Gonzaga in Florence

Course Name: The Writing Traveller
Course Code: English 305
Semester: Fall 2015

Scheduling: Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays 10.30 – 11.30 am

Instructor Data:
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Office hours: (usually by appointment only)

Prerequisites: None

Course Description
This is a course tailor-made for the student who comes to Italy and wishes to preserve something of his experiences here in journal form. Thus, whilst having its origins in the strictly personal it will ultimately outsoar this rather subjective frame by incorporating some of the elements of formal travel writing, memoir and the essay, attempting to give the student techniques with which to enrich, and structure, his work. This will be achieved, partly by studying classic travelogues and observational texts, as listed below, and partly by instruction and lecture from myself. I would also hope ideally to be able to forge a link between a personal, subjective experience and its evocation and a larger, more penetrating truth. Thus on some level the course would also seek to draw philosophical meaning out of the kind of social encounters and situations found whilst travelling. This course will ultimately also develop into a workshop in which students can read and critique each other’s work. The instruction will cover strategies for some elements of creative writing and focus on the rich subjects and themes provided by our travels here. While this course requires a lot of writing, the writing will issue out of the experiences afforded by life in Italy and the various GIF weekend and cultural trips, and much of the drafting will occur within journal pages during travel. The syllabus, including reading and writing assignments, will be adapted as necessary to circumstances that arise in Florence.

Course Objectives
This course will focus on the writing of non-fiction autobiographical works, observational pieces, fiction, and travel writing with an emphasis on the subjects, themes, and experiences of the traveler. Students will practice the techniques of creative writing, and at the same time use their
writing to deepen their cultural engagement with Italy and Europe. Students will review and practice the various elements of fiction, and non-fiction prose writing. For fiction writing this will include plotting, characterization, dialogue, description, along with symbolism, atmosphere, theme, and imagery. For non-fiction writing it will include elements such as structure and voice, tone and more idiosyncratic effects based in personal tastes and tendencies.

**Outcomes**: by the end of the course the students are expected to be able to write fluently, structure their work accordingly to dramatic and narrative principles, engage with literary texts and travelogues, discuss ideas and define the meaning of travel, the nature of being a resident vs being a tourist and the specific experience of travelling abroad whilst being a student.

More specific outcomes related to the writing track include:

- Understanding the important elements of literature that have historically shaped readers' appreciation of written works of art
- Commenting on peers' and others' works reflectively, and developing an awareness of writing as a process that involves invention, drafting, revision, and editing
- Employing situation-aware, genre-appropriate, creative, and expressive language to convey meaning and construct works of literary sophistication
- Developing a working knowledge of writing as a profession, including the processes of literary journals and book-publishing, and possible career options
- Producing a sustained piece or collection of literary work that could be shared beyond the classroom

**Teaching Method**

The lectures are multifaceted and draw heavily on the students' own experiences and contributions. Some space is devoted to the analysis of seminal texts and travelogues, with the employment of close reading. In turn various techniques are taught: the building of suspense, the creation of universality, the delineation of atmosphere. The classes employ workshops and students read aloud weekly assignments and critique each other constructively. Role play, games, imagination exercises, music and art are also utilised. The course offers both academic and personal approaches to travel and memoir writing but above all stresses the individual student's voice and the discovery of a unique way of seeing the world and channeling such perceptions into original prose creations.

**Teaching Commitment**

I believe strongly in the importance of education and cherish the ideal of trying to help people to think independently and help form resourceful and creative thinkers and writers, especially important in today's increasingly superficial and fragmented society. The imagination is in danger of being killed off and this course humbly hopes to delay, postpone or even stop this process of extinction.
**Decorum**

Cell-phones off; no food and beverages admitted, except for bottled water.

No technical devices are allowed (laptops, I pads, etc).

Disruptive, selfish behavior (doing something else during the course, engaging in private conversations, playing with electronic devices, reading unrelated materials) is not acceptable and if repeated it will negatively affect the attendance and participation part of the final grade or may result in removal from the course.

**Note:** Students are expected to take extensive notes in class and to contribute to discussions and debates. Verbal participation is an important part of this course.

**Attendance Policy**

Attendance is taken at the beginning of class from the first day of the semester. The student entering class after attendance is taken has to contact the professor at the end and announce his/her presence. However, this does not mean that coming late is acceptable. Two late arrivals may be excused, three turn automatically into an absence and will affect the attendance and participation part of the final grade.

