

**ENW 210: Introduction to Creative Writing:
Hybridity, Identity, and Getting Weird With It**
lehmanfallcw.commons.gc.cuny.edu



Instructor: Prof. Zefyr Lisowski
MW 12:30 - 1:45 PM
Fall 2020

Office Hours Monday 11:30 to 12:30 or by appointment
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Course Description

How are we creative? What in our lives leads us to be creative? This course explores various types of creative writing—playwriting, fiction, and poetry—all through the lens of identity, hybrid-ness, and getting weird. Students should be prepared to listen closely to each other and the texts we're looking at, push themselves in their writing and thinking, and develop skills in a wide range of forms. This can be intense work! As such, I invite you all to take your time with difficult assignments, let me know if you can't complete a reading, and try and get yourself in a state to "create freely" through writing as frequently as you can, in as many different ways as you can.

This class will emphasize developing craft through interrogating, writing from, and (in some cases) writing against one's identity, so be prepared to get messy!

Course Expectations

We'll draft up course expectations together on the first day, although regardless of what we decide on, compassion and deep engagement with each others' work is as must. Avoid talking over other people if you can, and if you're excited about something (or, conversely, really dislike one of the readings I've given you) say so!

As far what you can expect to *take* from this, here are the department's outcomes:

- Build a community of creative writers sustained through insightful and constructive feedback
- Analyze, produce and learn about avenues for publishing a broad range of creative writing, including fiction, poetry, playwriting, and creative nonfiction

And here are my own addendums to this:

By the end of the semester students will be able to: 1) demonstrate their close reading skills by reading and discussing selections in all three genres; 2) develop their creative writing through weekly writing assignments covering all three genres; 3) refine and deepen their writing through revision exercises; a final project consisting of one piece in each genre; and written reflection on the writing process; and 4) engage in verbal workshop critiques of classmates' work that draws on critical reading skills developed through discussion of literary selections.

Course Materials

Get a notebook for our class. Get a pen or pencil. If you have a smartphone, make sure you're comfortable using the notes function on it—or even better, Google Docs (if not, don't sweat it). Do you have all of these things? Incredible, that's the majority of your required materials.

This class is not a comprehensive survey of the history of creative writing in the English language; what we wind up talking the most about is subject to both my own interests and your own. We'll look mainly at PDFs and web links of poems, stories, and essays, but you will also be responsible for selecting and purchasing at least one hybrid work from the list below to discuss; take some time to google what looks the most interesting to you. We will discuss these books individually by the halfway point of the semester, so reading them ahead is recommended.

Hybrid Works (Combine Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry)

These works are available at a number of sources, including online, at used and new bookstores. You will select one of these books for a final presentation. Let me know if you have any issues with affording a copy.

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name, Audre Lorde, The Crossing Press, 1982 (available as a free PDF [here](#)) ISBN 0895941228

Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars, Kai Cheng Thom, Metonymy Press, 2017. ISBN 0994047134

Skim, Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, Groundwood, 2008*** ISBN 088899964X

***This book is a graphic novel/comic book; however, I invite you to think about the same ways it can also be a blurring of form!

Requirements:

Readings: Come into class prepared to discuss all readings you were assigned. Think of things you liked and things you felt troubled by. Coming into your own as a *writer* so frequently involves coming into your own as a *reader* as well; connect these pieces w/ your own works in terms of techniques you could steal, small details you noticed, and the emotional resonance of each work.

Writing Prompts: Each week you will have a creative/critical assignment due. Pick one element from the work you find interesting, and write in that mode. It could be writing a story using a similar narrator as the story we read, revealing information in the same kind of way as a specific nonfiction writer, or using a similar image to one of the poets we read. Revise as you feel necessary and turn in whatever you write. Some weeks, you will get a *specific* prompt, as opposed to being able to craft your own. Approach this much the same way!

