

Optional Residency MFA Courses

2019 Winter

Please note that the [UBC Course Schedule](#) is the definitive list of courses available. Be sure to select the correct term when viewing, as it defaults to the current term (in summer it will show summer courses rather than fall/winter courses).

Optional-Residency MFA courses are distinguished by a section number beginning with “D”. For example, CRWR 509-**001** is an on-campus section and CRWR 509-**D01** is a distance education section. If a course is offered in term 1 and term 2 with separate numbers you do not have to take both sections. Several other courses are two-term courses (501X for example) and for these you will be in the class from September to April.

A Note on Online Course Scheduling

Students are expected to spend a total of 3 hours online participating each week. Class preparation, reading and writing time is not included in this number. The class runs across 27 hours to accommodate the schedules of students in different time zones. All classes run from 9:00AM Pacific time on day one to 12:00PM Pacific Time on day two. Please note that if there is a course time listed in the UBC Course Schedule, it is most likely in error. Our internal scheduling takes precedence.

To register, go to the [Student Service Centre](#). We recommend new students watch the help videos to learn how to create a worklist of courses in advance. Do not wait until registration day to begin your course registrations.

Expanded Course Descriptions – 2019/20 Academic Year

CRWR 501V D01 (term 1) / 501W D02 (term 2): Advanced Writing of Poetry (3 credits per section)

Sarah Yi-Mei Tsiang

Tuesday 9am – Wednesday 12pm, PST

In this workshop-based course, students will produce new work, hone their editing skills, try different poetic forms, and rediscover their sense of play and wonder when it comes to words. We will have ongoing discussions that cover both the technical aspects of poetry and the emotional effect that great poetry produces. Assignments will include writing exercises, portfolios, and producing your own poetic form.

501X D01: Advanced Writing of Poetry (6 credits, two terms)

Susan Musgrave

Tuesday 9am – Wednesday 12pm, PST

In this workshop my aim is to help those who have grown up in fear of poetry to change their minds; I hope also to pass on something of what I know about line breaks, a good title (one that has sex, power and travel in it) why rhyme must include some element of surprise, the abecedarian, the Golden Shovel, the ghazal and other forms; the misuse of adverbs and adjectives; Latinates; archaic language; connectives; using abstractions effectively (if at all) and more. Notes on Craft will address a new poetic form each week. Writing exercises and prompts will be posted, also.

CRWR 503V D01 (term 1) / 503W D02 (term 2): Advanced Writing for Children / YA (3 credits per section)

Maggie de Vries

Wednesday 9AM – Thursday 12PM PST

Whether young people are a new audience for you, or you have published several books for children or teens, this course is a place for you to explore and grow with the enthusiastic support of your peers and me. In this workshop-based course, you will be asked to submit two substantial pieces of writing (which can both be from the same project, but must be new, never workshopped before), and you will have the opportunity to be a peer editor once. As they arise, we will review elements of craft as well as genres, from fantasy to realistic fiction, and forms, from early readers to graphic novels to contemporary picture books. Alongside your work for the course, you will be expected to read the best books out there, and to let your reading inform your own work and your feedback to others. Throughout, we will address questions of audience and the challenges inherent in writing for people at a stage of life that for us is past, and the barriers to getting that writing past the gatekeepers and into readers' hands. At the end of the term, you will submit a revision of one of your pieces along with a reflection on your revision process.

CRWR 505V D01 (term 1) / 505W D04 (term 2): Advanced Writing of Creative Non-Fiction (3 credits per section)

Mandy Catron

Thursday 9AM – Friday 12PM PST

This term we will wade into the sometimes messy, always vulnerable, and often political world of the personal essay. In our time together we will consider a few big questions:

- How does an obligation to the truth shape the ways we tell stories, constructive narratives, and write sentences?
- What is the relationship between the writer and reader in Creative Nonfiction?
- How can we decolonize the essay and expand our sense of what it might contain, how it might look, and what its role might be in the larger culture?
- How can your own curiosity be a starting point for essay writing? How can you find authority in your own knowledge and experience?

Your writing is our primary text, but we will also read and examine essays and criticism as we develop our understanding of the genre. This is a student-centered course which aims to resist larger mandates of taste and to honor the integrity of the work and the authority of its author.

