Course Description
This semester, we will investigate the relationship of form and function in fiction and creative nonfiction and explore how the underlying structure affects the impact of your prose. We will examine a variety of narrative shapes and find examples of their use in contemporary creative prose to witness the effect of those formal choices on our response as readers. We will then put these strategies and insights to work by drafting, workshopping, and revising your own original writing.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this semester, successful students will
- study published short stories, analyzing their structural craft and narrative techniques (participation, workshop, and structure analyses)
- apply their learning to their own creative prose writing (workshop pieces, rewritten story project)

Additional MENG-specific Learning Outcomes
The MENG Program is dedicated to helping students master the following learning outcomes. **This class focuses specifically on learning outcomes 1 and 2.**
Learning Outcome 1: Gather, analyze, and communicate information effectively as well as think creatively and critically.
Learning Outcome 2: Cultivated skills in close reading, critical thinking, logical argument from evidence presented, creative expression, and persuasive writing.
Learning Outcome 3: Apply various theoretical perspectives and literary terminology to interpretations of literary texts to showcase an understanding of theoretical perspectives.
Learning Outcome 4: Acknowledge and articulate the significance of key primary text(s) in one specific literary genre, period, culture or style.
Learning Outcome 5: Demonstrate knowledge of an interaction with current scholarly criticism.
Learning Outcome 6: Ability to employ academic conventions and protocols for written or multimodal presentations, including the application of appropriate conventions, citation formats and style manuals.

Required Course Materials
Aristotle. *Poetics.* (dropbox)

Online materials noted on our course schedule
A NOTE ON THE COURSE MATERIALS: In creative writing, we don’t really make a distinction between “primary” and “secondary” course materials, as you have done in your literature courses. Instead, we will consider your own work to be primary. We’ll also read published stories and essays in the Best American series, examining them for technique, as well as theory from Jerome Stern, Brenda Miller, and others, about the effects of structural choices on creative work. It could be argued that these published stories and theory are secondary source material in this context.

Course Grade
Your grade this semester will be determined according to the following criteria:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop Pieces (2 * 10%)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Revision Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural Analysis Essay</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Participation: Your participation grade in this class will be determined by attendance and class discussion according to the following criteria:

Attendance: If you aren’t here, you can’t participate. It is as simple as that. Thus, the base of your participation grade will be determined by how often you attend.

- 0 absences: 100%
- 1 absence: 95%
- 2 absences: 65%
- 3 absences: course failure

If you need to miss class, please e-mail or talk to me in advance so that we can make arrangements to turn in any assignments that are due. Talk to your peers to get copies of class notes.

IMPORTANT NOTES:
All absences are treated the same. Whether you miss class because of a wedding, a funeral, an illness, or a mental health day, it counts as an absence. There are no “excused” or “unexcused” absences. I expect you to attend class every day on which you are able. Absences should only be the result of an unavoidable emergency.
If you are more than fifteen minutes late to class, you will be counted absent. Contact me immediately if you have an emergency that causes you to miss a class.

Tardies are noted in the course role and affect your course participation. Please be punctual.

Class Discussion: Once you have established the numerical base of your participation grade through attendance, it will be adjusted to reflect your active participation or lack thereof. I will keep a tally sheet to track your contributions to class discussion and use them to adjust your score as follows:

+10 Student frequently offers comments that really develop the conversation, often producing “a-ha!” moments. The student’s comments reflect in-depth knowledge of the class material (including workshop stories and readings from required texts), bringing in supplementary research not assigned by the professor, and showing the student’s exceptional intellectual ability and effort.

+5 Student frequently offers comments that are intelligent and useful and demonstrate thorough knowledge of course material, sometimes including supplementary information.
Student routinely offers comments that show his/her knowledge of and thoughtful reflection on the course material. This student meets the class expectations but has not exceeded them.

-5 Student either comments less often than his/her peers or offers comments that do not reflect understanding of course materials. The student falls just short of class expectations.

-10 Student either comments rarely comments or offers comments that are factually inaccurate and distracting, suggesting they are not reading carefully. The student is not meeting class expectations.

-15+ Student never comments or offers comments that are off-topic and disruptive. Not only is this student failing to meet class expectations, but s/he is preventing others from learning.

Workshop Pieces: Throughout the semester, I will give you writing prompts to try out, each of which follows a unique structure. These are designed for daily work. The more effort you put into writing and revising, the more you will take from this class.

