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Integration of Literature into an Online Creative Writing Classroom

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Integration of Literature into an Online Creative Writing Classroom

A Portfolio / APP

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Table of Contents

Integration of Literature into an Online Creative Writing Classroom

I.	Introduction.....	3
II.	Bibliographic Essay	9
III.	Course Materials	27
IV.	Works Cited	41

Integration of Literature into an Online Creative Writing Classroom

Part 1 - Introduction

Learning is a lifelong pursuit. It certainly does not stop when a student completes a formal institutional education. Even though a teacher's impact is focused on the time a student spends learning at an institution, a formal education needs to enable a process that encourages a student to grow and learn for a lifetime. My teaching philosophy is to utilize the formal institutional learning structure to empower, inspire and enrich the learning that occurs outside the institution for the rest of the student's life. This is particularly important for artists such as creative writers, as they need to continue to grow creatively throughout their writing careers. There are two distinct features that can be used in a Creative Writing pedagogy that improve a writer's lifelong learning process. A broad literary knowledge base establishes a foundation to continually refresh the creative energy a writer needs to develop new perspectives from additional reading. From a lifelong learning perspective, there is a rich array of literature available in every library making it easily accessible to a writer. Online technology provides a mechanism to direct creative energy through interaction with other writers regardless of their physical location. The skills developed through online interactions with other student writers, prepare and enable a student to participate in online writing groups after leaving the learning institution. Establishing a strong literary foundation and developing the skills to interact with other writers online paves the way for a lifetime of leaning for the creative writer.

A lifelong learning strategy puts an emphasis on the development of insights over the knowledge of facts. In the creative writing context, it isn't enough for a writer to know the definition of a first person point of view for example. In order for a student to effectively integrate that point of view into an original work, scholars say the student needs to understand how and why different writers utilize that point of view into their works. By performing a critical analysis of a piece of literature, a student gains insight as to how all of the pieces of craft and theme come together to make a literary statement. A formal institutional education is a forum where a student can interact with instructors and other students to discuss and refine the insights developed around these literary statements. Once a student establishes a foundation of literary knowledge, additional insights can be developed with every new piece of literature encountered. The incredibly wide range of literature that has been developed through history opens countless doors to develop new thematic and craft initiatives that can be developed into a writer's own work. The availability of online forums for a writer to discuss literary insights with other likeminded writers regardless of physical location provides opportunities for a writer to further develop creative concepts.

It is this lifelong learning strategy that is the driving force for the proposal for the integration of literature and utilization of an online learning environment in this capstone. Creative writers are artists and as artists they need to be exposed to a continuous flow of stimuli throughout their careers in order to bring new creative focus to their work. By definition, a writer absorbs thoughts, images and

concepts from the world and translates them into ideas that can entertain and enlighten readers. The fulfillment of a writer's mission requires a continual flow of new ideas and concepts. For that reason, an undergraduate creative writing program should provide students exposure to literature and literary analysis. This knowledge will allow them to create their own unique insights and ignite a desire to continually develop new perspectives in their own writing. The transfer of the knowledge regarding the basics of craft is an important component in the education of a creative writer, but it should be considered table stakes in the overall development. Otherwise, every creative writer that did not break the rules of craft would be successful. An institutional educational strategy that overemphasizes craft over the development of a broad literary knowledge base may result in student writing that uniformly complies with the rules of craft, but is short on creativity.

The evolution of creative writing as an institutional discipline has had a direct impact on the pedagogy according to scholars and the change in the focus of instruction has impacted student writing. Before the mid nineteenth century, most creative writing instruction was accomplished on an informal basis outside the learning institutions. The creative writers before the 1930s learned their craft by studying the literature of the past. As they developed those concepts into their own creative work, they interacted with other writers to discuss their insights on literature and how they could be applied. When creative writing became a part of the academic English departments in the 1930s, literature was a significant component in the pedagogy. The Iowa Workshop model was developed in order

to provide a way for student writers to interact regarding literary concepts and how they apply to their original work. Over time, as the discipline of Creative Writing established itself as independent of the Literature discipline, there has been a steady decline in the influence of literature in the creative writing pedagogy. As a result, scholars have identified a decline in the quality of student writing in the institutional programs. They say that as a result of the institutional emphasis on the production of writing that fits contemporary craft standards, the writing produced by the students looks the same and has a generic quality. Several scholars argue that moving the instructional focus back to include more involvement of the critical analysis of literary works will improve both the creative writing programs and breathe new life and appreciation to the literature programs. The integration of literature will add diversity and creativity to student writing and establish a foundation to position students to pursue additional literary insights after they leave the institution.

There are several benefits to students resulting from a more literary integrated approach and exposure to online feedback processes and technology. The critical reading skills gained from a broad exposure to literary works will develop improved critical thinking skills which will add depth to a student's writing. Exposure to a diversity of thematic and stylistic platforms opens a wide range of communication parameters and perspectives a student can use to express ideas. The focus on the overall holistic literary statements being made establishes a high level of common understanding between students which creates a more collaborative and fruitful workshop process. These benefits

become even more important when they are paired with instructional innovations made possible with the adoption of online instructional platforms. There are logistical options available for student interactions with the instructor and with other students that are not readily available in a face to face classroom. The course design can include multiple opportunities for interactions between students and between students and the instructor. The process used for the students to communicate can be tailored to meet the parameters best suited for the purpose of the interaction. The online platform eliminates geographic limitations in communication with other students.

The skills developed by student writers from an increased utilization of literature in their study and in the use of online technologies to interact with other writers will be beneficial well after the academic coursework is completed. Expanding the thematic and craft horizons of creative writing students will afford them opportunities for learning and refining their craft with every trip to the library. Knowing how to effectively collaborate with other writers through virtual connections will allow writers to participate in online writers groups without being in the same geographical vicinity.

