

**Syllabus ENGL 4611-6611: English Studies/International Locale,
Topic: International Experiences in Creative Writing. 3 Credit hours**

Professor: Dr. John Bensko

Faculty, University of Memphis Creative Writing Program

Bio: Professor Bensko has lived in Alicante, Spain and taught at the University of Alicante as Fulbright Professor in American Literature and Creative Writing. He is the author of three books of poetry, including the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award winning *Green Soldiers*, and one book of fiction, *Sea Dogs*, a collection of stories. His fiction, poetry and non-fiction have been published in numerous periodicals and anthologies. He teaches in both the undergraduate creative writing program and the MFA graduate program at the University of Memphis.

Course description: This course will cover an introductory overview of all three of the main genres of creative writing (Fiction, Poetry, and Creative Non-Fiction) while also allowing students to focus on one genre and create a course project in that genre. The format will combine lecture, workshops, and seminar-style discussions, along with field trips to locations with high cultural value and on-site exercises in how to spot valuable material for writing, do the necessary research, and turn the material into creative work. Students will write journal versions and creative non-fiction pieces based on their experiences, and the class will then focus on how to incorporate those into unfinished works in the genre of the student's choice. One goal of the course will be to promote interactions between the students and the people of the country where the course takes place, and students will be encouraged and guided in those interactions and in learning as much as possible about the language and customs of the country visited. In cooperation with faculty at the University of Alicante, we will arrange for those students who wish to get together with U of A students studying English, to meet informally downtown and spend time together to share experiences and help each other with their Spanish/English.

Texts: Selections from: Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town*; Tom Wolfe's *The New Journalism: Western Wind* by J.F. Nims; the fiction and non-fiction of Ernest Hemingway; *The Cabin* by Vicente Blasco Ibanez; the poems of Miguel Hernandez, the prose and poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca; *South from Granada* and *The Face of Spain* by Gerald Brenan; *Death's Other Kingdom* by Gamel Woolsey; *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell; *Spanish Lessons: Beginning a New Life in Spain* by Derek Lambert.

These selections consist of individual poems or essays or chapters from the above works. We will not be reading the entire works, but only those parts that relate most closely to the course. Students will obtain and read most texts in the month before the trip to Spain begins. The professor will copy (following fair use guidelines) most selections and send them to the students. Others, they will need to buy or check out from a library and photocopy.

Note: Students in 6611 at the graduate level will read more selections from these works and will write short responses/commentaries on some of them.

Writing Assignments: Students will keep a daily journal and will do daily writing assignments that will involve gathering cultural and linguistic material and creating short works of poetry, non-fiction, and fiction that incorporate the materials gathered on the field trips. In addition, each student will create a final portfolio of work in one of the three genres to include either.

For students in 4611 at the undergraduate level: 1) 6 poems of at least 18 lines each; or 12 pages (typed, double spaced) of fiction (a story or a section of a novel); or 12 pages of creative non-fiction (from 1 to 3 pieces - travel, memoir, character sketch, personal essay, non-fiction story).

For students in 6611 at the Graduate level: 1) 7 poems of at least 18 lines each; or 15 pages (typed, double-spaced) of fiction (a story or a section of a novel); or 15 pages of creative non-fiction (from 1 to 3 pieces-travel, memoir, character sketch, personal essay, non-fiction story).

Other assignments for 6611 Graduate students: those with workshop experience will be expected to direct small group workshop discussions and act as a mentor/tutor to the undergraduates in that small group; other graduate students will complete an additional project that fits their areas of specialization.

All portfolios will be due on or before July 25.

Grading: Class Participation 25%, Short writing assignments/Journal 25%, Final Portfolio 50%.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1) to gain a greater appreciation of the language and culture of another country and to understand their importance to a creative writer;
- 2) to improve the students' creativity, writing skills, and versatility in the use of genres;
- 3) through workshop experience, to improve the students' ability to analyze and articulate their responses to creative writing in a way that makes them better critics, editors, and teachers of writing.

Attendance/Lateness Policy: Participation in class meetings and field trips is extremely important and missing more than one meeting/trip will hurt the student's class participation grade. Missing more than 4 can result in an F for the course grade. Being late, for field trips especially, disrupts the smooth running of the class and will also affect the participation grade.

Disability Statement: Qualified students with disabilities will be provided reasonable and necessary academic accommodations if determined eligible by the appropriate

disability services staff. Prior to granting disability accommodations in this course, the instructor must receive written verification of a student's eligibility for specific accommodations from the disability services staff. It is the student's responsibility to initiate contact with the disability services staff and to follow the established procedures for having the accommodation notice sent to the instructor.

2014 Class schedule: (for summer schedule--regular/workshop classes meet for 3 hours (5:30-8:30 pm) and symposium and field trip classes for a minimum of 3 1/2 hours (usually 3:30-7:00 pm, for local trips, 12-7 p.m. for trips to Altea and Orihuela; and all day for trips to Valencia and Tabarca)--total contact hours for educational (non-travel) purposes are 40 minimum, the standard for 3 hours of course credit. Although the course runs from June 2-24, during which the class will meet, the actual time period during which students may turn in work runs from June through July, U of Memphis summer sessions 1 & 2. Therefore, students may elect to take additional time after the course meetings to write and turn in their final portfolios and email them to the professor by July 25.