As you progress through the course, you will decide which among these starts is most interesting to you and polish that piece to share with the class. Early in the semester, we will create a workshop schedule. Each student should get to workshop at least two pieces. The week before your workshop, you will bring copies of your story, lyric essay, or personal essay for every class member to read and comment upon. Please double-space. Make sure your name is on your submission. Number and staple your pages. Use 12 point, Times New Roman font for readability. (This is the industry standard, and the font you are likely to use if you are submitting your work to publishers.) Workshop submissions should be no longer than fifteen pages. There is no minimum length—though if you are working on flash fiction there may well be a maximum length. A well-constructed piece of flash takes just as much time and thought to write as a longer piece. Your goal here should be quality, not quantity. All writing should be revised and edited to the best of the writer’s ability before being shared with the class.

Because I want you more focused on improving your craft rather than earning a letter grade, these writings will be graded pass/fail. The most common reason a draft fails is sloppiness in the writing or editing. Even at this stage, the writing should have been edited carefully and should reflect the writer’s mastery of the English language, grammar, and writing conventions. In other words, though your workshop pieces are not final drafts, neither are they first drafts nor rough drafts. I encourage all of you to take your work by the Writing Center or to review them with your peers before sharing them with the workshop.

Final Revision Project: At the semester’s end, you will turn in a revision project that includes two pieces: one 3-5 page craft essay and one revised piece.

Craft Essay: Approach the craft essay as you would a piece of publishable creative non-fiction. Your goal is to be both engaging and insightful. Your essay should focus on something you feel you have learned this semester about the use of structure or prose forms. It should have a central thesis that is supported with quotations and other evidence (from your writing, from published stories and essays, from interviews and craft essays from other writers)—BUT the way that you approach conveying that thesis should be as creative as your fiction and personal or lyric essays. Think about how the shape/structure of your craft essay (as well as the tone, wording, and content) can help to hold your reader’s interest.

Revised Piece: You may choose any piece that you have workshopped this semester to revise. Remember, revision differs from editing. To re-vise means to re-see and re-imagine possibilities. Rewriting is perfectly acceptable. Be bold. Take risks.
The project will be assessed with a letter grade based on the overall quality of the complete package. Those projects which are exceptional will earn an A, strong projects a B, and passing projects a C. Projects which fail to meet the standards of graduate-level work will earn a D or F depending on the severity of their flaws. Please edit carefully. To help you revise this project into its best possible version before turning it in, I highly recommend that students create out-of-class critique groups.

**Structural Analysis Essay:** Each student will write one short essay, 3-5 pages in length, analyzing the structural elements of a published short story or essay from *Best American Short Stories 2014* or *Best American Essay 2014.*

**Step 1:** Choose the piece you will analyze. (Students will select an unique story or essay in the first week of class.)

**Step 2:** Break the piece down into its component parts. Try to draw an illustration of its structure. If you were to build a three-dimensional model, what would it look like? Does the form match one described by Jerome Stern, or is it following another pattern altogether? What gestures is the writer making? Where does s/he start and end? Where does the piece turn? Where does the focus change from one thing to another?

**Step 3:** Write: Describe the piece’s structure, as you see it. Feel free to include a graphic if it helps to illustrate your vision. Make an argument about how the structure of the piece creates or alters its effect. Quote from both the story and the theory to support your argument. Students will earn a letter grade based on the essay’s quality as described in the previous section. You will assign the story/essay to your classmates and discuss your findings.

[Note this essay is worth 20% of your course grade. Approach it with the same creativity and care that you approach writing your imaginative pieces. Be interesting and intelligent. Revise carefully. Your goal is to create an essay that an educated reader could read and understand even if they had not read the essay or story whose structure you have analyzed. I encourage you to peer edit out of class and/or to take a draft of your essay to the Writing Center for feedback before turning in a final copy.]

**Step 4:** Present your analysis to the class. (Total time: 5-10 minutes). Turn in your essay immediately following your presentation.

**OTHER POLICIES**

**Late Work:** All assigned work should be turned in by the assigned deadline. Late work will be penalized five points for each day it is late, including Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. If for some reason your work is late, be sure to e-mail a copy to me as soon as possible to prevent excessive loss of points.

**Missed Classes:** If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to talk to a peer and find out what you missed. If you know you are going to miss a class and talk to me in advance, so we can devise a plan.