To demonstrate one way to move the creative writing instructional model to the middle of the spectrum towards critical analysis, I have constructed materials to establish an integrated undergraduate course modeled on a program in place at Ball State University. This course is designed to be taken by creative writing students at the 300 level with Introduction to Creative Writing as a prerequisite. It includes assignments for both critical writing and critical analysis

in the area of short story prose and novels. The course description proposed is to provide instruction in critical writing about literature and also offer experience in reflective and creative writing but with a writer's eye. Included in the topics covered will be the study of techniques of prose fiction craft, literary research and criticism. The course will be offered in an online environment and a key component will be student interactions regarding the literature reviewed and each other's creative writing.

Increasing the exposure of creative writing students to literature and demonstrating the capabilities of online technology to provide interaction and feedback from other writers provides a conduit for a lifetime of learning regarding creative literary themes and craft options. In the institutional setting, a teacher provides students with sufficient knowledge and exposure that allows them to create their own unique insights and ignites a desire to expand their knowledge and develop additional perspectives for the rest of their lives. The foundation established will serve creative writers throughout their literary careers.

Integration of Literature into an Online Creative Writing Classroom

Part 2 - Bibliographic Essay

Creative writers are artists. The challenge in creating a pedagogy for an artist is that it has to provide instruction on craft within an atmosphere of creativity. Creative opportunities are established by the study of existing art and the insights are gained by through interaction with other artists. Writers benefit from the study of literature and from discussing that literature with other writers in order to consider how the thematic and craft elements are used to make a literary statement and to determine how they can be reflected into their own original writing. Effectively applying these two concepts, the study of literature and the interaction with other writers, into today's creative writing pedagogy creates organizational and logistical issues. Changes in academic organizational structure have separated the Creative Writing discipline from the Literature discipline, according to scholars and the quality of student interactions is on the decline. Scholars maintain that instruction in interpreting and understanding literary works is so vital to the training of a writer to tap into creativity, that the disciplines of Creative Writing and Literature need to be integrated. They maintain that studying literature broadens a student's perspective from both a craft and theme standpoint. Collaborative, interpretive opportunities with other students create learning environments that expose student writers to new ideas and ultimately encourage them to produce more thoughtful, meaningful writing. Changes in the way the world communicates have made the use of online technology an important component in the development of writer communities to create these learning environments. The skills developed by conducting online

interactions with other students, opens a world of opportunities for a writer to discuss insights with other writers. Scholars conclude that including literature in the creative writing pedagogy, especially in an online environment provides exposure to variations in craft and thematic instructional experiences that can be replicated in a creative writing student's lifelong development as a writer.

Scholars recount that historically, creative writers learned through the study of literature and by interacting with other writers. Great writers have always recognized the need to learn from previously published literature. In a letter from William Faulkner to a man who had sent him manuscripts to evaluate he writes:

I don't think you have read enough. I don't mean research, facts: who the hell cares for facts. But you have not read enough novels and stories of people who have told their stories well. My advice is, read the following books...

He goes on to recommend *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Buddenbrooks*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and several other books and then concludes, "This may offend you. If it does, you have no business trying to write at all. If it does not, and you follow this advice, you may get somewhere some day" (112). Even though Faulkner was not considered an academic, this passage demonstrates the value he puts on the study of classical literature in the development of a writer. Poet and critic Donald Hall takes the issue a step further. He's critical of the approach institutions take in the development of poets. He even constructed a couple lines of doggerel poetry on the subject, "Keats studied the old poets every day / Instead of picking up his M.F.A." (94). He goes on to recount how

Keats and most of the other poets recognized as masters today such as Johnson, Spenser, Milton and Whitman educated themselves in the literature of the past, often in the original languages in which they were written. He says that even though Shakespeare was looked down upon by some of his peers because of his relative ignorance of ancient languages, he learned more language and literature in his Stratford grammar school than today's students acquire in twenty years of schooling. Hall points out that communities of writers congregated in London, Paris, Boston, New York and other metropolitan centers to support each other and create forums to develop their ideas. With a firmly entrenched study of classical writing to serve as a common foundation for these writer communities, they were able to discuss each other's writing on both a thematic and craft basis. He argues that interactions with other creative writers are vital to the development of a writer. "It is no accident that Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey were friends when they were young; if Pound, H.D and William Carlos Williams had not known each other when they were young, would they have become William Carlos Williams, H.D. and Pound?" (98). The opportunity to discuss and review their writing with fellow craftsmen gave the writers perspective and an educated audience to demonstrate ideas.

When the Creative Writing discipline entered academia in the 1930s and 1940s there was an attempt to institutionalize these two historical instructional methods in a university setting. Since academic English departments were historically based around the study of Literature, the initial development of the Creative Writing discipline included the study of literary works. With the strong

literary foundation from their own reading supplemented by literary analysis assignments from the English Departments, students were well read when came into the creative writing programs. The next step was to replicate the informal writer's communities within the academic institutions. Mark McGurl says that Paul Engle developed the University of Iowa Writers Workshop in the 1940s to provide a forum for writer interaction and it became an important linkage in the production of literature and academia. The Iowa Workshop Model has been replicated throughout higher education institutions in the United States and now serves as the standard method of creative writing instruction. In their article "Knocking Sparks: Demystifying Process in Graduate Fiction Workshops", Becky Adnot-Haynes and Tessa Mellas write that graduate fiction workshops are at their best when writers are taken out of their isolation and encouraged to "knock sparks off each other"(299). They say that the primary purpose of the development of the graduate workshop was to provide a forum where student writers could bounce ideas off each other to reinvigorate their writing processes and their individual projects.

The workshop system enables writers already possessing a strong set of reading and writing skills to enter into a serious apprenticeship that further hones and challenges those skills. By participating in workshops, they learn first and foremost by writing a lot of new material. Through trial and error, writers develop a process and strategies to complete the drafts that the workshop mandates (301).

