English 204A  Creative Writing (fiction)  
            3 Credits (Writing Intensive)  
            T-Th 1:30-2:45

INSTRUCTOR: Robert Barclay  
OFFICE: ‘Ākoakoa 236  
OFFICE HOURS: M-W-F 9:30 to 12:30, T-Th 8:00 to 9:45, or by appointment  
CONTACT: rbarclay@hawaii.edu; 224-3019  
EFFECTIVE DATE: Spring 2009

WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE MISSION STATEMENT

Windward Community College is committed to excellence in the liberal arts and career development; we support and challenge individuals to develop skills, fulfill their potential, enrich their lives, and become contributing, culturally aware members of our community.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

English 204A (fiction) introduces students to the basic practices and principles involved in the writing and publication of short stories and novels.  
PREREQUISITE: C or higher in ENG 100 or consent of the instructor.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

After successful completion of this course, a student will be able to:

1. View the world as a writer, with an eye for detail and an ear for dialogue  
2. Exercise the imagination as a tool for creation  
3. Write short stories or novels  
4. Submit writing for publication  
5. Gain and deliver useful writing feedback

DISABILITIES ACCOMMODATION STATEMENT

If you have a physical, sensory, health, cognitive, or mental health disability that could limit your ability to fully participate in this class, you are encouraged to contact the Disability Specialist Counselor to discuss reasonable accommodations that will help you succeed in this class. Ann Lemke can be reached at 235-7448, lemke@hawaii.edu, or you may stop by Hale ‘Ākoakoa 213 for more information.
COURSE CONTENT

Good fiction at its core is a precise and vivid evocation of meaningful experience (some experiences being very real, others highly fantastic or surreal). Our goal in this course will be to create these meaningful experiences, using our imaginations and an understanding of the basic elements of fiction: conflict, character, detail, dialogue, plot, style, and theme. We will begin by studying these elements, seeing how they operate in works of fiction, and then, considering the advice of seasoned writers, we will create original works of fiction which we will share and critique in a standard writing workshop format. Finally, we will attend to the process of publishing fiction, including working with or without a literary agent.

ASSESSMENT TASKS AND GRADING

You must complete ALL assignments to pass this class. No exceptions. Assignments that do not meet minimal proficiency (receiving an F grade) must be redone to receive passing credit.

Two writing conferences with instructor: Mandatory to pass the class
Quizzes on readings: 10%
Short paper and presentation on dialogue and description: 10%
Two short stories or novel chapters: 10% each
One submission to a publisher or query letter to an agent: 10%
Portfolio, including revised final drafts and Self Analysis: 50%

TEXTBOOKS

2009 Novel & Short Story Writer’s Market
Gotham Writers’ Workshop: Writing Fiction
Various Handouts

Attendance Policy

This is not a correspondence course. There are no excused absences. Schedule medical appointments outside of class times. You are required to show up and participate. Failure to do so will be reflected in your daily quiz score and result in a lowering of your grade. If, for whatever reason, you think you will miss more than five classes this semester, then this is not the class for you. There will be no make-up quizzes and no extra credit. Six absences (amounting to missing three full weeks of the semester) lowers your final grade by 10%. Seven absences lowers it another 10%. Eight absences (or missing four weeks of the semester) results in an F final grade. As such, you will be wise to not miss class except for real illnesses or emergencies. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to contact your classmates to find out what you missed, what changes have been made to assignments, and what you need to be prepared for the next class. If it is a day that we are conducting peer reviews of your drafts, you are still responsible to get that done. If life prevents you from regularly attending, then drop the course. If life prevents you from attending after the drop deadline, contact the Dean with proof of a valid excuse (medical emergency, death in the family) and you will receive a late withdrawal without penalty. Valid excuses for late withdrawal do not include employer or child care demands. Bottom line: you must attend class, arrive on time, and be prepared to contribute.
CONTENT WARNING

Fiction, as does the world it represents, sometimes contains violence, sexuality, profanity, depravity, and other graphic content that might offend you. As such, there will be no restrictions on content in this course. I hope, though, that content won’t be that offensive by modern standards, but if you would prefer not to risk exposing yourself to these things in reading, then this is not the class for you.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you do plagiarize, you will be dis-enrolled from the course, receive a failing grade, and the incident will be filed within your permanent academic record.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Each writing assignment requires you to turn in three drafts: a rough draft, a final draft and a revised final draft. The rough drafts must be complete drafts, and the rough and final drafts must be typed in MLA format, with one inch margins in 12 point Times New Roman font. The revised final draft will address and correct all punctuation, grammar, and content issues that I mark on the final draft. Drafts are due on the dates specified. Late drafts lose one letter grade. Drafts more than a week late will lose two letter grades. Keep in mind that paper lengths are minimums. You must complete at least 16 pages of finished prose in order to pass this class. If the stories or chapters you write bring you short of that, then you will need to write another story. Not completing all assignments will result in a failing grade for the entire course. Do not submit work as email attachments, or send email drafts to me for editing. If you want help with any of your papers (for this class or any other) come see me during my office hours or make an appointment. I am always happy to help.