Forum Presentations: On forum presentation days, you'll post an excerpt and short analysis on a book you've read outside of class that you're **especially excited by**. In this post, you'll discuss whatever you find interesting therein, and you'll moderate (respond to, highlight, and discuss other people's posts) a discussion on the forum.

Attendance: Attendance and participation are very important to this course. I expect everyone to be on time and be prepared for *all* classes; this means doing the reading, doing the assignments, and being prepared to respond to each other's writing. However, if you have a disability, health, or family/work condition that makes completing the work (or punctuality, or attendance) difficult, let me know.

Due dates, likewise, must be received within 24 hours of the deadline unless previously informed; the grade will drop by one letter grade each day after that.

Workshops: Occasionally we'll workshop each other's work. This is indicated on the class website by "WORKSHOP" being written in all caps by the day in question. You'll be assigned groups, and will only have to read each other's work this week. Come in with comments, thorough questions, and a (kind) letter towards the writer on what you like or don't like.

University Policies:

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty—which includes cheating, plagiarism, and more—is prohibited in The City University of New York. According to the Lehman academic integrity policy, penalties for academic dishonesty include academic sanctions, such as failing or otherwise reduced grades, and/or disciplinary sanctions, including suspension or expulsion. I encourage you all to [read the policy](#) in full if you haven't already.

Tutoring

The Lehman Tutoring Center (LTC) offers two options for online tutoring: (a) online tutoring in writing with LTC or SLC tutors; and (b) online tutoring in writing with the assistance of a service called NetTutor : <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/academics/instructional-support-services/online-writing-tutor.php>. Tutoring is still possible for creative assignments! If you ever want tutoring, please reach out to the LTC.

Title IX

CUNY is committed to maintaining a safe environment at all times and is a strong supporter of New York State's policies and laws against sexual assault on college campuses. Lehman College encourages anyone experiencing harassment, discrimination or sexual misconduct to talk to a faculty member, counselor, or staff; confidential resources are available through the Lehman Counseling Center at (718) 960-8761. See also the [CUNY Students Bill of Rights](#) for more information.

International and undocumented students

The International Student and Scholar Office is dedicated to providing services, programs and activities that facilitate U.S immigration compliance and cross-cultural learning experiences to students and scholars in meeting their academic, personal growth and professional goals.

Furthermore, as an educator, I support the rights of undocumented students to an education and to live free from the fear of deportation. If you have any concerns in that regard, feel free to discuss them with me, and I will respect your wishes concerning confidentiality. There are many resources on campus, throughout CUNY, NYC, and beyond.

Disability Policy

The mission of the Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is to offer students with disabilities equal access to all Lehman programs and activities in a climate that is welcoming and conducive to individual growth. Students with disabilities who may need classroom accommodations or assistive technologies are encouraged to register with the Office of Student Disability services. For more information, call 718-960-8441.

Digital and Emotional Support:

All of this information is from Lehman's website. Additionally, I hold a strong confidentiality policy with my students; if you have any concerns, please feel free to reach out to me personally via my email, zef.lisowski@gmail.com

Lehman's Coronavirus Resources site has an invaluable Student Resources page, which includes information on laptop loans and wifi access.

The Help Desk is accessible here: <http://www.lehman.edu/itr/help-desk.php> .

Students seeking access to the many Lehman offices that have now gone online can find them on the Virtue Student Services page: <http://www.lehman.edu/about/office-hours/index.php> .There are tabs there with contact information for administrative offices as well as for undergraduate and graduate advising/services.

The Counseling Center is offering virtual services for registered Lehman College students. Students can call (718-960-8761) or email counseling.center@lehman.cuny.edu with their name, EmplID, email address, telephone number, & days and times they are available. A counselor will follow up with the student as soon as possible. Personally, I wasn't able to get through college without the use of the counseling center. I'd encourage it for all students who feel they need it.

Additionally, the Ny State Mental Health Covid Coping Circles is a COVID19 site is especially for people who have lost relatives from the virus.