A key prerequisite to the success of the workshop model is critical reading and writing skills the students had before entering the program. Adnot-Haynes and Mellas argue that the strong literary background provided the foundation for the student writer interactions.

By the early 2000s, scholars noticed a change in the student writing produced in the creative writing programs. There was a decline in the diversity of the writing and less creativity in style or theme. As a result, scholars say that the writing has begun to look generic. In his article “Research and Reflection in English Studies: The Special Case of Creative Writing”, Patrick Bizzaro comments that “... much of the writing going on in workshops explores a limited range of topics and techniques” (304). The lack of innovation in student writing as a result of the students’ limited exposure to craft and thematic options has created what he derisively calls “workshop writing” (304). Adnot-Haynes and Mellas agree that a “herd mentality” (303) exists as the students participating in the workshop are focused on writing that replicates current fiction from a content and stylistic standpoint. Eric Bennett points out that the fledgling writing programs of the 1940s and 1950s assumed that all writers were already creative artists and they would benefit from more discipline and a narrower window of craft options. As a result he says, the institutional writing workshops put the focus on maintaining a structure along the lines of early Hemingway in both form and content. Mark McGurl, in his article “Understanding Iowa: Flannery O’Connor, B.A., M.F.A.” comments that even Flannery O’Connor, widely held to be one of the most successful writers ever to have emerged from the Iowa Workshop

Program, did not vary from the limited third person point of view held to be a workshop standard. He says that O'Connor's literary style fully embraces the structure adopted within the Iowa Workshop model without variation. "Unlike Hemingway, whose forms of narration varied over the course of his career, O'Connor employed the same precisely calibrated mode of narration – 'third person limited' – form favored by Henry James and promoted by her mentors as the surest path to 'impersonality'- in every one of her stories without exception" (531). McGurl concludes that O'Connor was successful in creating great literary fiction despite staying within a narrow window of narration, but her work did not evolve over time in the manner of other artists trained outside of the workshop model. When applied to all of the students in the workshop programs the use of the same craft choices for every student inhibits creativity and retards diversity. Hall is even more direct in his criticism the workshop model and the quality of student writing produced within it. He says the institutionalization of the workshop model has limited creativity around the style and genres of poetry to that which instructor is most comfortable. The limited background of the student groups providing feedback on the writing has narrowed the scope of what is acceptable within the workshop. The writing then sinks to the lowest common denominator of understanding in the group. The production of the poetry workshops in particular has led to a mass produced type of writing that Hall has dubbed "McPoetry" (95). He says that the poems all look like and do not show creativity of style or theme.

Scholars have identified three factors that have led to the generic writing that students are producing in the institutions utilizing the Iowa Workshop model.

When Creative Writing became an independent discipline within the institutional English departments, scholars say the study of literature was deemphasized within the programs and tighter rules around acceptable theme and craft options were established. This resulted in a reduction in the reading and literary analysis requirements for creative writing students within the institution. Societal changes have caused students to read less on their own and so they acquire less literary background outside the institutions according to Andrew Melrose. In the battle for a student's leisure time, he says that reading literature has to compete with video games, television, the Internet and a whole host of other entertainment options. Because students are reading less within the institution due to the change in the Creative Writing curriculum focus, and reading less outside the institution because of societal changes, they are not developing a strong literary foundation. Without a strong combined literary foundation of the participants, the quality of student interactions within the workshops has declined. The smaller combined literary knowledge base of the workshop groups puts the focus of feedback and interactions around a narrow window of craft and thematic perspectives. Scholars have identified the limited literary background in creative writing students as a significant issue in the development of student writers. Sharon Oard Warner's experience indicates that without a sufficient literary background, the students writing in workshops tend to produce writing that resembles the plots from television shows. When she provided only the rudimentary definitions of craft in the same wide open, informal manner of

instruction she experienced when she received her MFA, she found her students did not have the background to put them into a literary focus.

While I thought I was educating and preparing my students through discussions of character, plot, point of view and so forth, in actuality, I was only pointing out the various features of a vast landscape. The students had no directions, no sure way of finding their way around the world of fiction (33).

This is an important point in establishing a lifelong learning teaching philosophy. If students can't find their way around the world of fiction when they are in the institution, how are they ever going to find it after they leave the institution and pursue a career as a creative writer? Lifelong learning requires a strong literary foundation.

Scholars have identified two solutions that will help creative writing students find their way and prepare them to continually explore new and different roads through the world of fiction after they leave the institution. First, they suggest a reintegration of Literature into the Creative Writing curriculum. The reintegration will require institutional and organizational cooperation and will require a change in the philosophy of creative writing instruction in some cases. Bizzaro argues that the development of creative writing pedagogy as a separate discipline within academia has been done without a thorough study and theoretical basis anyway. He argues that the focus on publishable writing production from an independent Creative Writing discipline has put the too much emphasis on learning craft and distances the pedagogy from literary theory.

McGurl concurs that the acceptance of creative writing workshops into the higher education degree granting culture required a level of institutionalization regarding acceptable options for writing craft. The resulting institutionalization of craft limits creativity and impedes looking at writing as an artistic endeavor. The separation of Creative Writing and Literature disciplines, McGurl argues has put the focus on the craft side of writing leaving the instruction on how to tap creativity to be developed outside of the institution. Peter Wilson groups pedagogical theorists based on the amount and type of integration they advocate between Literature and Creative Writing. The groups are depicted in Figure 1. He indicates that some scholars advocating totally independent disciplines are Creative Writing Purists who don't want student writers to be tainted by other writers and Critical Literary Analysis Purists who don't believe there is any room for creative writing in literary critical analysis.

