

Cornell College Department of English and Creative Writing Distinguished Visiting Writer Courses

The Distinguished Visiting Writer Program, established in 2008-2009, is made possible by donor support for the Cornell Creative Writing Program, and enables us to supplement our regularly offered creative writing courses with OCAAT courses offered by distinguished visitors. Each year, we invite two nationally and internationally distinguished poets, fiction writers, journalists, and/or creative nonfiction writers to participate. These courses are part of an energetic and thriving creative writing program that also includes a published writers reading series, student literary and creative writing organizations, and the student-run literary magazine, *Open Field*.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS 2011-12

ANNE SANOW:

382. Advanced Topic: Distinguished Visiting Fiction Writer Seminar: Linking Stories, Story Cycles, Making Stories. An individual short story is a fully realized art form that can immerse the reader into the life of a character and vividly depict a particular place and time. Other short stories do more: they "talk" to related stories, creating story cycles, linked story collections, and novels-in-stories. From Sherwood Anderson's classic book *Winesburg, Ohio* to Elizabeth Strout's recent Pulitzer-prize winning collection *Olive Kitteridge*, writers continue to experiment with ways to create links between stories—thus creating a larger fictional world.

In this course we will be reading like writers, discussing examples of linked stories to see what makes them tick: How do writers use classic elements of fictional craft such as character, dialogue, setting, plot, and structure to put stories in conversation with one another? What goes into a link, and what can be left out? Just what is a "short story," and how do linked stories defy some expectations? We'll put our analysis into practice through creative exercises, which will allow you to generate your own set of linked stories. You will discuss your stories in the workshop component of the seminar and in individual meetings with the instructor. After revision, you will have created your own linked story cycle suitable for submission to student literary journals. Prerequisite: writing-designated course (W). (Fine Arts) ANNE SANOW

WENDY CALL:

383. Advanced Topic: Distinguished Visiting Creative Non-Fiction Writer Seminar: Literary Nonfiction: Legend and Lyric in Linn County. To begin, we will learn the basics of "immersion reporting" as we delve deeply into the places, people and parables of Linn County. Whether it's the storefront you pass by every day or a back road you have never before traveled, you will find a story there. Using all our senses, along with notebooks, laptops, audio recorders and cameras, we'll carry as much of Linn County as we can back to the classroom.

After we immerse ourselves in someone else's world, we will render those worlds on the page. We'll borrow tools from the world of journalism to gather our stories, but we will work in the

world of lyric nonfiction to tell those stories. The personal essay, collage essay, and prose poem are the containers that will hold our experiences. Through it all, we will read, read, read from masters of these nonfiction subgenres.

Once we're satisfied with the legend and lyric we have created on the page, we'll recast our work as oral stories (presented at a reading), digital stories (published on the web with images and sound) and/or recorded audio essays (for podcast or radio distribution). Class time will be devoted, in roughly equal portions, to discussion of reading, in-class writing exercises, and peer review. Expect to read (and reread) a lot, to write (and rewrite) even more, and to experience (and re-experience) Linn County in new and surprising ways. Students from *all* fields of study are most welcome. Prerequisite: writing-designated course (W). (Fine Arts) CALL

2010-11

ANGIE ESTES:

383. Advanced Topic: Distinguished Visiting Poet Seminar: The Language of Beauty: Poetry and the Visual Arts. What is the language of beauty? When you wander through a museum and are struck by a particularly wonderful painting, or when your gaze is captured by a marvelous building, sculpture, or photograph, how do you convey what you see or feel to other people? Since Homer first tried to describe Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, poets have sought to capture art via the written word. This process is called "ekphrasis": the verbal or linguistic expression of visual forms. In ekphrastic poems, one medium of art—language—tries to relate to another; in this way the poem highlights, in a rhetorically vivid way, the object of interest. The ekphrastic poem expresses a new experience of the visual work of art so that the painting or sculpture, the photograph or building, comes to life by means of the poem's meditation on and presentation of it. Our class will explore this fascinating genre of literary creation.

In "The Language of Beauty," we will read poems and discuss works of art both ancient and modern—from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," to Auden's "Musee des Beaux-Arts," to Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo," to contemporary poems such as Larry Levis' "Sensationalism" (based on a photograph by Joseph Koudelka) to the "self-portraits" of Jorie Graham's *The End of Beauty*. Our discussions of the myriad meanings generated by images in both the visual and the verbal arts will be stimulated by rich and provocative essays on subjects ranging from Michelangelo, Velasquez and Delacroix to the history of photography and film. Such readings will help us to explore new ways of thinking about the intriguing relation between verbal and iconic representation. Texts may include readings from W.J.T. Mitchell's *The Language of Images*, James Heffernan's *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, John Hollander's *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*, and John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*.