**Students can miss one week's work, irrespective of the course formula (three sessions, two sessions, one session).** It is their responsibility to make up for the missed work. If they miss a quiz or a report they are not allowed to have it at another time, unless the absence is for certified medical reasons and the professor and Dean agree.

More than one week's work missed is going to be penalized as follows:

One extra absence:
1. by lowering the attendance and participation grade

Two extra absences
2. by lowering the final grade by a whole letter grade

Three extra absences
3. by grading the whole course F

**Assessment Criteria**

**Example:**
Attendance and participation 20%
In class writing 10%
Midterm 30%
Final 40%

Failure to submit or fulfill any required assessment element results in failure for the class.

Significance for the final grade of attendance and participation

A -- the student has no absence, is punctual and respectful with the professors and the classmates, is always prepared for class (has done the reading and writing assignments); He/she vividly participates in class discussions and contributes with interpretations which prove fine critical sense and creativity, using a grammatically correct, semantically rich and conceptually clear language.

B – the student is respectful and punctual, is prepared for class, participates in discussions, has a good level of understanding the issues under focus and an appropriate use of language.

C – has a adequate but schematic or superficial understanding of the texts and issues under focus, is not always prepared for class, uses a simple language.

The language/art teachers will describe their own definition of grades.

Grades Significance for written assignments

Example:

Grade A: the writing is original, stylistically accomplished and shows great energy; there is considerable insight into human behaviour and the human condition and the writer can relate memorable scenes and turn his or her own experiences into universal stories and accounts of life and travel

Grade B: the writing is fluent and engaging and draws the reader in a compelling and universal way

Grade C: the writing is derivative or cliched and shows no real power or insight

Grade D: the work is acceptable, but weak in terms of forming ideas and executing them. The writing is tired and sloppy and the thinking unclear and disorganized

Grade F: the work is not acceptable in terms of the basic requirements or has not been submitted in time.

Grade 0: the work has not been submitted

Grade 0 + Main Campus Report: the work has been plagiarized.
Grades Conversion Example

Version I          Version II
A= 94-100          93,6-100
A - = 90-93        89,6-93,5
B+ = 87 ÷ 89       86,6 ÷ 89,5
B = 84-86          84,6 -86,5
B- = 80-83         79,6 -84,5
C+ = 77-79         76,6 ÷ 79,5
C = 74-76          73, 6 ÷ 76,5
C- =70-73          69, 6 ÷ 73,5
D+ = 67-69         66, 6 ÷ 69, 5
D = 65- 66         64, 6 ÷ 66, 5
F = below 65

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is essential to education and represents the bond of trust between the university, the instructor and the student.

Academic dishonesty is any action by which a student seeks to claim credit for the intellectual effort of another person or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic exercise. It includes unauthorized assistance in tests and examinations; intentionally impeding or damaging the academic work of others; submitting another person's work as your own, or providing work for this purpose; submitting work of your own that has been substantially edited and revised by another person, or providing such an editing and revision service for others; submitting material from a source (books, articles, internet sites) without proper citation and bibliographic reference; paraphrasing material from a source without appropriate reference and citation; submitting substantially the same piece of work in more than one course without the explicit consent of all the instructors concerned; assisting other students in any of the above acts. Students who are academically dishonest will receive 0, zero on the work in question or a failing grade for the course as a whole, depending on the importance of the work to the overall course grade and the judgment of the instructor.

Plagiarism

Academic dishonesty can manifest itself in plagiarism, defined as claiming intellectual property on somebody else's work, in other words as cultural theft. Written assignments will be submitted to the plagiarism detection procedures of TurnItIn.com., activated on Blackboard.

A plagiarized assignment/paper, research project, etc will be graded 0 (zero) and sent to the Main Campus accompanied by a report.

Special Accommodation for students with learning disabilities

Documented learning disabilities or other medically certified problems that need special
accommodation for any of the student’s expected academic performances will be treated with the due attention.

**Required Readings**

On Writing, Stephen King  
The Stones of Florence, Mary McCarthy  
Vaporetto 13, Robert Girardi

**Recommended Additional Resources**

all available for purchase in Florence  
DH Lawrence, Twilight in Italy  
Literary Traveller: an Anthology of Contemporary Fiction. Ed. Larry Dark  
Italy: True Stories of Life on the road.Ed. Anne Calcagno  
a blank journal is recommended