Finally, the Lehman Library research guides site includes a compilation of Wellness resources (https://libguides.lehman.edu/arts_and_wellness_coronavirus) for your perusal.



A Note on Grading

This course practices qualitative, not quantitative assessment. So what does that mean? I won't give you grades on every assignment, but will provide written and feedback for everything you turn in. I'll meet in the middle of the semester with each of you to discuss course progress, and at the end of the semester will submit a final grade based on (1) assignment completion; (2) your own self-assessment; and (3) my own evaluation of your progress. Feel free to ask any questions!

This policy is adapted from several other professors; [here's more information](#) if you're curious about why I'm doing this.

A Note on Scheduling

I realize that there are unique difficulties associated with digital learning. Our class is scheduled to meet twice a week on Lehman's schedule, on Monday and Wednesday. **We'll be meeting every Wednesday synchronously, via Zoom.** Mondays will be reserved for **asynchronous work**, a time to engage in forum posts, writing, class reading, and homework assignments in preparation for the next synchronous class. Occasionally, we may meet, either in person or one-on-one, on Mondays; you'll receive ample notice over email when this is scheduled. We'll discuss this more on the first day of class.

I think it's important to say: we'll be reading some materials that may be difficult—either emotionally or formally. If you're triggered by any of the materials we're discussing, let me know and we can make accommodations together.

This is a living syllabus; especially towards the end, what we'll read and discuss will have as much to do with your needs and interests as my own. As such, check CUNYCommons and my class emails for the most up-to-date assignment lists.



A note on our identities:

We're coming to this class from a wide range of different experiences, all of which impact our own writing. A lot of us may have experiences with violence that impact our comfort in the classroom and certainly can impact our writing. To this end, I encourage everyone to treat each other respectfully, including in the assignments you bring in; racist, homophobic, sexist, classist, ableist, transphobic, or otherwise discriminatory language won't be tolerated, *unless* you can provide a full and convincing explanation of why you use it.

However, everyone makes mistakes (myself included)! If you see someone being rude, politely let them know. If someone tells you you were rude, consider where they are coming from! Hopefully, no one here wants to hurt anyone else.

I'll try to put into place some safer space policies, including asking for pronouns and providing content warnings for pieces; however, I may slip up. Please, don't feel afraid to tell me if I do so.

Above all, approach this with a sense of exploration. We'll spend some of the first day talking about identities, but this is a conversation that is threaded through all of the works we'll be discussing. Identities (especially gender and sexuality) can change throughout a semester. Keep that in mind, and, in your writing and class presence, try and explore who *you* are as much as what the *writing* is. Let's jump into things.

Schedule (Subject to Change)

Class	In Class Activity	For Next Class
Wednesday, August 26th	<i>In-class introductions w/ bestiary; exquisite corpse; go over syllabus; draw up class expectations</i>	<i>Start reading "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide" (Introduction and pg 1-26 of the play). Write a paragraph about your thoughts, and bring in for next class.</i>
Monday, August 31st	<i>Asynchronous day. Think about what you expect a play to be. Does Shange's "choreopoem" reflect that? In what ways is it similar, or different?</i>	
Wednesday, September 2nd	<i>Discussion of first half of Shange's play; in-class writing assignment.</i>	<i>Finish reading "For Colored Girls." Monologue assignment.</i>
Monday, September 7th (no class)	<i>No class</i>	<i>No class.</i>
Wednesday, September 9th	<i>First group of forum posts due; discussion of end of Shange's play and small group activity around monologues.</i>	<i>Read excerpts from Claudia Rankine's "The White Card." Post on the forum about the difference between it and Shange's play. What are things you notice?</i>
Monday, September 14th	<i>Revise or rewrite your monologue as you see fit. Make forum post from 9/9.</i>	

