

Regent University  
School of Communication & the Arts  
*Department of Journalism*

**SYLLABUS**  
**SUMMER 2008**

JRN 685 (MAD) – **Seminar in Nonfiction and Novel Writing** (3 Hours). A study and examination of both story and novel development. Emphasis will be on learning the elements, fundamentals and structures of effective nonfiction and fiction writing. The course will allow students the opportunity to begin writing a novel or to complete three stories, which will be submitted to a publisher for consideration. Literary readings will include diverse works from authors representing various cultures, such as: Achebe, Borges, Capote, Chekhov, Ha Jin, Hemingway and Singer. Please note that this is an eight-week course, but you will have until the end of the summer, August 15, to turn in all final drafts.

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**Preface**

The most important part of this course is you. Your participation, involvement and enthusiasm are vital for a meaningful experience both for you and for others in the class.

As your professor, I want to further your understanding of the total process of writing. But, more important, I want to help you become a better person and journalist. Your progress and development are my primary concerns. Let me know anytime you feel as though you are confused or do not understand the material. I will be happy to meet with you during my office hours or by appointment at your convenience. You may also call me at home if you wish.

Please know that I am always eager to help you. I see my role as both a teacher and a facilitator: I am a teacher in sharing with you what I have discovered (the hard way) through the years and I am a facilitator in helping you learn how to learn.

My goal for the course is for us to explore, study and talk about the process of writing in a way that allows you to understand the incredible responsibility and power you possess as a journalist and writer. The public is expecting you to be their eyes and ears in a complex society; you must always remember to treat this trust with care, integrity and sensitivity.



**Special needs**

The classroom is similar to a community or a family; each one of us is different, yet we function together as a group. We all need to learn from and encourage one another. It is important to

remember that each person has individual strengths and weaknesses; however, by working together we become a complete community.

Physical disabilities are no different than any other kind of disability. Please let me know anytime you need special assistance. If you, as a student, see that someone else in the class needs help, please lend a hand. We always need to work together in any class. Learning and living are corporate, shared responsibilities.

Keep in mind what *George Washington Carver* once said: "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because some day in life you will have been all these."

No matter what we do, where we go or how we think, we are all brothers and sisters as we travel through this journey of life. Treat everyone in a way that shows respect, concern and compassion.

### **Regent University's policy on accessibility**

The policy and intent of Regent University is to fully and completely comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, to the extent that they apply to the university.

Regent University will not discriminate against qualified student, faculty or staff members with a disability in any academic or employment activity, including examinations, student oriented services, recruitment, hiring, promotion, training, lay-off, pay, firing, job assignments, leave, benefits, or any other employment related activity.

Regent University will provide reasonable accommodation to the known physical and mental limitations of a qualified individual with a disability, unless to do so would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the university (42 USC 12102 et seq.). It is also the policy and intent of Regent University to comply with the Virginians with Disabilities Act (VA Code Sec. 51.5.5-41). See [http://www.regent.edu/admin/stusrv/student\\_life/disabilities/policy.cfm](http://www.regent.edu/admin/stusrv/student_life/disabilities/policy.cfm).



### **Writers as mirrors**

Being a journalist and a writer will allow you to see and experience the many facets of our world. As such, you are writing about today's events that will become tomorrow's history. You have a duty to reflect the diversity of cultures, races and religions that are found throughout the earth.

Henri Nouwen once wrote that the world is a giant mosaic of people, each of whom shines a little differently. Allow the light of their beauty and individuality to shine through in all of your stories and writing.

"Community is like a large mosaic. Each little piece seems so insignificant. One piece is bright red, another cold blue or dull green, another warm purple, another sharp yellow, another shining gold. Some look precious, others ordinary. Some look valuable, others worthless. Some look gaudy, others delicate. As individual stones, we can do little with them except compare them and judge their beauty and value. When, however, all these little stones are brought together in

one big mosaic portraying the face of Christ, who would ever question the importance of any one of them? If one of them, even the least spectacular one, is missing, the face is incomplete.

“Together in the one mosaic, each little stone is indispensable and makes a unique contribution to the glory of God. That’s community, a fellowship of little people who together make God visible in the world.” – *Henri Nouwen* from Can You Drink the Cup?

### **A writer’s purpose**

In my opinion, one of the greatest writers of the past century is Isaac B. Singer, who won the 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature. I had the honor of studying with Mr. Singer when I was a graduate student at the University of Miami in Florida. Read what Mr. Singer said in his Nobel Lecture Banquet Speech (Dec. 8, 1978) about the purpose of a writer:



Isaac Bashevis Singer

“The storyteller and poet of our time, as in any other time, must be an entertainer of the spirit in the full sense of the word, not just a preacher of social or political ideals. There is no paradise for bored readers and no excuse for tedious literature that does not intrigue the reader, uplift him, give him the joy and the escape that true art always grants. Nevertheless, it is also true that the serious writer of our time must be deeply concerned about the problems of his generation. He cannot but see that the power of religion, especially belief in revelation, is weaker today than it was in any other epoch in human history. More and more children grow up without faith in God, without belief in reward and punishment, in the immortality of the soul and even in the validity of ethics. The genuine writer cannot ignore the fact that the family is losing its spiritual foundation. All the dismal prophecies of Oswald Spengler have become realities since the Second World War. No technological achievements can mitigate the disappointment of modern man, his loneliness, his feeling of inferiority, and his fear of war, revolution and terror. Not only has our generation lost faith in Providence but also in man himself, in his institutions and often in those who are nearest to him.

“In their despair a number of those who no longer have confidence in the leadership of our society look up to the writer, the master of words. They hope against hope that the man of talent and sensitivity can perhaps rescue civilization. Maybe there is a spark of the prophet in the artist after all.

