercises in-class and out-of-class. This is an important part of the course. The exercises will emphasize a particular fictional rhetorical strategy such as description, character, dialogue, setting. Some of these exercises may be the genesis for more work or may unearth an issue which the students would like to explore further.

**Sample Fiction Assignments:**

- **Finding the Story.** The Writing Process. Making Lists. Make a list of all your obsessions: colors, television shows, movies, books, pet peeves. Things that annoy you about your family. From Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones*.


- **Developing Character.** Make an object or an animal have the thoughts of a human being. What do they like? Dislike? Fear? What are their dreams? What do they own? What would they never own? Write a monologue from the point of view of the object or the animal. From Larraine Herring, *Writing Begins with the Breath*.

- **Movement:** Write a 400 word scene in which a person washes a car. Or does some other activity. You must describe exactly how the person does the activity, but do not reveal his
thoughts. The pattern of the person’s character will emerge from the way he performs the activity. From Ron Carlson, *Ron Carlson Writes A Story*.

**Time and Place**: Where are we? List ten objects in a character’s bedroom or private space. Make these objects as specific as possible. Three of these objects are important to the story. One of these objects the character does not want anyone else to see. Using your list, describe why the objects are important to understanding the psychology of the character. Writing Exercise from Burroway’s *A Guide to Narrative Craft*.

**The Significant Detail**: Fear means…Risk means…Hate means…Come up with concrete details from ordinary life to define these abstractions. Which one makes you the most uncomfortable? Write as much as you can in that direction. Adapted from Larraine Herring, *Writing Begins with the Breath*.

**Point-of-View**: Choose a well-known story: a historical event, news, or a fairy tale. List the characters of the story. Choose the character who is the most unpopular or repugnant to you and try to tell the story from his or her point-of-view. For example, try writing the story from the king’s point-of-view in A Thousand and One Nights. Adapted from Burroway’s chapter on point-of-view in *A Guide to Narrative Craft*.

*Any number of these short exercises could be developed into longer stories, depending on what interests the student.*

**Workshop Critiques. (10%)**
An important part of the workshop is participation. Students must come prepared with their comments on the manuscripts and with written critiques. Critiques should include a discussion of the rhetorical strategies which we are studying: character, point-of-view, setting. Students will be given guiding questions and instructions on how to write a good critique, which includes an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Every student is required to write a one page critique of each story that we critique. *I should be given a copy. A careful reading of others’ work will help us focus the discussion in class. I may adopt a mini-workshop approach if the class is big.*

**Book Talk. (10%)**
Each student will choose a fiction writer with the approval of the instructor, preferably a writer he is unfamiliar with. The student will read a selection of the writers’ work. For example, he might read a novel and a selection of short stories by the same writer. On the day of the presentation, the student will recommend a particular book of this writer to the class. (*Why, for example, did this particular writer interest me? Why is this writer significant in terms of a literary tradition or even in popular culture? Why is this book recommended to others?*) Students will be given guidelines for the oral presentations.

**Story 1 (10%) & Story 2 (20%)**: Using any of their short exercises, students will develop their ideas into full length stories of 7-10 pages or more.

**Revision of either Story 1 or Story 2, Final Project. (25%)**: After considering the feedback of the class and the teacher, students will radically revise either story. The revision should
not be cosmetic, but a “rethinking” or “reseeing” of the initial idea. This will be the final project of the course.

**One Page Reflection on Creative Process.** (5%) At the end of the semester, the student will also be required to write a reflection of what difficulties or challenges they encountered in the creative process during the semester.

**Rubric for Participation.** (10%) Pay attention: For the workshop to be successful, students must be committed to their writing and to the other writers in the class. This means that the same principles apply as in other courses: consistent, daily participation. Participation means offering engaged, insightful comments in the class and on other students’ work. Note the following: **Punctuality:** I will take attendance at the beginning of class. If you are ten minutes late, you can be marked absent. **Mobile phones:** Your phone should be on silent. If you keep texting during the class, I will either take your phone away or ask you to leave the class. **Leaving the classroom:** Students should be prepared to stay in the classroom the entire time. If you leave without my permission, I will mark you absent. **Impoliteness or a rude attitude:** Students should treat their teachers and other students with respect. Students should not talk while others are talking or act insensitively toward others. Students should critique other students’ stories in the same way they would like to be treated.

**Instructor Policies and Expectations:**

**Formatting for Stories:** You will need to double-space your stories. 1” margins. Standard 12 point type. Use headers. You will not need to worry about MLA or APA since the work is original.