**Texting/Social Networking/Surfing/Other:** While in this class, your computer and/or phone should be turned off and put away unless it is needed for a class assignment. Do not send text messages, surf the net, or check social networking sites while in class. Doing so displays a contempt for the class and for the thoughts of your peers that I absolutely will not tolerate. Students caught “texting” will lose five percentage points from of their final grade for the first offense and will be asked to drop the class if the incidence recurs. They may re-enroll in the course when they are serious about learning.
**Academic Dishonesty:** As specified in PPM 6-22 IV D, cheating and plagiarism violate the Student Code. Plagiarism is “the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person’s or group’s ideas or work.” Students found guilty of cheating or plagiarism are subject to failure of a specific assignment, or, in more serious cases, failure of the entire course.

**Core Beliefs:** According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “[d]etermine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student's core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student's beliefs.” As a note, we are not willing to censor your fellow students and their writing. Each student has an individual voice and it is very likely topics and language will come up that may be offensive to some.

***Please note that, due to the nature of this course, readings often include material that may be offensive. Fiction writers must write about what they feel most passionately about, and it is not unusual for writing to include profanity, graphic depictions of sexual encounters, violence, and political or religious content. I welcome all forms of writing here, provided that they aspire towards excellent craftsmanship. If you feel that the course requirements will violate your values, we need to talk immediately to determine whether we can create a plan that will allow you to complete the course work. If we can find no solution, you may wish to take this course from another instructor. I will completely understand your decision to do so and will not hold it against you in any way.***

**Disability Accommodation:** PPM 3-34 notes: “When students seek accommodation in a regularly scheduled course, they have the responsibility to make such requests at the Center for Students with Disabilities before the beginning of the semester in which the accommodation is being requested. When a student fails to make such arrangements, interim accommodations can be made by the instructor, pending the determination of the request for a permanent accommodation.”

**Emergency Closure:** If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class via Canvas. Look for announcements through Weber email.

**SCHEDULE**
Please complete all readings and assignments prior to the date on which they are listed. I’ve put lecture topics in parentheses to help distinguish them from assignments.

**Week 1, Sept 1:** Introductions. Talk through the syllabus and textbooks. Construct class workshop & structural analysis schedules. Mini-lecture: Freytag, Aristotle and the basics of structure. (If time, writing prompt.)

**HW:** Peruse the Best American collections, looking for a piece that you would like to use for your structural analysis. Read Aristotle’s Poetics (dropbox).

**Week 2, Sept 8:** Create reading schedule based on the structural analysis dates. Lecture: Poetics and classical story structure. Watch John DuFresne, “How to Write a Short Story”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urJD5W01 (If time, writing prompt.)

Prompt: Write a story or essay that follows a traditional Aristotelian structure with a clear beginning (act I), middle (act II), and end (act III) occurring in that order. Some event should appear between each act to spin the action in a new direction, and the person whom the piece is about should be driven by a clear desire.

Week 3, Sept 15: Discussion: Braided prose and extended metaphors. Take apart the essays and stories we read for today: What are the parts? How are they put together? How does the structure contribute meaning to the work?
[2 students] distribute workshop pieces.
HW: Read __[student-assigned story/essay]___ and __[student-assigned story/essay]__. Read and comment on workshop pieces.
Prompt: Write a braided essay or story. One of the braided elements may be about a thing and the other may be about a person. You must braid at least two elements but you may have more.

[2 students] distribute workshop pieces.
HW: Read Annie Dillard’s “Living Like Weasels” (http://www.courses.vcu.edu/ENG200-lad/dillard.htm). Read __[student-assigned story/essay]___ and __[student-assigned story/essay]__. Read and comment on workshop pieces.
Prompt: Write a story or essay that follows one of the structures listed in Section 1 of Jerome Stern’s Making Shapely Fiction.

