

English 126: Creative Writing and Social Justice
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As soon as we lay our hand on the pen, or the computer keyboard, we cease to be the helpless victims of whatever it was that enslaved and diminished us before we began to write. Not the slaves of our predicament nor of our private anxieties; not of the "official narrative" of our country, nor of fate itself. We write. The world is not closing in on us.
--David Grossman, "Writing in the Dark"

We all know that atrocities have taken place on an unprecedented scale in the last one hundred years. Such monstrous acts have come to seem almost normal. It becomes easier to forget than to remember. Such forgetfulness is willful and isolating; it drives wedges between the individual and the collective fate to which he or she is forced to submit. [Poems of witness] will not permit us diseased complacency. They come to us with claims that have yet to be filled, as attempts to mark us as they themselves have been marked.
--Carolyn Forché, "Against Forgetting"

Course Description

This course will explore the intersections of creative writing, social justice, and vocation with special attention to issues of poverty and homelessness, violence against women, and war and genocide. Through reading and writing poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction, students will imagine the lives of others and the injustices they face, and through guest speakers and a brief community placement, students will learn about lives of meaning and compassion. This course is part of the Core Vocation Pathway.

Core Arts Learning Objectives (CALO):

1. Students will create and interpret art, individually and collaboratively (Knowledge, Communication, and Collaboration)
2. Through artistic creation students will express knowledge and understanding of the world, humanity, and themselves (Knowledge and Complexity)
3. Students will analyze and critique art to inform and inspire their own creative practice (Complexity and Communication)

Course Learning Objectives

1. Students will be exposed to a range of vocations that incorporate creative writing and social justice.
2. Students will read, analyze, and critique poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction with themes of social justice.
3. Students will learn and practice a range of methods of generating raw material, drafting poems, short fiction, and creative nonfiction, and revising.

4. Students will become informed about several major issues of social justice and will practice transforming information into poems, short fiction, and creative nonfiction.
5. Students will learn that creative writing has a social function, that it engages people in important social, political, and ethical issues and that it offers opportunities for personal growth.
6. Students will work with underserved populations at local schools or a shelter teaching two creative writing units.
7. Students will collaborate in small group activities, including workshops.

Texts

David Elliot Cohen, *What Matters: The World's Preeminent Photojournalists and*

Thinkers Depict Essential Issues of Our Time

Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*

Frances Driscoll, *The Rape Poems*

Carolyn Forché, *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poems of Witness*

Mike McGarvin, *On the Level: Walking the Streets with Mike McGarvin*

Mike McGarvin, *Papa Mike*

Peter Orner, *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*

Reading

In order to write engaging poetry and prose, writers read—a lot. You will read two kinds of texts: 1) creative works which will explore specific social justice issues and serve as models for good poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction and 2) analytical works which will inform you about important social issues. These works will provide some of the content for your creative writing. Read assigned texts carefully. For every reading assignment, there will be a half page Discussion Preparation Response (See handout for details.) (CALO 1 and 3)

Guest Speakers and Reflection Papers

Three guest speakers will teach you about the range of vocations that incorporate social justice and creative writing.

1. Kevin Fagan, San Francisco Chronicle reporter and author of a three year series on homelessness for which he and his photography partner received the James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism.
2. Dana Teen Lomax, poet and prose writer, who has taught poetry at Napa State Hospital, Marin Juvenile Hall, and San Quentin Prison.
3. Forrest Hamer, poet, psychologist, and psychoanalyst

There will be a two page reflection paper due after each guest speaker. (See handout for details.) (CALO 3)

Writing

Through weekly writing assignments of creative pieces-- poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction-- you will learn how to craft imaginative responses that confront various kinds of injustice. Strategies for drafting and revising will be explored. All

writing should be typed and should include the date and a title. For pieces that go through multiple drafts, indicate after the title which draft it is. At the end of the term, you will turn in a portfolio containing a collection of your best work, including all drafts. (CALO 1, 2, and 3)

Community Placements

There will be a short community placement through Arrupe at a local shelter or school. You will introduce residents or students to creative writing through two lessons which we will work on in class, and you will write a brief reflection paper on your experience. (CALO 2)

Attendance

Be here every day. If you must miss due to illness or an emergency, e-mail me as soon as possible. If you miss more than four classes, the highest grade you will be able to receive is a C-.