Throughout our time together, we will be writing and workshopping poems composed in the midst of, and in conversation with, the ideas generated by these texts and our discussions of them. Our course will be part creative writing workshop and part literature seminar, and our aim will be to produce our own poetry—ekphrastic poems—in response to works of visual art. In so doing, each student will also learn to transform his or her poetry (through collective critique and

revision) into poems that are engaging and illuminating works of art in their own right.
Prerequisite: writing-designated course (W). (*Fine Arts*) ESTES

GARY GILSON:

382. Distinguished Visiting Journalist Seminar: Journalism From the Bottom Up. Most reporting depends upon official sources, who are too often self-serving. Rather than learning about reality from so-called representatives of the citizenry, students will immerse themselves in reporting and writing about the daily lives of unemployed and underemployed people in the local economy. Readings may include: *The Elements of Journalism*, by Kovach and Rosenstiel; *Nickel and Dimed*, by Barbara Ehrenreich; *Levels of the Game*, by John McPhee, and assorted examples of great non-fiction writing. Basics of reporting, writing and ethics will be part of the fabric of the course. Lively participation in class discussions encouraged. Prerequisite: writing-designated course (W). (*Humanities*) GILSON

2009-10

SARAH PRINEAS:

382. Advanced Topic: Distinguished Visiting Fiction Writer Seminar: The Protagonist Must Protag: The Intersection of Plot and Character in Children's Literature. This course is part creative writing workshop and part literature seminar. The most memorable characters in children's literature, from Laura Ingalls to Max the King of the Wild Things to Bilbo Baggins, have been protagonists who protag; that is, they are characters who act to achieve their goals, thereby generating plot. We will read selections from children's literature and develop an understanding of what protagonists do and who they are. We will also discuss the particular importance of "protagging" in children's literature. In turn, we will use this knowledge in our own writing projects. The literature section of the course will include large-group discussions of key literary and critical texts. The creative writing section will include large-group discussion, peer-review, and small-group meetings with the instructor. Prerequisite: writing-designated course (W). (*Fine Arts*) PRINEAS

MICHAEL MARTONE:

383. Advanced Topic: Distinguished Visiting Creative Non-Fiction Writer Seminar: Reading and Writing the Rural. What is a farm? What is a farmer? What is food? Presently under 2% of the American population produces the food and fiber for the remaining 98+%. How do popular images of the rural landscape--the barn, the silo, the windmill, the weather, the flock, the bank foreclosure--square with the political, economic, aesthetic, and practical realities of agriculture? The readings in fiction and essays will offer various answers to these and other questions.

First, you will learn much about contemporary rural life and agricultural practices. The landscape that we will study though real is often a hidden one from our predominantly urban and suburban point of view. You will gain practical knowledge of agronomy, animal husbandry, food production and distribution, etc. At the least, you should come away with a working vocabulary

of the specialized terms unique to farming.

Second, you will read a variety of writing in prose about the farm and rural life, all of it written within the last forty years. We will discuss the differences in these genres and how each works to convey its message.

Third, we will examine through your writing and the recorded reactions of our authors, the sweeping changes in the rural landscape and in farming over the last half-century, and at the same time take measure of our held beliefs and images of agriculture and how they differ from the portraits created by the authors and our own newly formed opinions. Several dramatic themes will emerge. You will note the old antagonism between farm and city but will also delve into questions of education, politics, history, and environment. You will also reexamine your notions of progress, your relationship to family, to the animals and plants that sustain you, to physical labor and work in general, and finally to your feelings about death.

In this seminar, you will learn about farms, learn about various images and techniques of imaging that landscape, and teach yourself the connections you have to the rural and how and why those connections are in flux. Writing will include daily and weekly responses in a variety of forms, and will be discussed in hypoxic workshops, pin-ups, and in individual meetings with the instructor. Prerequisite: writing-designated course (W). (*Fine Arts*) MARTONE

2008-09

ROSS GAY:

381. **Advanced Topic: Distinguished Visiting Poet Seminar: Representing Bodies.** In this course, we will examine the political and ethical ramifications of representing bodies (our own included), particularly bodies in pain (though also bodies in love and bodies at rest), in poetry. As such, the course will be framed with a few theoretical texts—excerpts from Elaine Scarry's "The Body in Pain," Susan Sontag's "Regarding the Pain of Others," and Sadiya Hartman's "Scenes of Subjection"—in addition to the work of several poets. We will be writing and workshoping poems composed in the midst of, and in conversation with, the ideas generated by these texts and our discussions of them. The class will be about half discussion of these texts and half workshop. Prerequisites: writing-designated course (W). (*Fine Arts*) GAY

MIKE CONKLIN:

382. **Advanced Topic in Creative or Media Writing: Distinguished Visiting Feature Writer Seminar.** Want a ticket to lifelong learning? In this course, you will learn the craft of feature writing, which, unlike straight news reporting, allows the author more creativity to tell stories. Feature writing starts with, first and foremost, finding and having good ideas; it depends on fundamentals that turn these ideas into articles appealing to audiences. Through listening, reading, research, reporting, and, of course, writing, you will be encouraged to stretch your thinking. We will hone these skills and apply them inside and outside the classroom. There will be opportunities to get work published. The ultimate goal is that you improve your writing, a

benefit throughout life whether it is applied to professional journalism, newsletter writing, journaling, or other forms of communication requiring analytical skills developed in this class.
Prerequisite: writing-designated course (W). (*Humanities*) CONKLIN