Note: for reading and writing assignments below, students will be given more detailed instructions for the assignments during the class. Readings are to be read before the class day listed. Assignments are to be begun on the day listed and completed at least one day before the Workshop day for that assignment.

Sun June 1: arrival in Madrid: Orientation. Students should plan to arrive in Madrid by 4 pm. Optional visit to the Prado art museum at 6 pm. All local meals and transportation will be paid for by the students.

Mon June 2: Morning, explore Madrid. Afternoon, train trip (paid for by students) to and arrival in Alicante. Initial orientation, setting up with Spanish families. Note: The dates for the annual Mercado Medieval, have not yet been set, but it usually takes place this week, and if so the class will visit it. This fiesta celebrates local artisans and the medieval past of the city and it includes parades, a medieval fair with participants dressed in period costumes, and vendors selling locally produced goods.

Tue June 3: Field trip orientation through city center, Mercado (central market), bus station, train station, and *Explanada*, to gather writing material. First class meeting. Introduction--discussion of basics of creative writing in the three genres, basics of workshop, how to gather material for writing, strategies for the course, keeping journal and how to use it. Basic language skills and information about getting around Alicante. Fiction Assignment (#1), write a fictional scene in which a person goes to one of the local places we've visited and something unfolds that connects the past to the present.

Wed June 4: Field trip to the MARQ archaeological museum and the Castillo de Santa Barbara. Discuss selections from Wolfe and Nims. Overview of history of Alicante.

Thur June 5: Field trip to the Roman ruins at Lucentum and a walking tour of the coast along Cabo las Huertas. Discuss travel writing. Non-Fiction Writing assignment (#2): Write a non-fiction piece that involves an interview with someone you meet in

Spain. It must also concern some cultural aspect you discover, and be sure to use what Tom Wolfe calls “status details.”

Fri-Sun June 6-8:-- weekends 1&2 are left free, with options--some students may want to purchase and take an optional ALI educational trip offered this weekend to Barcelona--the rest will take a class trip on Friday to Valencia (9am-8pm) and the Oceanographic (aquarium) there. Discussion of Ibanez's *The Cabin*. On Sunday there will be an optional workshop for students wishing to gain additional workshop experience.

Mon June 9: Discuss selections from Brennan, *Ibanez*, and the exotic in literature. Workshop of Assignment (#1). Poem Assignment(#3): write a poem in which you use "false friends" from Spanish/English and/or interesting multiple meanings that a word has in one language but not in the other.

Tue June 10: Workshop of Fiction Assignment #1. Discuss readings from Miguel Hernandez, Brennan, Woolsey, and George Orwell. Discussion of Alicante's role in the Spanish Civil War.

Wed June 11: Field trip to museum of the *Fogueres*. Discussion of the history of the fiesta and the artistic and cultural developments over the years. Discuss readings from Hugo and Garcia Lorca and ideas about what an artist is and what separates artistic writing from other types. Poetry Assignment (#3) due. Assignment (#4): Write 5 brief descriptions that have a surreal contrast between the old and the new.

Thur June 12: Field trip to Perez Chocolate factory in Villajoyosa and on the return a visit to the Roman ruins and fish impounds at El Campello on La Illeta. Discussion of using occupations in creative writing. Discuss readings from Hemingway and the use of setting to create a mood and develop character.

Fri-Sun June 13-15:-- some students may want to take an optional ALI trip offered this weekend to Grenada, the gypsy caves at Guadix, and the Alhambra--others will go on a class trip Friday to the coastal town of Altea and see the coastline north of Alicante, including the high-rise resort city of Benidorm, also known to the Spaniards as BeniYork.

Mon June 16: Workshop of Poetry Assignment (#3). Discuss readings from Lambert and the cultural and linguistic tensions in present day Spain. Assignment #4 due.

Tue June 17: Discussion of Assignment #4 and workshop of Non-Fiction Assignment #2. Discussion of readings from Hernandez and Lambert.

Wed June 18: Trip to Orihuela and a visit to the house and museum of the poet Miguel Hernandez. Discussion of readings from Hernandez.

Thur June 19: Workshop of Non-Fiction Assignment #2 continued.

Fri June 20: Trip to the Island of Tabarca. Snorkeling, swimming. 10am-7 pm--some students might want to rent a room and spend the night on the island. Room rental and meals on the island are not included in the trip cost.

Sat, Sun, Mon, Tue June 21, 22, 23, 24: Field trips to and discussion of the events of the Fiesta of San Juan, including the renewal ritual of the bonfires on the beach, the building of the Ninots (a Valenciano word for the statues they will burn), the firing of the Palmera from the Castillo, the Fogueres (the burning of the Ninots), and the other events such as the parades, fireworks displays over the Mediterranean, and the Diablos (people who dress up like devils and ride around the *Explanada* on strange wheeled contraptions filled with huge sparklers).

Wed. June 25: Course wrap up. Discussion of final projects. Evaluation session.

Thur. June 26: depart from Alicante.