CRWR 425
INSTRUCTOR: Chris Dombrowski
Classroom: ED 312
Office: LA 215
Office Hours: Th 5:30-6:00, and Th afternoons by appt.
phone: 406.546.2041 (text messages preferred)
email: chris.dombrowski@mso.umt.edu

“We live in stories. What we are is stories. We do things because of what is called character, and our character is formed by the stories we learn to live in. Late in the night we listen to our own breathing in the dark and rework our stories. We do it again the next morning, and all day long, before the looking glass of ourselves, reinventing reasons for our lives. Other than such storytelling there is no reason to things.” –William Kittredge

“All around the world when the dark night falls / we should be sitting around the fire telling stories.” –Greg Brown

“This is a class for everyone: the writer, the storyteller, the playwright, the artist, and of course the listener and the viewer.” –Debra Earling (course originator from whom much of this syllabus and curriculum is derived)

STORYTELLING: LIVES OF BRILLIANT EPISODES

TEXTS:
The Round House (Louise Erdrich)
The Bird Artist (Howard Norman)
Italian Folk Tales (Italo Calvino, trans)
When Women Were Birds (Terry Tempest Williams)

This course is about stories: how we tell them; why we tell them; to whom we tell them; and what happens to us if we don't. Richard Hugo’s memorable sentiment, that a creative writing classroom may very well be the last place you go where your life still matters, would be writ in neon and hung from the dry-erase board had I funds for such a sign at my disposal. Also, as Flannery O’Connor opined: “The life you save may be your own.”

“Our lives are stories,” wrote Debra Earling. “History itself is a grand story woven together of many stories. And what is your place in the fabric of stories—what stories do you hold that once shared will help others to see the world with new eyes? There has been a resurgence of storytelling in this country and around the world. Traditional American Indian stories were told in deepest winter so the people could survive. Stories lifted the people from hunger, from death and made them see visions of perseverance
and hope. Some traditional stories spun a furious wind of telling and stories would travel great distances at astonishing speeds, revealing that story, voice, and the spoken breath is a mighty vehicle that possesses its own authority. And it is no different today...we tell stories to survive.”

**GRADING POLICIES:**

*A given: students are required to tell stories and listen actively to stories. Completing assignments, in-class exercises, and collaborating with others is “proof of your seriousness. This is otherwise known as “**Participation,**” and accounts for 40% of your grade.

*Mid-Term and Final assignments account for 25 and 35%, respectively.

* Class Attendance is imperative. Since your active participation is required weekly, missed exercises cannot be made-up. I recognize that extraneous circumstances sometimes arise and prevent attendance (NOTE: please do not come to class or my office if you are sick), but for your absence to be excused you must provide a reason via email or in person.

**COURSE GOALS (as per DE):**

*To gain a further understanding of the elements of the craft of fiction through active storytelling and storytelling collaborations.

*To incorporate literary constructs into your own stories.

*To gain critical hands-on experience with audience response to aid in the development of story ideas.

*To gain the knowledge necessary to evaluate the elements and craft of fiction through storytelling and the practice of effective storytelling methods.

*In-class exercises and other assignments (reading) should help students identify, develop and demonstrate effective narrative practices in their chosen fields, as well as help recognize unifying themes and ideas in literature and oral stories.

**GENERAL NOTES:**

*Per University policy: “Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person’s words, ideas, data, or materials as one’s own. Consequences include failing an assignment, failing a course, or even expulsion.”

*Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please come and see me. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

**SPECIFIC NOTES:**

*I welcome video/music/art accompaniment to your oral stories. Team stories are viable options as well. However, reading your own pre-written stories (except on rare occasion with props) is not acceptable.
*This syllabus should serve as a “shock-warning” in advance of any stories we might encounter throughout the semester that are graphic, harrowing, revealing, or otherwise important. As audience members, we must keep in mind that our job is to listen intently (not be psychologists, etc.). If questions of physical and mental danger arise, please refer to the list of resources at the end of this syllabus. **

A FINAL NOTE:

*This syllabus is subject to change.

COURSE PROTOCOL

*All assignments must be completed on time. Please use Times New Roman, 12pt font, not some otherwise expressive font. Type your name/date/class on the top of the page, upper right or left.

*Let’s be kind, respectful, and gracious.

*Turn off your cellphones and put them somewhere they won’t tempt you.

A complete but very tentative course schedule will follow next week in class, but for next week:

--Bring a stick/piece of wood/tinder for our very imaginary campfire. Be prepared to tell us where your stick came from. We can’t have a campfire in-class, but we can imagine one.

--Read one Italian Folk Tale (trans. Calvino) of your choice; be prepared to summarize tale next Thurs; tell a story from your own life that this tale inspired and/or reconstitute the arc of the story with a tale from your own life

--Come with at least one question about the syllabus.

--Begin reading THE BIRD ARTIST; write a brief (no more than one page, no less than a half) prompt or sketch of a “confessional” you might make from your own life.

--That’s enough.....

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“Tell me a story. In this century and moment of mania, tell me a story. Make it a story of great distances and starlight.” –Robert Penn Warren

** RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Student Advocacy Resource Center (SARC)
24-hour Support Line: 406-243-6559
General office line: 406-243-4429
Regular office hours: Monday- Friday 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
Located in Curry Health Center (East Entrance, Upstairs) in Room 108

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action/Title IX Coordinator
Eric M. Gutiérrez
eric.gutierrez@umontana.edu
406.243.5710
University Hall 020

Curry Health Center Counseling
406-243-4711
http://life.umt.edu/curry-health-center/Counseling/
West Entrance, Downstairs and to the Left: Room 076

Financial Aid Office
(406) 243-5373
faid@mso.umt.edu

UM Public Safety: (406) 243-4000

- Discrimination is exclusionary conduct that is based upon an individual’s race, color, religion, national origin, creed, service in the uniformed services (as defined in state and federal law), veteran status, sex, age, political ideas, marital or family status, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

- Harassment may take various forms, including, name-calling, graphic or written statements (including the use of cell phones or the Internet), or other conduct that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating. Harassment does not have to include intent to harm, be directed at a specific target, or involve repeated incidents. Sex-based harassment includes sexual harassment and non-sexual harassment based on stereotypical notions of what is female/feminine v. male/masculine or a failure to conform to those gender stereotypes.

- Sexual Harassment can include unwelcome: sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, including sexual assault. Sexual harassment, including sexual assault, can involve persons of the same or opposite sex.