“The primary benefit of practicing any art, whether well or badly, is that it enables one's soul to grow.” – Kurt Vonnegut

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1. E-mail. My address is brian.buckbee@mso.umt.edu. You can also use the "Compose E-Mail" toolbar on the Moodle course main page to send me an e-mail. Because we will be using Google+, you will also need to know my g-mail address, which is brian.buckbee@gmail.com

2. Google+. I will be requiring live video conferencing, perhaps including peer group meetings, through Google+. You will need a g-mail account; you will need to sign up for google+; and you will need a camera and microphone (built-in or otherwise).

3. Face-to-Face. As a technophobe, I am interested in "live" face-to-face meetings. (These won’t be a requirement.) I can meet you on campus or at The Break Espresso coffee shop downtown. Send me an e-mail to schedule an appointment.


COURSE DESCRIPTION: As an introductory course, our focus will be on the elements used in fiction writing, with an emphasis on the short story. While it is arguable whether or not art can be taught, it is inarguable that the tools artists/writers use (whether used consciously or unconsciously) can be taught. This course will provide an introduction to some of those tools, as well as entryway to the perpetual, universal conversation about writing, reading, and art.

For those students who wish to pursue a study in creative writing, this course will give you an idea of what you are in for.

Learning Outcomes are what students are expected to know or be able to perform at the end of the course. As an art course, I am hesitant to dictate specific outcomes. After all, artists should develop unique skill sets. (Otherwise, what is the point of art? If we all do the same work, then we are closer to being craftspeople than artists.) That said, there are several things I would like you to leave this course with:

- A familiarity with the elements used in writing fiction--devices like plot, dialog, character development, etc.
- The ability to employ some of those elements, through the practice of writing.
- A language that allows you to engage in a critical discussion about writing and art. This includes being able to separate form from content; developing a sensitivity so that you can speak about other artists' work in an honest, polite manner; and being able to speak about day-to-day life with the same kind of critical acumen.
- The ability to apply the lessons we learn in creative writing to the kinds of communication you use in your everyday lives.
- Questions. I want you to begin asking yourself why people make art, what role art plays in our lives, how language is a tool that can be (and is) used to various ends, etc. The role of a student is not so much to know, but to know to ask; the sign of a good student is not one with a lot of answers, but one with a lot of questions.

FORMAT: Because this is an online course, it is the responsibility of the student to engage with the subject. This is not the kind of course that can be mastered simply through rote memorization or cramming. It requires steady engagement and thoughtfulness. Though we will not be meeting three times a week (as
do ordinary face-to-face classes), you will be asked to check in to the online class at least three times a week. Because I am a big proponent of sleep, I will ask that you space out your visits. A lot of the critical work our brains perform gets done during that time when we seem to be doing the least. “Sleeping on” the material you confront in class—whether it be instruction from the textbook, the readings from the textbook, your peers’ work, or your own writing—is very useful. In short, I want you to “live” with fiction writing over the course of the semester.

In terms of organization, our theme this semester will be "Work Hard, Play Hard." We will alternate "Work" weeks with "Play" weeks. The structure of the "Work" weeks and the "Play" weeks will remain consistent over the course of the semester.

I will be dividing the class up into groups. This will be your peer group for the duration of the semester.

**SCHEDULE:** As a result of being an online-only class, we cannot count on the routine of class meetings to keep everyone engaged and up to date with assignments. To ease the confusion that some students encounter with online courses, I have developed a schedule in which we repeat the same tasks every week, alternating between "Work" weeks and "Play" weeks. Each week will be its own unit. We will be covering a lot of ground in a short amount of time. I would advise you to not fall behind. I have set up the class so that you can't work ahead, nor can you make up missed work.

**NOTE:** I use the old "2 hours outside of class for every hour in class" model for my courses. In a traditional class, this would mean you should expect to spend two hours of homework for every hour of class time. For our online class, you **should figure on spending 10 hours/week on the class in total.** The work is "front loaded" in this class, meaning weeks 2-10 will be the busiest. You may need to spend more than 10 hours per week during the early/mid parts of the semester. There is no final exam, nor any other responsibilities during exam week.

**ASSESSMENT:** It is difficult to put a grade on a class that is so much about the practice of art. For this reason, all I ask is that you engage. Show up (online) as required, put due diligence into the writing assignments, participate in the discussions, and you will do fine. You will, however, be required to provide "substantive" contributions to our many discussions. This critical component can be extremely difficult to master, and for some requires immense patience/practice.

We will alternate between "Work" weeks (100 points each) and "Play" weeks (100 points each).

To further understand how I evaluate students' contributions, visit the page titled "Guides for Online Discussion." Please be forewarned that I will be demanding frequent, quality discussion posts. In this aspect in particular, I will be a "hard" grader.

Remember, there is no final exam for this class.

**A NOTE ON DISCUSSION:** I will be asking you to comment on your peers’ work. While I expect you to provide honest feedback based upon close readings, I also ask that you be sensitive to one another. This is not a competition. Let’s work together in a positive atmosphere. In addition, be prepared to receive the kind of honest criticism your writing may never have received before. This is not Grandma reading your schoolwork and sticking it to the refrigerator. In the history of mankind, there has never once been created a perfect piece of art.

**DISABILITY SERVICES:** [Here](#) is the UM site. Please contact me in advance if special arrangements need be made.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Rules apply. The University of Montana Student Conduct Code is available [here](#).
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