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

1) TWO CONFERENCES WITH INSTRUCTOR
   For each of the two short stories or novel chapters that you write, you are required to meet with me for a short conference. We will discuss its merits, where it might be improved, and anything else you wish. Outside of these conferences, you are encouraged to meet with me as much as you like.

2) QUIZZES
   For each day that we discuss assigned readings, the class will begin with a short easy quiz that will serve as an honesty check on the readings and as a prompt to begin discussions.

4) SHORT PAPER AND PRESENTATION ON DIALOGUE and DESCRIPTION: DUE FEB. 3.
   In order to write dialogue in fiction, you need to pay close attention to how people actually speak. Beginning writers often write dialogue that is stiff, formally grammatical (like writing), but this is not the nature of real conversations. The trick is to reproduce speech as authentically as possible, without it calling too much attention to itself. Amo teach ya how. Good description is a balancing act: not enough can make reading an empty, confusing experience, and too much can drive a reader to boredom. The trick is to
pick and choose just the right details to describe. The way to do this is to write to the
senses, and to recognize how the human eye operates: sometimes perceiving a space or
person in large to small detail, and sometimes the other way around. What strikes your
eye first, second? What is unique or interesting? What other senses are stimulated. Do
you really need to say what color the chairs are? How much effort should you put into
describing the way the birds shuddered before they took flight from the tree? For this
assignment, follow the three steps below and then turn in the completed scene—about
two pages. In class, you will briefly discuss your dialogue and description experience,
and then read one page of your scene.

STEP 1: Dialogue
Go find someplace where you can overhear an interesting conversation: maybe in
a fast food place, on a bus, at a bar, maybe even at home. You may have to try a
few places before you hear an especially interesting exchange. When you do,
write down what do you hear. Do people speak at cross purposes, almost as if
two people are having two conversations at the same time? How do they
pronounce words? What is their syntax? Are there interesting or unique phrases
that people use? Write down as much of what they are saying as you can, so that
later you can type up at least one full page of dialogue. Warning: don’t be too
obvious, and don’t put yourself in dangerous situations, as people might be
offended if they knew you were transcribing their words.

STEP 2: Description
Go find someplace visually interesting (actually, with the proper rendering, just
about anyplace can be made interesting). Make sure this is not the same place
where you observed your dialogue. Now write down what you see, especially
focusing on small, interesting details. For example, the odd tooth marks on the
nub of a pencil behind your teacher’s ear. Keep in mind that this is not
necessarily a “nature” exercise, or simply a visual one. For example, “Outside in
the night a truck downshifts to take the hill. Its
radio searches for a station, finds
a sermon, and then the truck is gone, leaving the stench of its exhaust and the
sound of dogs fighting somewhere down the road.” You might be describing
human or animal details as well. For example: “She took a few feeble steps after
the bus she had just missed, her hand raised and fingers fluttering. And then she
just stared at it, angry and defeated, as if a man twice her size had just sucker-
punched her crippled sister.” Go for similes and metaphors. Write down as much
detail as you can, so that later you can type out about one full page.

STEP 3: Scene
Now take your dialogue, invent entirely new characters speaking it, and transplant
this into your description. First, choose a point of view—one of the characters
you just invented. Filter all the descriptions and perceptions through this
person (in first, second, or third person). Choose a consistent tense: past,
present, or future. Feel free to invent, change, add, or delete things to make the
scene work. Try working some of the descriptions into the dialogue tags: “I
guess just keep the change, a drink on me,’ he says, and he pulls his hand back,
forcing his smile so wide he gets wrinkles by his eyes.” Maybe begin the scene
with large details that spiral into smaller ones, or the other way around.
Remember, separate dialogue by paragraph, no two speakers in the same
paragraph. Above all, make your scene interesting, and don’t worry if it doesn’t make any sense.