Wednesday, September 16th	<i>In class reading: "Dear Gone," by Grey Vild. [CW: suicide, transphobia]. Discussion and writing assignment.</i>	<i>Write a dialogue or monologue, for 1-3 people. Submit it by next class.</i>
Monday, September 21st	<i>Work on dialogue assignment.</i>	
Wednesday, September 23rd	<i>Second group of forum posts due. Discussion of hybrid writing and wrapping up playwriting unit. In-class reading assignment [Khadijah Queen] and introduction to poetry.</i>	<i>Start reading from poetry unit! Read poems in the "Writing One's Name" folio on CUNYCommons: Chen Chen, Danez Smith, Ocean Vuong, Adrienne Rich. Respond to one poem and post on CUNY Commons about it.</i>
Monday, September 28th (no class)		
Wednesday, September 30th	<i>Discussion of poems and in-class writing activity.</i>	<i>Read poems in the "Writing One's Body" folio: Joshua Jennifer Espinoza, Rickey Laurentiis, June Jordan, Brenda Shaughnessy. Write a poem using an element from all of these pieces.</i>
Monday, October 5th	<i>Write and revise poems from class.</i>	
Wednesday, October 7th	<i>Discussion of folio and "writing one's body." In-class writing activity.</i>	<i>Read poems in the "Writing What Happens to One's Body" folio. [CONTENT WARNING] Write a poem about yourself and writing.</i>
Monday, October 12th (no class)	<i>Select a book for final presentation.</i>	
Wednesday, October 14th	<i>Third group of forum posts due. Discussion of how to write difficult subject matter in poetry. In-class writing exercise.</i>	<i>Prepare for one-on-one meetings. Upload pieces for workshop by Monday.</i>
Monday, October 19th	<i>Make an appointment for one-on-one check-in meetings. Read the pieces assigned to your group for workshop day.</i>	
Wednesday, October 21st	WORKSHOP DAY	<i>Read "The Husband Stitch". Start writing a ghost story.</i>
Monday, October 26th	<i>Make an appointment for</i>	

	<i>one-on-one check in meetings.</i>	
Wednesday, October 28th (ghost story day)	<i>Start of fiction unit. Discussion of Machado. Ghost story activity.</i>	<i>Read “Yurássic Park.” Think about a piece of popular culture you’d like to write into/against.</i>
Monday, November 2nd	<i>Write a short story based on an existing premise. You won’t have to show this to me, so it can be any length.</i>	
Wednesday, November 4th	<i>Fourth group of forum posts due. Class discussion of “Yurássic Park” and writing into popular culture. Discussion of stories class wrote.</i>	<i>Pick one flash story from website folio, and write a flash sci-fi or horror piece for class</i>
Monday, November 9th	<i>Read and revise as needed.</i>	
Wednesday, November 11th	<i>Flash fiction day.</i>	<i>Rewrite one of your assignments for workshop. Submit online by Monday.</i>
Monday, November 16th	<i>Workshop submissions due. Read the pieces assigned to your group for workshop day.</i>	
Wednesday, November 18th	<i>WORKSHOP DAY</i>	<i>Prepare for final presentations. Begin revisions of other pieces.</i>
Monday, November 23rd	<i>Return to your playwriting piece. Revise it based on class conversations and the previous two workshops we’ve had.</i>	
Wednesday, November 26th	<i>“Hybrid Writing” Presentation: Day 1. Discuss revised playwriting assignments.</i>	
Monday, November 30th		<i>Write or bring in a piece you want to change dramatically.</i>
Wednesday, December 2nd	<i>“Hybrid Writing” Presentation: Day 2. Discussion of “radical revision.”</i>	<i>Sign up for a one-on-one meeting slot.</i>
Monday, December 7th	<i>One-on-one meetings to discuss revision strategies.</i>	
Wednesday, December 9th—last class day	<i>Ending class ritual. Portfolios announced at exam date TK</i>	<i>Finish creative portfolios.</i>