**Late Work:** Ten points a day for every day you are late, whatever your excuse. See university policy on attendance. Attending and participating in class is key to your success in the course.

**Turnitin.com:** All major assignments must be submitted to Turnitin.com.

**Conferences:** You will have conferences with me on the major assignments. I am available to meet with you about developing your creative ideas or any other concerns you might have. Make an appt. since I am not on campus every day. I will be in my office during office hours Sun/Wed. 11:30-2:00.

**Final Grades:**

C. **Explanation of Final Grades:** I will available twenty-hours after the grades are posted, online. After I send you a detailed breakdown of the grades, I will not keep answering.

For additional information about grading and to get answers to questions like

- How will I know at what level (or grade) I am performing during the semester?
- I’m having trouble completing all the work by the end of the semester. What options do I have?
- Can I appeal a specific assignment grade?
- Can I appeal the final course grade given to me by the faculty?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.
Attendance, Absences, and Tardiness
Students are are highly encouraged to attend all classes, as regular class attendance can significantly help a student do better in the class. A student is not allowed to miss more than six classes without severe consequences, up to and including, failing the course. Also, missing more than 10 minutes of a class counts as half of an absence and missing more than 30 minutes of a class counts as a full absence.

There are many important additional guidelines related to this area. To read complete details and to get answers to questions like
- Who is responsible for keeping attendance?
- What happens if I miss a class? What happens if I exceed six absences?
- What is the policy on tardiness or missing part, but not all, of a class session?
- What happens if I have a medical excuse, family crisis, or extracurricular activity?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Attendance.aspx/FAQ

Academic Integrity
In accordance with the AUC’s efforts to promote a culture of academic integrity on campus, the Rhetoric and Composition Department strictly enforces the academic integrity principles found in AUC's Code of Academic Integrity. Instructors are trained to ensure students are doing their own work; additionally, students must also use Turnitin.com for all drafts of major assignments. Violations of academic integrity can lead to serious consequences, including failing the course and having notes about violations added to your permanent transcript.

For further details about academic integrity and to get answers to questions such as
- How do I know what is legitimate borrowing from a source and what is plagiarism?
- How will the instructor know if I have copied my paper from the Internet, had the paper written by a professional writing service, or tried some other tricky thing?
- What are the consequences of violations of academic integrity?
- What is Turnitin.com and how do I use it?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Academic_Integrity.aspx

Dropping, Failing and Repeating Courses
While we hope that you complete and pass your RHET course, sometimes disruptions do happen, and students, at times, drop or fail RHET courses. There are a number of important policies that affect these situations.

For further details about dropping, failing, and repeating and to get answers to questions such as
- I’m thinking about dropping my course. What should I do?
- What happens if I miss the drop deadline?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Dropping_Failing_Repeating_Courses.aspx/FAQ
Special Needs, Concerns, or Additional Support
The Department of Rhetoric and Composition provides practical support to all students in a fair and equitable manner. Students who have special needs or concerns about the class should talk to their instructors the first week of classes or as soon as possible. AUC complies with the American Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

For further details about special needs, concerns or additional support and to get answers to questions such as:

- I have a documented special need. What should I do?
- I feel that I will need some additional support. What should I do?
- I have a concern about the instructor or the course. What should I do?
- What does the writing center offer? How can the writing center help me?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Special_Needs.aspx

Research in RHET
Research is highly valued at AUC, and students are encouraged to participate in research during their time at AUC, however, research, both on-campus and off-campus, MUST comply with a number of important policies and regulations for security, legal, and ethical reasons. Students who plan to do ANY on-campus research involving people (surveys, interviews, etc) or ANY off-campus research of any nature MUST receive approval PRIOR to starting their research. To begin this process a student should discuss their plans with their instructor as well as be familiar with the policies found at the link below.

For important information about the research process, ethical research, extracurricular research opportunities, and to get answers to questions like

- When I conduct a survey or an interview, can I collect data from subjects off-campus?
- Do I need any approvals if I collect data from subjects on-campus?
- What is the IRB and what is CAPMAS?
- What presentation or publication opportunities do I have?

Visit the following link or scan this QR code

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Research.aspx

Scope of this Syllabus and Contingency Plans
This syllabus includes all written content, graphic displays, as well as the content referenced in the links/QR codes included in this document. Any student who continues in the course is expected to understand and abide by all policies, guidelines and schedules mentioned therein. However, in the event of the suspension of normal university classes, the initial plan is to continue with the course as long as there is internet accessibility in Egypt, but this may require adjustment to policies, guidelines, and schedules. Thus, in the case of the suspension of classes, please check your email and course website for details about how the course will continue.