5) **TWO SHORT STORIES OR NOVEL CHAPTERS: ROUGH DRAFT FOR ONE DUE FEB. 10, FINAL DRAFT DUE FEB.17. ROUGH DRAFT FOR TWO DUE MAR. 19, FINAL DRAFT DUE MAR. 31.**

On each of the two dates specified on the calendar, you are required to turn in a short story or novel chapter (make a note on the ms. to let us know it’s a chapter). There are no restrictions on length or content. Using what you have learned about imagination and the elements of fiction, write to impress. You will take each novel or short story through three drafts: a rough draft which you will have peer-reviewed in class. This, after some revision, will lead to a final draft. Turn in two copies of the final draft--one with the rough draft and peer review attached (in that order), and one that is just the final draft. This draft will be work-shopped in class, you will receive a review sheet from each classmate, and I will also mark it up for you with suggestions for improvement. Take this work-shopped, feed-backed, marked-up draft and create a revised final draft and place all of the drafts in your portfolio.

6) **ONE SUBMISSION LETTER TO A PUBLISHER OR QUERY TO AN AGENT:**

**DUE MAY 5 IN PORTFOLIO**

For a short story, choose a publisher from *The Writers’ Market*, draft a letter to them, and then if you like, mail them one of your stories. Wait for a letter of acceptance or rejection. For a novel chapter, choose an agency from *The Writers’ Market*, draft a letter to them that outlines your novel, and mail them your chapter. Wait for their reply. For this assignment, you need not actually send anything off, but you must include the letter in your portfolio. You are encouraged, however, to enter your work to Rain Bird, the WCC literary magazine. Doing so will earn you 10% extra credit and much gratitude from your instructor.

7) **PORTFOLIO: DUE MAY 5**

In a three ring binder, compile every draft of every writing assignment you do this semester. Include at the end a self analysis of your writing, analyzing basic grammar and punctuation and how you perform with regards to the various elements of fiction. Do you have strong plots? Vibrant characters? Vivid descriptions? Meaningful themes? What do you do well? What do you need to work on? Lastly, look at the Student Learning Outcomes for this course. Address each one, one at a time, and explain how well you believe you have you achieved each one. Also, for each one, give yourself a score on a scale of one to ten.
Portfolio Checklist

Checklist (make a copy of this page and check all items included)

Short Paper on Dialog and Description

Story (or chapter) One
Revised Final Draft
Final Draft
Rough Draft
Grade Sheet

Story (or chapter) Two
Revised Final Draft
Final Draft
Rough Draft
Grade Sheet

Letter to Agent or Publisher

Self Analysis
Final Draft
Rough Draft
Peer Review
WORKSHOP POLICY

Most of this semester will be spent discussing each other’s writing. You will read up to three stories or chapters per class, on the workshop days, and you will come prepared to discuss them. Additionally, you will fill out a workshop review sheet for each piece, prior to coming to class that day. **DO NOT FILL THEM OUT IN CLASS.** I will begin each discussion and keep it moving, but for the discussion to work you need to bring your completed workshop review sheet so that you can contribute. And speak up!

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN IN THE WORKSHOP

1: The writer is in the room.

2: Insulting or mean comments will ruin the dynamic we need to help each other.

3: Being overly sensitive to criticism will also ruin the dynamic we need.

4: Refrain from commenting when we are discussing one of your pieces.

5: If you have issues about your pieces you want addressed, let me know ahead of time.

6: This is not a competition.

7: Recognize that you and your peers are beginning writers—some work may be very lacking in quality, and very hard to read. No problem. That’s what we’re here to help each other with.

8: Our goal is to help each other.

9: Our goal is to help each other.

10: The best way to approach saying something negative about a piece is to first find something to praise about it, and then to phrase the negative comment in a way that gets us talking about a way to fix the problem.
Short Story Peer Review

1) Describe the protagonist, then offer suggestions on how this character might be improved or better realized. Add some back story? More physical description?

2) Is the setting detailed and specific enough to draw you into the story? If not, how might the setting become better established? Or is there too much description? What might be taken out?

3) A good story moves through specific scenes, complete with vivid details and dialogue. Does the story have specific, detailed scenes, or is it just generally narrated, almost operating like an essay instead of a story? Help the author create better scenes.

3) Insure that dialogue is separated by paragraphs, not jammed together in the same paragraph.

4) What theme is the story communicating to you, or what theme might be developed?

5) Where might the author’s imagination improve this story?

6) Author’s comments: State five things in five full sentences on how you plan to improve this story.
Workshop Review Sheet: (Story title)______________________________

What did you like best about this piece in the following areas? Be very specific.

1) Character

2) Description/Setting

3) Dialogue

4) Plot

What did you like least about this piece? Be very specific.

1) Character

2) Description/Setting

3) Dialogue

4) Plot

In one thematic sentence, say what this piece is about.

What would you suggest for improvement?
On the back, write whatever questions that come to mind concerning this piece—could be something relative to writing in general.