This course welcomes those who are new to creative nonfiction as well as experienced CNF writers.

CRWR 505V D03: Advanced Writing of Creative Non-Fiction (3 credits term 1)

Charlotte Gill

Thursday 9AM – Friday 12PM PST

Narrative nonfiction. Literary journalism. The literature of fact. No matter what we call creative nonfiction, this style of fact-based writing is composed of two basic elements: real-life events + killer storytelling. Creative nonfiction, or CNF for short, comprises dozens of hybridized forms including the personal essay, family memoirs, adventure narratives, investigative reporting and popular science, to name just a few. We will look at four kinds of CNF, styles you might find in places like *The Walrus*, *The Atlantic*, or [Longreads](#). Each has been selected to introduce you to essential nonfiction skills. Through supplementary lectures and workshops we will cover:

- an intro to four CNF forms: memoir, the personal essay, the biographical profile and the short feature article.
- the reconstruction of real-life events into truthful, compellingly readable narratives.
- the development of cinematic, true-to-life story worlds borrowing from the classic techniques of fiction.
- how to incorporate reporting (such as interviews and research) into your work.
- issues particular to nonfiction such as insufficient source material or the ethics of writing about others.

You'll workshop two nonfiction submissions in a collegial, supportive setting. The first submission is memoir, and the second is your choice. This course is open to all graduate levels, and CNF experience is not required.

CRWR 505W D02: Advanced Writing of Creative Non-Fiction (3 credits, term 2)

Jenny Ferguson

Wednesday 9AM – Thursday 12PM PST

We will focus on drafting and workshoping three kinds of creative non-fiction: a flash essay in the style of Brevity (750 words); a lyric essay that engages with the personal, memoir, research, and poetry (2000-4000 words); and, a short literary journalism feature (2000-4000 words).

With a focus on form (how we tell true stories; what form is best suited to telling this true story) and content (what facts to include; what facts to leave out; how to structure scenes so they are compelling; etc.), we will consider how to address both text and subtext in CNF, and how to use the techniques of fiction to structure true stories. We will also talk about truth (what truth? whose truth? emotional truth?), the ethics of telling true stories, and complications that arise while doing research.

Your writing is our main text. We will however read example essays from writers such as Brenda Miller, Ira Sukrungruang, Deesha Philyaw, Alicia Elliott, Marcos Gonzalez, Sherry Simpson, and if needed, a few others. Through mini-lectures and friendly, accomplice-framed group workshops, you will learn to take risks in your writing. Additionally, you will substantially revise one essay during the term. You may be assigned to read work by a specific writer, or

assigned a specific craft book to help push your writing further, on a case-by-case basis. This course is open to writers who have never written CNF as well as writers who have published essays—and anyone in between.

CRWR 506X D01: Advanced Writing of Drama for Screen (6 credits, two terms)

Sara Graefe

Wednesday 9AM – Thursday 12PM PST

This advanced screenwriting workshop focuses specifically on writing for film. Students will explore techniques of creating, developing and writing a long-form screenplay, from initial pitch to treatment to draft. Students will work on the first draft of a new feature-length project (90-120 minutes) over the fall and winter terms. Original stories only please; no adaptations, as this goes beyond the scope of the course. We will also screen movies and examine screenwriting structure, formatting and craft, working from the age-old adage that a writer must first know the rules in order to break them.

CRWR 507V D01 (term 1) / 507W D01 (term 2): Advanced Stage Playwriting (3 credits per term)

Stephen Hunt

Wednesday 9AM – Thursday 12PM PST

During the course, you will explore playwriting through working on a script of your own, whether one-act, musical, monologue or full-length play. In the weekly workshops, you'll participate in peer critiques, write reviews and each student will take a turn hosting a forum discussion. Students learn dialogue, how to develop complex characters, scene endings and other elements of effective stage storytelling. You'll also read a sampling of some contemporary drama, by a variety of playwrights, including Michael Healey, Carmen Aguirre, Tennessee Williams, Tony Kushner, Sarah Ruhl, Djanet Sears, Anna Deavre Smith, Tomson Highway, Wajdi Mouawad and others. In past classes, some of the plays read included *Angels in America*, *Scorched*, *Blue Box*, *Kim's Convenience*, *The Drawer Boy*, *Another Home Invasion*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cloud Nine*, *The Clean House*, *The Romeo Initiative* and *Harlem Duet*.