Independent	Integrated	Independent
Creative Writing Purist	Literature as a Tool for CW	Fully Integrated CW / CA
[----Creative Writing Pedagogical Theory-----]		
[----Literature Pedagogical Theory-----]		

Figure 1 (Linstrom)

Wilson identifies another group of scholars supporting an independent Creative Writing discipline and advocate using literature only as a stimulus for creative writing. The texts are used tactically as examples to show students how the basic elements of fiction such as point of view, plot, and characterization are used by successful, mostly contemporary writers. A great deal of the creative writing

workshop pedagogy is based around this philosophy. David McVey points out that the scholars in this camp use of literature only as examples due to a concern that writing about literary theory and criticism will negatively impact the creativity of the student writers as they pursue their own work. In the middle and rejecting the idea of separate Creative Writing and Literature disciplines, is a group Wilson identifies as promoting a fully integrated creative writing / critical analysis process advocated by Rob Pope. He maintains that all acts of writing should be part of a “critical-creative process” (131) and that criticism and creative writing as separate disciplines should disappear. Agreeing with Pope, Hall takes the position that the independence of creative writing makes no sense if it is coupled with a loss of the influence of literature. He sees the separation of literature from the writing department as a negative influence for the poet, the scholar and the student. His concern with separate disciplines is that literary scholars isolate themselves from contemporary writing and writers isolate themselves from the literary past. Therefore, the students lose the writers’ unique perspective on literature. “Our culture rewards specialization. It is absurd that we erect a barrier between one who reads and one who writes...” (100). Wilson agrees that the migration to separate critical and creative writing limits the range of understanding of both literature and the process of creative writing. He maintains that the careful reading of literature that is required for effective critical literary analysis can provide context for improved creative writing. Instructors who utilized elements of both critical and creative writing in their curriculum he says, expand the student’s understanding of the both the craft and thematic aspects of the writing process.

McVey counters the argument from the advocates of separate disciplines that exposure to literary theory may negatively impact students creativity. He advocates that students need to learn to develop their literary critical skills at the same time they become creative practitioners. The promotion of critical reading and academic writing skills are important not only to student success at the university but they create a sense of “self-identity” (293) in students that will empower their learning after they leave academia.

Scholars maintain that this integration of Literature and Creative Writing assignments positively impacts students by requiring more reading assignments, providing a wider exposure to craft and themes and the development of a more holistic view of the craft of writing. Including more reading in the institutional education of creative writers is a key benefit. Melrose argues that the reading ability of university students has declined worldwide in all disciplines. Creative writing students are not reading enough outside of institutional assignments to acquire the reading skills needed to be an effective artist. He asserts that university students at all levels need to work at the craft of reading critically to improve their critical and creative thinking. “The idea is a simple one ongoing and cyclical: better readers – become better thinkers – become better writers – become better readers” (112). By becoming better critical readers and exposing themselves to a wide variety of literary craft and thematic styles, he maintains that students learn to make better writing decisions in their own work, to better understand how stories work, to translate personal experiences into writing and to establish critical thesis skills. Gavin Goodwin agrees and points out that it is

especially important that creative writing students read poetry because they have so little exposure to it. It is his contention that even students who want to become poets do not come into creative writing classes having read either a sufficient amount or an adequate diversity of poetry. This gap in reading makes it very difficult for students to develop an understanding of the elements that make a successful poem. Goodwin's experience is that exposing students to a wide array of poetry as they are working on constructing their own work will improve their enthusiasm and their creativity. Nicole Cooley provides additional benefits to the students from exposure to literature by adding a literary analysis component. She advocates creative writing classes in which students read other texts to help model their own work in new and innovative ways. She finds that reading and responding to a wide array of texts from other cultures expands the student's view of their own writing. "If we allow creative writing and literary studies to rejuvenate and replenish one another, both disciplines will gain much and our students will benefit not only as writers and scholars but as human beings" (103). The wide diversity of thematic and craft options that Literature provides should be looked at on a holistic basis, Paul A. Dawson advocates. Just using literature as examples of structure doesn't tell the whole story of the literary statement the writer is making. He says to fully understand the how the author utilizes the elements of fiction to achieve the holistic effect, a student needs to understand the work in a historical context. "My argument, then, is that rather than giving students 'advice' about the inherent technical advantages and disadvantages of different types of narrative voice, we're better off historicising

these elements of craft so students can fully appreciate how they have actually been used, and how they can be adapted for contemporary concerns" (217).

These positive benefits from exposing creative writing students to literature are key in the establishment of the literary foundation that will serve them after they leave the institution.

Scholars have identified several venues where the integration of Creative Writing and Literature assignments has been accomplished successfully.

Elizabeth Mills says at Davidson College they have successfully combined the literature subject matter with the creative writing subject matter providing benefits to both. All of the creative writing classes, even workshops include a literary study of published writers and all literary courses include creative writing instruction. The creative writing students and the literature students develop a sense of collaboration that helps them understand elements of the other discipline and can be applied to their own learning. The faculty teaches both creative writing and literature. She says one example of the success of the program is that Randy Nelson, a literature professor who started writing short stories in order to learn how to teach the subject, ended up winning the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. Warner helped her students find their way in the world of fiction by structuring her writing assignments around works of literature. By having her students perform a literary analysis of a story and then attempt to creatively write a story of their own incorporating the theoretical ideas, she got a more diverse scope of student writing and inventiveness.

