

MEMORANDUM

Rationale for granting GEC status to English 265, 266, and 268

We would like to see our existing 200-level Creative Writing courses approved as GEC courses under the category number 5 (Arts and Humanities), letter “B” (Analysis of Texts and Works of Art), number 2 (Visual/Performing Arts). With your approval I’d like to seek GEC status for English 265 (Writing of Fiction I), 266 (Writing of Poetry I), and 268 (Writing of Creative Nonfiction I). My rationale is as follows:

These three courses are creative writing workshops that emphasize the close reading of literary texts as a means of learning how to create such texts oneself. We spend a certain amount of class time in every workshop analyzing the artistic choices and effects present in professional models of short stories, poems, and literary essays. Of course, our eye is always toward how we can then practice specific techniques in original work. Of course, we spend a good deal of time engaged in workshop discussions of the original work that the students distribute to the class. Here, we’re engaging in textual analysis, and practicing the oral expression and critical thinking skills essential to a deeper understanding of literary texts and necessary to our revision of original work and the creation of new work that reflects a more sophisticated grasp of poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction.

The purpose of each course, then, is to give the students an appreciation of the history and the breadth of the respective genre, thereby exposing them to a deeper understanding of artistic technique. This study and analysis then has a practical application in the students’ own original work and in the workshop analysis and discussion of that work. In short, students learn technique through the study of its literary history and the creation, analysis, and revision of original work

The content of each course teaches aesthetics and in fact invites the students to begin to define their own sense of the shape and possible range of the respective genre. Students in 265, for example, often have reading assignments in a craft book such as Janet Burroway’s *Writing Fiction*, where they learn about the techniques of point of view, characterization, structure, description, and voice, to name a few. Students then see these techniques utilized in stories by such masters of the form as Anton Chekhov, Katherine Mansfield, Ernest Hemingway, and notable contemporary writers such as Tobias Wolff and Bobbie Ann Mason. Students practice these techniques in short writing assignments. They then produce one or two full-length original stories for workshop analysis. All students participate in these workshop discussions that require them to consider the intent of the individual story and the artistic choices necessary to producing that intent. Students in English 266 and 268 undergo this same process with texts and reading and writing assignments appropriate to the respective genres.

Instructors evaluate students in the 200-level workshops on the basis of their understanding of artistic technique as evidenced in their writing assignments, their verbal

articulation of aesthetics in their discussion of assigned readings and also the analysis of original work, and in their conception and revision of the original work itself. Each instructor designs a grading plan that allows the writing assignments, the oral participation, and the full-length written work to receive appropriate weights, each contributing a certain percentage to the final grade.

Through the reading, class discussions, the practice of techniques common to the respective genre, and the production and analysis of full-length original work, students in English 265, 266, and 268 gain a fuller appreciation of the humanities and the arts. The students become more perceptive producers and receivers of works of art. By paying attention to theoretical issues relevant to a genre, students become more astute participants in the interpretation and evaluation of artistic works inside and outside that genre. Students in these classes leave not only with an increased understanding of the historical and aesthetic development of a particular genre, they also acquire critical skills, both verbal and written, necessary to the further enjoyment and appreciation of all forms of art. They also gain the skills of expression and depth of thought essential to the further study of a wide range of disciplines.