CRWR 508V D01: Advanced Writing for Graphic Forms 1 (3 credits, term 1)

Sarah Leavitt

Wednesday 9AM – Thursday 12PM PST

This course is designed to give students a strong foundation in comics creation. Because it is a small workshop class, assignments can be modified as needed for students who are already familiar with comics theory and craft. Through readings, class discussion, exercises and workshops, students will:

- Acquire an understanding of the elements of comics writing, drawing, composition, etc and how they work together;
- Learn about the history and present practice of comics, and be exposed to a wide range of comics by diverse cartoonists;
- Become familiar with key theoretical approaches to the form and acquire tools to analyze their own and others' work;
- Write and draw their own short comics.

Students who have taken the course previously or who are already experienced at creating comics will have the opportunity to further hone their skills and work on ongoing longer projects during the class. Students who are new to comics can find it intimidating, particularly if they don't think of themselves as "good artists." In comics class, we build a respectful atmosphere in which students can both support and challenge each other, with thoughtful analysis and honest feedback on the part of readers, and openness and determined effort on the part of the writer/cartoonist.

You do have to draw your own comics for this class. BUT I'm not concerned with whether you can or "can't" draw, and it doesn't matter how much experience you have as a cartoonist. The focus for this class is building coherent, compelling narratives with comics and the goal is to push yourself to improve your own work, in your own style, starting where you are right now.

CrWr 509V D01: Advanced Writing of Fiction (3 credits, term 1)

Jenny Ferguson

Thursday 9AM – Friday 12PM PST

In this workshop we will write in three possible fictional forms: flash fiction (under 1000 words), more traditional short stories (up to 4000 words), and the first chapters of new, in-progress, never-before workshopped novels. We will focus exclusively on literary and literary-genre mash-up fiction—where you change, alter, and play with established genre tropes until they become something hybrid, something new—as we discuss story structures for fictions, the different kinds of conflict, how loud or soft these conflicts can be in a scene, the use of scene vs. summary, how character drives plot and how plot drives character, as well as things like point of view, setting, dialogue, metaphor, symbol, subtext, and developing your voice as a writer.

Your stories are our main texts. We will however read example fictions from writers such as Roxane Gay, Rebecca Roanhorse, Jocelyne Saucier, and possibly a few others as needed. We will workshop two pieces: the first will be flash fiction; the second workshop piece will be your choice. Additionally, you will substantially revise one story or the first chapter of your novel-in-progress during the term. You may be assigned to read work by a specific writer, or assigned a specific craft book to help push your writing further, on a case-by-case basis. Through mini-lectures, and friendly, accomplice-framed group workshops, you will learn to take risks in your writing, and significantly develop your fiction..

CrWr 509V D03 (term 1) / 509W D02 (term 2): Advanced Writing of Fiction (3 credits per term)

Doretta Lau

Thursday 9AM – Friday 12PM PST

To write is to be in conversation with other writers, an attempt to produce our fantasy of what fiction should be. In this workshop we will be open to creative impulses and experimentation while applying rigour at the sentence level. This is a time to hone the voice, to learn how structure is a kind of freedom, to master rules in order to break them, to make mistakes that

develop into beauty beyond perfection, to create a point of view so singular that no one else can be the author of the work.

Students will submit two assignments during the term and are responsible for placing as much attention on critique as on their own craft. Community begins here in the workshop setting.

CrWr 509W D04: Advanced Writing of Fiction (3 credits, term 2)

Charlotte Gill

Thursday 9AM – Friday 12PM PST

From just a handful of basic ingredients—eggs, flour, milk, sugar—a thousand different cakes can be made. Just like this, infinite plots and fiction styles may be devised from just a handful of narrative building blocks. That’s our starting point. We will break down the storytelling process into comprehensible fundamentals, using a variety of examples from contemporary fiction.

Through workshops and supplementary lectures, we will cover:

- the four pillars of fiction: character and plot, scene and exposition.
- classic story structure in three acts (plus alternative designs).
- conflict and the reversal.
- narration and point of view.

This course is open to all graduate levels. Over the course of the semester, you’ll workshop two fiction submissions in a collegial, supportive setting. The focus is workshop with short stories and novel chapters. No matter our literary predilections, the goal is to provide a clear, compelling reading experience, and to achieve a style that’s authentically our own.