The second part of the solution proposed by scholars to improve student writing from workshop programs is to couple the integration of literature with the use online technology to refocus student interactions in order to improve feedback and discussion. Scholars say the use of online technology increases the participation level and diversity of the points of view articulated in the discussions in the online class. Mary Lenard's experience in the online literature classes she teaches is that students are more likely to participate in an online class discussion. In her end of course surveys at the University of Texas, students consistently indicate that they participated more in the online course than they would have in a traditional classroom environment. Graceanne A. DeCandido agrees and says that the interactions in her Children's Literature classes are more focused and more directed than the interactions she has in face to face classes. She said that the asynchronous discussions allow her students, particularly those of a more retiring nature, the opportunity to provide more thoughtful responses. A sense of community is formed in the class, even though the students never meet face to face. "It's a struggle to find ways to describe, to someone who wasn't there, the particular intensity of an online literature course. It was as if we had our fingers on each other's pulses, all the time." (297) Tyler Schmidt points out that students are both more comfortable and more open to providing feedback around controversial topics when using capabilities of online discussion boards and other electronic forms of interaction. His hybrid class, exploring the relationships between race, language and power is conducted half online and half face to face. He finds that student discussion in

the online forum to be more thoughtful and productive than the face to face discussions between the same students. In the online portion, students are less emotional and are more comfortable taking and defending positions. He concludes that, "Using online discussion boards innovatively and suspiciously, we can begin to re-script the public conversations we have about race, technology and our role as teacher-citizens" (46). Joy Bowers-Campbell studied the responses of three groups of students in a literature class conducted face to face for part of the session and online for the remainder. She found that the literature discussions in the online portions of the course provided a more open forum for students with diverse ideas. There was more equality in participation regardless of how the students communicated or their levels of self-confidence. While face to face discussions are dominated by a few students, participation online was nearly the same for all. "Ideas from naturally shy students came across as powerfully as more vocal students." (565) The informal groupings enabled by online technology can be used for pedagogical enhancements suggested by other scholars. Adnot-Haynes and Mellas are critical of the requirement in the traditional workshop model that only finished, polished pieces of writing are eligible to be reviewed, which removes the sense of collaboration for student writers. They advocate allowing students to work with other students collaboratively on early drafts to achieve a sense of community within the class. Blythe and Sweet agree and suggest the same community of writers approach. They create small self-selected groups of three to five students who receive only minimal direction from the teacher mentors to further the development of all the

writers in the group in a collaborative environment. The logistics of the online setting makes the implementation of the writer communities proposed more feasible because there are more options for how student writers can interact in order to take advantage of different levels of collaboration and feedback. In the construction of her Advanced Composition Course at Ball State University, Linda Hansen utilizes a student-community interaction model that takes full advantage of the benefits of an online system and allows her to utilize both the traditional workshop feedback structure and the writer's community philosophy. She developed the figure below to demonstrate how student interactions with the teacher and other students can provide a wide array of privacy options from both a discussion and feedback basis.

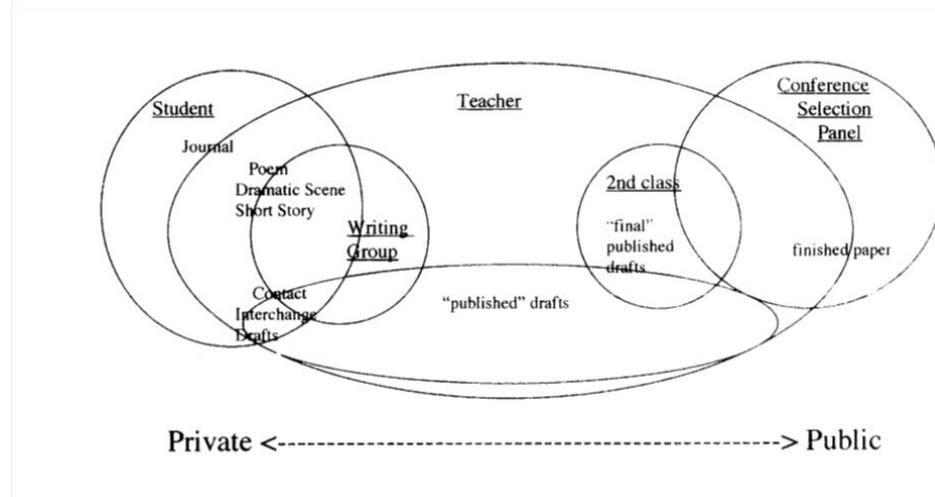


Figure 2 (Hansen 224)

In Hansen's model, the journal the student keeps is very private and only shared with the teacher, and the first drafts of the papers and projects are shared with the internal writers group which serves the writer's community function. As the papers and projects become more polished, there are various outlets interact

with other classes and even an external conference which maintains elements of the traditional workshop environment. Hansen maintains that the logistics of moving papers through the various groups to collect different types of feedback and organizing the appropriate role of the reviewers would be difficult in a face to face situation. By the use of online technology her students get the benefit of the traditional workshop feedback structure as well as the writer community philosophy advocated by Blythe and Sweet and Adnot-Haynes and Mellas. In addition, because there is a transcript of online interactions, she is able to maintain contact and review the progress and engagement of the various groups without sitting in on every session.

The result of the integration of literature and the adoption of the online format is that students are exposed to a learning model that can be used to develop their writing after the course work is completed according to scholars. It requires a different way of looking at the role of a teacher. Warner changed her teaching philosophy to frame her creative writing coursework around literary fiction and in doing so, she give her students a long term road for future development. “Teachers, therefore, function as guides, providing directions and drawing boundaries, and if they do their jobs well, students will set out with less trepidation and with more real chance of success” (34). This direction fits directly into my teaching philosophy in support of lifelong learning. Courses that integrate literary study and creative writing provide student writers with the literary foundation they need to continually develop their creativity as their careers continue. The workshop process was designed to provide an institutionalized

version of Gertrude Stein's Paris salon. As the workshop model has evolved, the institution has forgotten that before discussing Pound's latest work, Hemingway, Dos Passos and the other writers of the Lost Generation at the table, spent years reading and studying literature in order to develop a foundation for their art. A writer without this background would not have added depth to the discussion and Gertrude wouldn't have let them in the door. Learning to read and study literature will provide students an ongoing support mechanism to tap into their creative energy for the rest of their careers. Writers can revive creative juices and expand perspectives of theme and craft every time they walk into a library and check out a new book. With the skills they developed using online technology; they can become part of their own version of Gertrude's Paris salon full of writers and artists without ever leaving their living room.