Academic Integrity

Students need to be aware of and follow the university's academic integrity policy as outlined in the bulletin. Plagiarism will lower your grade and may result in an *F* for the course.

Disability Accommodation Policy: From Undergraduate Bulletin: "To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in the Drahnann Center in Benson, Room 214, (408) 554-4111; TTY (408) 554-5445. Students must register with Disabilities Resources and provide appropriate documentation to that office prior to receiving accommodations.

Assessment

You will receive regular feedback on drafts of your creative work in the form of written comments, conferences, and workshops. Individual pieces of creative writing will not receive a grade. Your portfolio, which will contain your best work, will be evaluated according to language, tone, detail, narrative structure, depth, range of subject and style, and attention to revision.

Your reflection papers will receive points and will be evaluated based on their thoughtfulness and depth. Your discussion responses will receive points and will be evaluated based on their accuracy and thoughtfulness.

Course Grade

Because your creative work is not receiving individual grades, we will have midterm conferences to discuss your progress in the course, and you may contact me any time for additional feedback on your work. Your course grade will be based on the following:

Portfolio: 50%

Reflection Papers: 20%

Discussion Responses: 20%

Class Participation: 10%

Schedule

T Jan. 6 Course Introduction, Defining Social Justice

TH Jan.8 Creative Writing and the Social Sphere

What Matters: Introduction: “Photographs that Can Change the World,”
“The Bottom Billion,” 154, and “Shop ‘Til We Drop,” 174

Due: Discussion Response 1

T Jan. 13 The Personal and the Political: Intersections

Francine Driscoll, *The Rape Poems*

Due: Creative Writing 1: Distribution of Wealth

TH Jan. 15 Oppression and Violence Toward Women

Finish “The Rape Poems”

WM, “Lost Girls: The Child Brides of Afghanistan, Nepal, and Ethiopia”

Due: Discussion Response 2 and Creative Writing 2: Poem

T Jan. 20 Poverty and Homelessness

Mike McGarvin, *Papa Mike*: Introduction-71; McGarvin, *On the Level*

Due: Discussion Response 3 and Creative Writing 3: Poem & short fiction

TH Jan.22 Poverty and Homelessness, continued

Papa Mike, 72-end, *On the Level*, continued

Due: Discussion Response 4

T Jan. 27 Vocation, Creative Writing, and Justice: Photojournalism, Fact Based Fiction

Guest speaker Kevin Fagan

Due: Creative Writing 4: Short fiction

W Jan. 28 Conferences

TH Jan. 29 Creating Scenes: Details and Dialogue

Read Kevin Fagan’s San Francisco Chronicle series on the homeless

Due: Reflection 1 and Discussion Response 5

T Feb. 3 Vocation, Creative Writing and Justice: Psychoanalysis

Guest Speaker Forrest Hamer

Due: Creative Writing 5

TH Feb. 5 Vocation vs. Work

Peter Orner, *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*

Due: Reflection 2, Discussion Response 6

T Feb. 10 Teaching Creative Writing

Due: Creative Writing 6

TH Feb. 12 Vocation, Creative Writing, and Justice: Teaching in prisons, hospitals, Shelters Guest Speaker Dana Lomax

T Feb. 17 Community Placement Discussions
Workshop: Creative Writing 7 due (collaborative)
Due: Reflection 3

TH Feb. 19 Revising Creative Writing
Workshops continued

T Feb. 24 Global Oppression, War, and Genocide
WM: "Images of Genocide," 82; "The Scorched Earth of Darfur," 98
Due: Creative Writing 8, Discussion Response 7

TH Feb. 26 Poetry of Witness
Carolyn Forché, *Against Forgetting*
Due: Discussion Response 8

T March 3 Revising creative work
Forché, continued
Due: Creative Writing 9 and Reflection 4 (Community Placement)

TH March 5 Fictionalizing Haiti
Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*

T March 10 Conferences
Due: Creative Writing 10

TH March 12 Style and Craft Review

Class Readings and Portfolios due on final exam day