CRWR 509W-D06– Advanced Writing of Fiction (3 credits, term 2)

Maureen Medved

Thursday 9AM – Friday 12PM PST

This is a workshop for graduate writers of all forms of short and long fiction. During this workshop, you will complete two submissions (adding up to approximately 40 pages) of either short stories, narrative fragments or chapters from a novel or novella. This course accommodates all forms of fiction writing (short stories, novels, novellas, flash, micro-fiction, genre-crossover, and others). While content is the writer’s choice, strong literary prose is the standard. You are welcome to explore any form of fiction with the exception of formula or genre writing – romance, science fiction, crime, mystery – unless you spin the genre and make it new.

We will explore advanced aspects of craft – fiction techniques, including structure, point of view, character development, voice, dialogue and so forth, and I will ask you to participate in exercises that will address these aspects, so that we can enhance our understanding of craft. We will investigate the revision process, and you will be expected to deeply consider a revision of your own work. Excellent works of fiction will be our texts for analysis and discussion. We will explore the writing process and getting published.

This is a workshop about taking creative risks while honoring your unique potential, literary aims, and writerly voice. My hope is that you will leave this workshop with more tools and a

more deeply felt understanding of your work, and its strengths and challenges, and that you will take this forward in all your writing.

CrWr 514X D01: Advanced Writing for Television (6 credits, both terms)

Sioux Browning

Tuesday 9AM – Wednesday 12PM PST

Television has evolved from being the “idiot box” to providing us with a “golden age” of storytelling. This two-term class is for anyone interested in writing for the small screen; no previous screenwriting experience is required (but it is helpful). We will cover the essentials: units of action, plotting, story structure, dialogue, formatting and much more. We will also look at how series are structured, and the business and process of writing for TV.

In the first semester, students will deconstruct a current, scripted TV show (half-hour or hour) and write a spec episode for it. Keep in mind it’s not necessarily easier to write a half-hour of television than it is to write an hour of it. We’ll go step-by-step from the beginning: pitch to beat sheet to outline to draft. Before classes begin, students should have in mind several options for shows they’d like to spec; these should be shows you like to watch and you know fairly well. Shows from specialty channels (like HBO) or streaming services (like Netflix or Amazon, as long as the show is on-going) are just as welcome as regular network TV. Prior to the start of classes, I’ll send out a note that will help narrow down your choice.

In the following semester, students will create an original project. This project can be for TV or it can be a web series. For those who desire, these original projects can be written in pairs or teams. Over the course of the class, we will also watch and discuss episodes of TV (access to a subscription service like Netflix or Crave will likely be necessary).

I expect discussion of each others’ projects to be thoughtful and merciful. Just as in a professional writers’ room, deadlines are taken seriously. Before class starts, I recommend students read a few recent TV scripts on-line to get a sense of how they look and feel. This class has a sharp learning curve and it’s busy, but it also tends to be a lot of fun

CRWR 550V-D01 – Teaching Creative Writing (3 credits, Term 1)

Nancy Lee

Tuesday 9AM – Wednesday 12PM PST

This hands-on practical course introduces students to the rewards and potential challenges of teaching creative writing. As a foundation, we explore the fundamentals of teaching writing and the practices of planning, programming and performance necessary to thrive and inspire as a creative writing instructor in a variety of settings: continuing education, college and university, and specialized workshops for specific groups. We will examine our philosophies and theories around creative writing pedagogy and familiarize ourselves with a variety of teaching methodologies, including: working with writing exercises, workshopping creative work, developing course reading lists, and guiding students through creative process. Other topics include the perils of workshop, how to support diversity in the classroom, how to mediate sensitive topics and deal with difficult classroom situations, and finally, how to find work. Students will leave the course with a concrete set of teaching tools including a teaching philosophy, course outline, syllabus and a bank of writing exercises.

Note: this course is open to on-campus and online students; 6 spaces have been reserved for each program. We do not recommend new students take this course – students closer to the end of their degree have priority.

Enrolment Note

We use the UBC enrolment system through the [Student Service Centre](#) for all workshop enrolment. Thesis enrolment must be carried out directly through the program support, Alexandra Tsardidis, with the prior permission of your thesis advisor.