Integration of Literature into an Online Creative Writing Classroom

Part 3 - Materials

Reflection on the Course Syllabus: A key component of Literature for Creative Writing is the integration of literature into the course structure but maintaining the focus on the improvement of creative writing. For the course to be successful, the students need to develop a “writers eye” for reading literature that will enable them to understand not only what the writer did to produce a piece of literature, but to also understand why. The instructor will need to balance literary analysis with creative writing for the integration to be successful. This is not a lecture course. Students will be constantly asked “How would you apply this to your own writing?” in the discussions, chat and reflection journal articles. Literature and other non-creative writing students could certainly benefit from this course by gaining a better understanding of what goes into the creation of literature, but the primary focus is to help the creative writer. The learning gained in the class will give the students a process to recharge their creative energy for the rest of their lives.

Course Syllabus

Eng 3xx Literature for Creative Writing

Course Description

Literature for Creative Writing provides instruction in creative writing through the analysis of literature. Students will develop an understanding of how writers make a literary statement through their use of the elements of craft and theme. Included in the topics covered is the study of techniques of prose fiction craft, literary research, criticism and documentation. The course will be offered in an online environment and a key component will be student interactions regarding the literature reviewed and reacting to other student's creative writing.

Prerequisites

- Eng 2xx Introduction to Creative Writing

Course Objectives:

Students will create original writing projects applying the knowledge and experience gained from exposure to literary works, analysis and research.

Students will learn to critically read, research and interpret writing of significant literary quality gaining experience regarding how craft elements are utilized, the importance of thematic devices, organizational options and most importantly, how an author brings all of the factors together to make a literary statement.

Students will learn to collaborate and exchange ideas with other students regarding literary works and regarding each other's creative writing.

Writing Assignments:

- Three literary research papers of 500 to 1,000 words
- Two original short stories at least 750 words
- One original 2 to 3 page outline and the first chapter (at least 750 words) of a novel
- Journal entries of a minimum of 250 words in weeks there are no writing assignments that reflect the student's reactions to the readings and class discussions and as well as perceptions of how they can be applied to the student's personal reading and writing processes.

Grading:

- 45 points - Participation in Class and Student Interactions
- 15 points - Critical Papers 5 points for each paper
- 10 points - Original Short Stories 5 for each story
- 10 points - Original Novel outline and first chapter
- 20 points - Journal

Total 100 points

Detailed assignment descriptions and specific grading criteria for each assignment is included in the assignment specific folder.

Text and Required Books:

- Boyle, T. Coraghessan, comp. *Doubletakes: Pairs of Contemporary* Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2004.
- Collins, Susan. *Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2008.

Course Media

- This is a totally online course. Students are expected to have computer hardware, software and Internet access pursuant to University policy regarding online classes.
- Students are expected to online and participating in real time in weekly chat sessions held on _____ from _____ pm via the university D2L site.
- Students are expected to participate in asynchronous discussions via the D2L site each week.

Reflections on the Weekly Cadence and Assignments: Students will be reading, participating in asynchronous discussions, participating in synchronous chat session and writing every week. The writing assignments are short, but are required to insure that the students are constantly reflecting on how the readings, discussions and chats can be implemented to help them with their own creative writing. It is important that students remain engaged throughout the course so the short writing assignments and mandatory participation in discussions and chat are established. The instructor has several opportunities to identify if a student is engaged by following chat and discussion transcripts and through the Reflective Journal assignments. By providing timely feedback to the Journal assignments, the instructor can make certain that the student is not staring at a blank page when it comes time to draft the original piece of fiction.

Weekly Cadence and Assignments

	Reading	Asynchronous Student Interaction (Discussion in D2L)	Synchronous Student Interaction (Chat in D2L)	Writing
Week 1			Introduction and review of course	Journal / Reflection (250 word min) literary background and interests
Week 2	Classical Short Stories (see assignment sheet)	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding what works in stories	Group – Review of stories and key elements Small Groups- explore key elements	Journal / Reflection (250 word min)
Week 3	Assigned article(s)	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding positions taken by articles	Group discuss possible research topics Small groups explore topics	Journal / Reflection (250 word min)
Week 4	Individual research	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding individual research	Group overall impact Small groups by topic groups	Literary Analysis research paper (500-1000 words)

	Reading	Asynchronous Student Interaction (Discussion in D2L)	Synchronous Student Interaction (Chat in D2L)	Writing
Week 5	Other Student's research papers	5 Responses to papers	Group – Research - Story Small groups on original story topics	First draft original story (750 to 2,000 words)
Week 6	Other Student's stories	5 Responses workshop	Group workshop	Revision Original Story
Week 7	Contemporary Short Stories (see assignment sheet)	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding what works in stories	Group – Review of stories and key elements Small Groups- explore key elements	Journal / Reflection (250 word min)
Week 8	Assigned article(s)	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding positions taken by articles	Group discuss possible research topics Small groups explore topics	Journal / Reflection (250 word min)
Week 9	Individual research	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding individual research	Group overall impact Small groups by topic groups	Literary Analysis research paper (500-1000 words)
Week 10	Other Student's research papers	5 Responses to papers	Group – Research - Story Small groups on original story topics	First draft original story (750 to 2,000 words)
Week 11	Other Student's stories	5 Responses workshop	Group workshop	Revision Original Story
Week 12	Novel (see assignment sheet)	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding what works in the novel	Group – Review of novel and key elements Small Groups- explore key elements	Journal / Reflection (250 word min)
Week 13	Assigned article(s)	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding positions taken by	Group discuss possible research topics Small groups explore topics	Journal / Reflection (250 word min)

	Reading	Asynchronous Student Interaction (Discussion in D2L)	Synchronous Student Interaction (Chat in D2L)	Writing
		articles		
Week 14	Individual research	2 Posts and 2 Responses to posts based on discussion questions regarding individual research	Group overall impact Small groups by topic groups	Literary Analysis research paper (500-1000 words)
Week 15	Other Student's research papers	5 Responses to papers	Group – Research - Novel Small groups on original novel topics	First draft Novel chapter (750 words min) and 2 to 3 page outline
Week 16	Other Novel chapters and outlines stories	5 Responses workshop	Group workshop	Revision Original Novel Chapter and Outline

Reflection on Week 12 Workplan: This plan provides an example of what each week's work plan will entail. At the start of the week, the students would have completed their reading of *Hunger Games* and then will begin their analysis. Each of the activities of the week are structured for the student to develop an understanding of how the various thematic and craft elements of *Hunger Games* come together to make a literary statement and then to lead the students to consideration of how those elements can be used in their own creative work.