Week 5, Sept 29: Adopting poetic forms: sonnet structure in flash fiction: “Living Like Weasels” as Ode. Presentations: [2 structural analyses.] Workshop [2 students—names to be entered after first class].
[2 students] distribute workshop pieces.
HW: Read and comment on workshop pieces. Read __[student-assigned story/essay]__.
Prompt: Write a flash fiction or essay in fourteen lines. If you are following an Italian sonnet structure, include a turn (“volta”) after your eighth sentence. If you are following an English sonnet structure, the first twelve sentences should share a focus, perhaps further segmenting into three sets of four sentences (these twelve collectively may develop a metaphor or set up a question) and the last two sentences should create some kind of pay off (either an answer to, conclusion, amplification of, or refutation of the previous twelve sentences). For more on the sonnet tradition, see http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/poetic-form-sonnet

Week 6, Oct 6: BK Loren reading @ 6 in Kimball, Shaw Gallery. Presentation: [1 structural analysis.] Workshop [2 students—names to be entered after first class].
[2 students] distribute workshop pieces.
HW: Read __[student-assigned story/essay]__. Read and comment on workshop pieces.
Prompt: Rewrite a previously drafted story or essay changing the point of view and using a different structure selected from Jerome Stern’s *Making Shapely Fiction*.

**Week 7, Oct 13:** Star Colbrooke and Shanan Ballam reading @ 5:30 in Fireplace Lounge in Union Building. Presentation: [1 structural analysis.] Workshop [2 students—names to be entered after first class].

[3 students] distribute workshop pieces.

**HW:** Read ___[student-assigned story/essay]___ and ___[student-assigned story/essay]___. Read and comment on workshop pieces.

Prompt: Write a story that starts at the end and takes us back to the beginning.

**Week 8, Oct 20:** Watch Kurt Vonnegut on story structure: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ) Presentations: [2 structural analyses.]

Workshop [3 students—names to be entered after first class].

[3 students] distribute workshop pieces.

**HW:** Read ___[student-assigned story/essay]___ and ___[student-assigned story/essay]___. Read and comment on workshop pieces.

Prompt: Write a story or essay in second person. The title of your piece should start with the words “How to…”

[Examples: Lorrie Moore’s “How to Become a Writer” and “How to Be an Other Woman,” Pam Houston’s “How to Talk to a Hunter,” Junot Diaz’s “How to Date a Brown Girl,” and Jerald Walker’s “How to Make a Slave”]

**Week 9, Oct 27:** Presentations: [2 structural analyses.] Workshop [3 students—names to be entered after first class].

[3 students] distribute workshop pieces.


Prompt: Rewrite a previously drafted story or essay changing the setting and using a different structure selected from Jerome Stern’s *Making Shapely Fiction*.


[3 students] distribute workshop pieces.

**HW:** Read ___[student-assigned story/essay]___ and ___[student-assigned story/essay]___. Read and comment on workshop pieces. Work on final projects.

Prompt: Write a segmented story or essay that features a bug.

**Week 11, Nov 10:** Presentations: [2 structural analyses.] Workshop [3 students—names to be entered after first class].

[3 students] distribute workshop pieces.
HW: Read __[student-assigned story/essay]__. and __[student-assigned story/essay]__. Read and comment on workshop pieces. Work on final projects.

Prompt: Write a story or essay about a body part. Choose your structure from one of the shapes from Jerome Stern’s Making Shapely Fiction.

**Week 12, Nov 17:** Presentations: [2 structural analyses.] Workshop [3 students—names to be entered after first class].
[3 students] distribute workshop pieces.
HW: Read __[student-assigned story/essay]__. Read and comment on workshop pieces. Work on final projects.
Prompt: Revise a story or essay that you’ve previously written. The new version may be no more than half the length of the original story.

**Week 13, Nov 24:** Listen to Robert Boswell’s “Complex Moments in Fiction” (http://www.tinhouse.com/blog/37390/the-tin-house-podcast-complex-moments-in-fiction-with-robert-boswell.html). Workshop [3 students—names to be entered after first class].
[3 students] distribute workshop pieces.
HW: Read __[student-assigned story/essay]__. Read and comment on workshop pieces. Work on final projects.

**Week 14, Dec 1:** Presentation: [1 structural analysis.] Workshop [3 students—names to be entered after first class].
HW: Finish final revision project.

**Week 15, Dec 8:** Listen to AWP panel “The Art of Encounter: Structuring Short Fiction” (https://www.awpwriter.org/magazine_media/podcast_view/307). Discuss points of agreement and moments we want to question. Present final revision projects: Be ready to talk about your craft essay in particular and to touch on how your approach to craft manifested in your story/essay revisions.

Because this is a projects-based class, we will not meet during the final exam time. Please use the time instead to finish other projects and prepare for your other finals. If you’ve made it this far, you’ve more than put in your time. Good work!