Overview
This course is designed to introduce you to creative writing. It’s not a literature course. We’re going to be looking at stories and poems as writers – taking them apart, discussing not just what they’re saying but how they work. This course will also provide an introduction to the workshop format. The semester will be split in two – the first half will focus on fiction, the second on poetry. Mondays will be devoted to discussions of craft, and Wednesdays will be devoted to workshops. Each student will submit one story and two poems over the course of the semester.

Assignments
Workshop pieces: Stories may be between 5 – 15 pages in length, 12pt Times New Roman, double spaced. If you want to submit a chapter from a novel-in-progress, it must be the first chapter. Poems can be however long you’d like, but 12pt font as well. On the Wednesday before your workshop, you will bring 16 printed copies of your submission to class.

Workshop letters: You will write a one-page feedback letter to each writer, for each piece being workshoped. On the day of the workshop, you will bring two hard copies of each letter to class, one for the writer, and one for me. These letters are meant to provide useful feedback to the writer. You’ll want to identify what works and what doesn’t work in a piece, identify any points of confusion, and give constructive feedback on how a piece can be improved. You should also take notes on the hard copies. Here, you can use marginalia to identify passages you thought worked particularly well, areas of confusion, grammatical, syntactical, and spelling errors. You will return your hard copy to the writer after each workshop, along with your letter.

Weekly Reading Comments: Every Sunday by 7pm, you will be expected to e-mail me with at least one question, comment, or topic for discussion on that week’s reading.

Writer’s Journal: Most of a writer’s work occurs outside of class. Being a writer is a full time pre-occupation, and your creativity only flourishes if cultivated. You’ll be expected to keep a writer’s journal, in which you should write three pages a week. Anything counts. Words, phrases, story ideas, overheard snippets of conversation, lines from a story that you particularly liked. The point is to keep your brain active, to exercise your creativity. I won’t read the journal entries, but I will check – once in the middle of the semester, and once at the end - to make sure you’re keeping up with them.

Writing Exercises: Throughout the course of the semester, I will assign various writing exercises. These will be due in hard copy on Mondays and graded based on effort, not accomplishment. The idea is to take risks, be imaginative, explore new techniques and approaches.
Final Portfolio: At the end of the semester, you will submit a final portfolio, which will contain:
- 1 revised story (along with my original marked up copy)
- 1 revised poem (ditto)
- 2 page writer’s statement about your revisions
- 1 writing exercise expanded into a short story or poem
- Writer’s Journal

Grading Breakdown
Workshop pieces – 20%
Workshop letters – 10%
Class participation – 20%
Reading Comments, Writer’s Journal, Exercises – 20%
Office Hours engagement – 10%
Final portfolio – 20%

Office Hours
I will hold weekly office hours. You’re welcome to sign up to meet with me as frequently as you’d like, but you will be required to come at least twice – once after your fiction workshop, and once after a poetry workshop.

Expectations
- Show up, and show up on time. This class only works when you do. You are permitted two unexcused absences. Your grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter for any additional unexcused absences. If you arrive more than 20 minutes late to class, that will be considered an absence.
- No laptops, cell phones, or other electronic devices will be permitted during class.
- Do not plagiarize. Really. You will be caught and penalized.
- Be thoughtful and respectful to your classmates during workshops. We will discuss workshop etiquette in more depth and devise a workshop schedule during the first week of class.
- Note: The last thing I want is to misinterpret a cry for help: If you submit any writing which exhibits specific, potential dangers, especially about young people of college age—like murder, depression, or suicide—you may expect a brief note or email from me to make sure you are doing okay. If you want to avoid this, I would not mind a quick email to alert me that your work is a reflection on your creativity, and not your current state of mind.

Tentative Reading List
How Fiction Works – James Wood
Poetry Handbook – Mary Oliver

Readings will include work by: Lorrie Moore, Lydia Davis, George Saunders, Aimee Bender, Donald Barthleme, Anton Chekhov, Junot Diaz, Jennifer Egan, Jamaica Kincaid, Claire Messud, Zadie Smith, Anne Lamott, Jorge Luis Borges, Raymond Carver, Alice Munro, William Carlos
Williams, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, Wallace Stevens, Sharon Olds, Gwendolyn Brooks, Yusef Komunyakaa, Tracy K. Smith, Claudia Rankine