Week 12 Workplan

Fiction Elements Learned from Hunger Games

Summary: *Hunger Games* is a very popular novel that can provide some valuable examples of how elements can be utilized in a student's own work. In this online coursework, students will identify craft or theme elements of *Hunger Games* and discuss how to impact their own creative writing using those elements.

Discussion (Asynchronous): After you have read *Hunger Games*, prepare a response with specific examples to any two of the 4 discussion prompts below (using any of the questions you feel appropriate) and respond to a minimum of two posts placed by other students.

1. Characterization:
 - Katniss is one of the most popular and interesting protagonists in modern popular fiction. Looking at her character outside the plot of the story, what are the key attributes that you would use to describe her? How does Collins depict these attributes? Do any of them conflict? What is it that make the combination interesting? How do the various attributes present in Katniss foreshadow the story?
 - Thinking of the combination of attributes in one of your original characters, how could they be changed to make your character more interesting?
2. Novel Structure and organization
 - *Hunger Games* is presented in a classic three act structure, an Introduction, a slow build to a climax and a conclusion. Where would you place the divisions between the various acts? What does Collins do to keep the reader engaged through each act? *Hunger Games* is written as the first book in a trilogy. How would it be different if it was written as a standalone?
 - Where are the breaks in your proposed novel? How do those breaks impact the pacing?
3. Backstory
 - The history of what happened to society before the narrative of *Hunger Games* takes place is a major component of the story. How and when does Collins release the information and is it done

in a manner to keep the reader engaged in the narrative? How is the backstory for the Kaniss and the other characters provided to the readers?

- How and when will you provide the backstory in your novel?

4. Setting

- The setting is obviously a vital part of the plot of *Hunger Games*. As Collins breaks up the world the novel takes place in, how does she use colors and images to make each setting a character? How are the collective people in each setting characterized? How does Collins use these settings and collective characterizations to drive the narrative?
- What is unique and different in the setting of your novel? How can it be used to make the narrative more interesting?

Chat (Synchronous):

- Full chat (20 min) discussion regarding the overall impact of *Hunger Games*? Strengths and Weaknesses? Applicability to a student's original work?
- Small group chat: (30 min) “*Hunger Games* and –isms”. Go to the small group with your name on it and discuss the topic for your group, returning to the full group in 30 minutes with three main points to present.
 - Group 1: What is the *Hunger Games* take on feminism?
 - Group 2: What is the role of the government on people's lives in Panem?
 - Group 3: What symbolism is present in *Hunger Games*?
 - Group 4: What does *Hunger Games* say about popular culture?
- Full Group chat (20 min) regarding Small group reports
- Activity / small group (30 min): The students will go to the home page and download the following PDF and read the first paragraph. (<http://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/teachingwriting/article/viewFile/1337/1286>) They should then return to their small groups and discuss how creative writers should consider Literary Analysis in creating their own work and bring 3 relevant points back to the Full Group session.
- Full Group chat (30 min) regarding small group feedback and wrap up.

Reflective Journal Entry: By _____ each student will put a 250 word reflective journal entry into the dropbox. It should include a summary of the student's take on the student's personal take on the *Hunger Games* as well as the summarizing

class discussions the student found relevant. In addition, the student should outline initial ideas for the Literary Analysis paper due in two weeks and ideas for the novel chapter and outline that is due in three weeks.

Reflections on the Unit Content: The course is designed as a framework to provide instruction on how any literature can be used to improve creative writing. I have used Classic Short Stories, Contemporary Short Stories and Novel for the unit groupings in order to explore the diversity of fiction. The framework could certainly be used for a unit on poetry or other medium of literature. The specific works chosen were to show a wide diversity of themes and styles, but also to demonstrate how two writers might address similar issues differently. I included some possible topics that could serve as focal points for discussion questions regarding the readings, but there are certainly many options. As the instructor gets a feel for craft or thematic elements the students are particularly interested in, chat groupings and discussion questions can be constructed to take advantage of that interest. The Novel portion should focus on how the book is structured and how it can be outlined. The concept of writing a novel can be very intimidating, but the process established in this course should give the students the confidence to see that they could do it.

Unit Content

Unit 1 Classic Short Stories:

Stories: (Links to Internet Access provides)

- *Hills Like White Elephants*, Ernest Hemingway [Quick View](#)
- *The Bear*, William Faulkner [Quick View](#)
- *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, Flannery O'Connor [Quick View](#)

Discussion topics include but are not limited to:

Emotional distance
Dialogue
Symbolism
Regionalism
Narrative style

Unit 2 Contemporary Short Stories (Available in Doubletakes)

- *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Diaz: page 228
- *The Burning House*, Ann Beattie: page 14
- *Bullet in the Brain*, Tobias Wolff: page 650

Discussion topics include but are not limited to:

Point of View
Characterization
Cultural settings

Unit 3 Novel

- *Hunger Games*, Susan Collins

Discussion topics (not limited to):

- Three Act Structure
- Novel structure
- Setting as a character
- Flashbacks
- Characterization

Reflections on Assignments and Grading: The grading of Literature for Creative Writing is a challenge as it attempts to be both a literary analysis course and a creative writing course. With the relatively short assignments, students are not going to be able to research as deeply as they would in a literature course or produce as polished of a creative writing project as they would in a creative writing workshop. It is important that they understand how the two disciplines can work together, however. A key component of the course is student engagement so the Student Participation and Reflective Journal grades which are basically focused on being there and doing the work, make up two thirds of the total grade.

Assignments and Grading

Reflective Journals (250 words): (A total of 20 points – 4 points for each of the five assignments) In weeks there are no other writing assignments, students will be required to turn into the D2L Dropbox reflections from the readings and class discussions for the week. As part of these reflections the students should relate how the readings and discussion will impact their own writing including ideas for the literary analysis paper and the original creative writing that will be required for the unit. The more work a student puts into the reflective journal the easier the literary analysis paper and the original story will be. The instructor will comment and provide feedback to the student on the journal in a timely manner. Grading is based on the completion of a minimum of 250 words and turning in the assignment on time.

Literary Analysis (500 words): (A total of 15 points – 5 for each of the 3 papers assigned) In the third week of each unit, the students will research and write a paper on a literary aspect of the assigned reading and or on one of the discussion topics regarding thematic or craft elements used in the readings. The paper should contribute to the class understanding of how the assigned readings can be utilized by writers in their own work. At least one journal article other than the ones assigned should be utilized as a source. The paper must be a minimum of 500 words and be in proper MLA format. Literary analysis papers will be posted in the discussion forum of D2L and will be reviewed by the members of the class. Grading will be based on

- Completeness of the assignment: word count, on time and MLA format - 20%,
- Proper use of the source(s) and paraphrasing - 20%,
- Literary analysis - 60%.

Original Short Story (minimum of 750 words) (A total of 10 points – 5 for each story written). At the end of each of two short story units, the students will write an original short story. The story theme and format are at the discretion of the student. It is appropriate for students to discuss ideas they have for the stories in their reflective journals so the instructor is aware of what they have in mind and

can help guide them. A first draft of the story will be shared on the D2L discussion site for other students in the class to workshop. Grading will be based on

- Completeness of assignment, word count and on time – 25%
- The appropriate use of imagery, language, form and structure -75%,

Novel First Chapter and Outline (minimum first chapter 750 words – outline 2 pages) (10 points) At the end of the third units, the students will write the first chapter, or at least the first 750 words of the first chapter of a proposed novel as well as constructing a two page outline that reflects the proposed structure of the novel. The chapter and outline should reflect what was learned in the unit from a format standpoint but students are free to select the content and genre of the novel. It is appropriate for students to discuss ideas they have for their novel in their reflective journals so the instructor is aware of what they have in mind and can guide them. A first draft of the novel chapter and outline will be shared on the D2L discussion site for other students in the class to workshop. Grading will be based on

- Completeness of assignment, word count and on time – 25%
- The appropriate use of imagery, language, form and structure - 75%,

Participation in Class and Student Interactions (45 points – 3 points for each of the last 15 weeks of the course) Participation in the D2L Discussions and the class chats are key learning activities for this course. Each week students will be asked to post responses to questions in the D2L Discussion area and to respond to other student's posts. The online class chat will include activities for the whole group and frequently small subgroups that will discuss various topics and respond back to the full chat group. Thoughtful, respectful participation in these activities is expected and grading is based on participation.

Reflection on the Definitions of Online Interactions: Since Literature for Creative Writing is so heavily dependent on the interaction tools available on an online basis; I thought that it was important to identify the options available and when they are best utilized. The information included here is based primarily on my experience in participating in ten different online courses at Minnesota State University Mankato with five different instructors and two internships conducting classes online. The processes for online instruction are evolving as quickly as the technology changes, but the basic concepts remain constant.

Definitions of Online Interactions:

Name	Description	Utilization
Full Class Live Chat	The entire class is logged into a single chat room moderated by the Instructor	This method is effective for the Instructor to lecture the entire class. As it is difficult to generate much student interaction in this environment, the length of the lecture needs to be short to retain student engagement. Breaking a full class lecture up with discussion groups helps drive student interaction. If a full lecture is required it should be closely tied to a text or some other stimuli in order to retain the student's attention. A good practice is to construct the key lecture points ahead of time and cut and paste specific passages.
Small Group Live Chat	This technique establishes small chat groups (usually about 4 students) to discuss either an outside assignment or concept that was presented in full group chat	These small group chats need to have a specific question to address and a structure to their output. It is an effective way to determine if the outside reading required is being completed. The instructor floats between them generally guiding the instruction, but for the most part they are student run. By the end of the session each group needs to narrow their output to two or three "nuggets" that they will present back in full chat. Requiring a presentation adds structure to the discussions and puts the peer pressure on the students to perform. One benefit

Name	Description	Utilization
		to this as an online tool is that the instructor can go back after class and check the transcripts in grading student participation and in determining the groups for the next chat. As I have told students "there's no place to hide in cyberland."
Live Exercises into Dropbox	Students are instructed in full chat to go to the home page, download an assignment and either dropbox it or discuss in small groups.	The advantage to this technique is that the students accomplish a specific task. It has to be very short and not very complex to be effective and has the added benefit of insuring that a student is actually present.
Asynchronous Discussion Forums	The students respond to a discussion prompt by posting into an asynchronous forum. Other students read and respond to the post. At some point the instructor may respond as well.	This traditional bulletin board format is effective in enabling students to thoughtfully reflect on an issue in a less formal manner than writing an essay. Generating learning through student interaction is the primary objective of the use of this tool. Selecting the right prompt is very important in that it must be simple enough to warrant a five or six sentence reflective response, yet complex enough that there is a range of opinions from the students. Instructor insertion into the discussion should be done in a manner to guide students and not terminate a free flow of ideas.
Reflection Summaries into Dropbox	Student Reflection on a topic submitted directly to the Instructor	This is the traditional paper to be submitted to the instructor and not subject to review by other students. It provides an opportunity for students to reflect on what has been learned and gives the instructor a good view of the student's progress.

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