“As the son of a people who received the worst blows that human madness can inflict, I must brood about the forthcoming dangers. I have many times resigned myself to never finding a true way out. But a new hope always emerges telling me that it is not yet too late for all of us to take stock and make a decision. I was brought up to believe in free will. Although I came to doubt all revelation, I can never accept the idea that the Universe is a physical or chemical accident, a result of blind evolution. Even though I learned to recognize the lies, the clichés and the idolatries of the human mind, I still cling to some truths which I think all of us might accept some day. There must be a way for man to attain all possible pleasures, all the powers and knowledge that nature can grant him, and still serve God - a God who speaks in deeds, not in words, and whose vocabulary is the Cosmos.

“I am not ashamed to admit that I belong to those who fantasize that literature is capable of bringing new horizons and new perspectives - philosophical, religious, aesthetical and even

social. In the history of old Jewish literature there was never any basic difference between the poet and the prophet. Our ancient poetry often became law and a way of life.”



## Introduction

The primary focus of this course is to help you develop and write nonfiction and fiction stories – one genre complements the other. Be advised, though, that no course, book, or professor can give you a complete step-by-step formula on how to become a successful writer. The total process involves years of study, both on your own and in courses like this one.

Becoming a writer is difficult; you will be successful only if you persevere and learn from your mistakes. Never allow yourself to become discouraged by any criticism of your work. Listen carefully to such comments and accept those suggestions that seem most valid. Discipline yourself to write on a daily basis. It is extremely important that you set aside at least half an hour to an hour each day and use that time to work on a poem, play, short story, part of a novel, or even to write in a journal. Do not wait until you feel inspired to write something down. Remember that a writer can only be a writer if he or she writes. You may find the following words from Raymond Carver (1938-1988) helpful as you work on material for this course. Although Carver is talking specifically about fiction, his observations are applicable to the entire process of writing:

*"Evan Connell said once that he knew he was finished with a short story when he found himself going through it and taking out the commas and then going through the story again and putting commas back in the same places. I like that way of working on something. I respect that kind of care for what is being done. That's all we have, finally, the words, and they had better be the right ones, with the punctuation in the right places so that they can best say what they are meant to say. If the words are heavy with the writer's own unbridled emotions, or if they are imprecise and inaccurate for some other reason – if the words are in any way blurred -- the reader's eyes will slide right over them and nothing will be achieved. . . .I have friends who've told me they had to hurry a book because they needed the money, their editor or their wife was leaning on them or leaving them -- something, some apology for the writing not being very good. 'It would have been better if I'd taken the time.' I was dumfounded when I heard a novelist friend say this. I still am, if I think about it, which I don't. It's none of my business. But if the writing can't be made as good as it is within us to make it, then why do it? In the end, the satisfaction of having done our best, and the proof of that labor, is the one thing we can take into the grave."*

Clearly, Carver is talking about integrity and doing our best no matter what the task. Both of these things are important as we go through life, but they are extremely crucial for a writer. We have a responsibility both to ourselves and to others to give 100 percent effort at all times. Failure to do anything less compromises everything that we say and believe. When you write, do so with honesty and integrity, knowing that someday others will look back and judge you for what you write today.

## University mission statement

Our mission is to provide excellent graduate and undergraduate education from a global, biblical perspective in pivotal professions to equip Christian leaders to change the world, and to be a leading center of Christian thought and action.

### **Primary course goals**

- Students will demonstrate the ability to employ analytical tools that will enhance their effectiveness as leaders and communicators in a wide variety of contexts.
- Students will demonstrate skills to integrate the Christian faith with graduate level academic studies in journalism.
- Students will demonstrate the journalistic skills necessary for publication, processes and the media consumer's participation within interactive communication.



### **Course purposes and competencies**

- To offer each student a thorough understanding of the complexities of how to tell a sound, meaningful story.
- To insure that each student understands the basic elements of a story (plot, characterization, setting, and theme) as well as the narrative modes (dialogue, thought, action, description and exposition).
- To give each student the opportunity to write numerous types of stories to gain practical experience.

### **Attendance**

Each student needs to attend/participate in all class sessions. Absences, excused or otherwise, do not automatically relieve you from turning in written homework. Clear effort should be made to notify me about any absence in advance to class. Absences for health reasons will require verification of medical attention. Students are expected to keep up with class content and assignments despite absences. Participating in class discussions (via Blackboard) is your best opportunity to learn. When you are absent you miss critical discussions and explorations. In addition to lowering your /attendance/participation grade, not being involved will affect how you perform on your assignments.

### **Writing requirements**

You are expected to complete each writing assignment. Failure to turn in any assignment by the scheduled deadline will result in a 0. During the term you **may** have the opportunity to rewrite some assignments for a possible increase in the grade. Rewrites will not be permitted for any incomplete work or for late papers. In addition, any rewrite must show significant improvement from the original and there must be other changes in the paper than merely correcting errors which have been pointed out by me or by the Regent University Writing Center. If there is little or no improvement, the grade for the rewrite will not be increased. The grade you receive on the rewrite is the one that will be recorded; however, the rewrite grade never will be lower than the original grade for that particular assignment. Whenever you are given the opportunity to rewrite a paper, the revision is due prior to the beginning of the next class meeting.

### **Academic integrity**

The Regent University community of teachers and scholars affirms that the biblical principles of truth and honesty are absolutely essential. Indeed, the Bible contains numerous admonitions against false witness, dishonesty and cheating. Upholding the standard of academic integrity with its reliance on honesty is a responsibility of both faculty and students. Conduct that violates academic integrity includes issues such as:

--*Dishonesty*, which is the lack of integrity exhibited through lying, cheating, defrauding or deceiving. Examples of dishonesty include: copying from the research paper of another, allowing one's own research paper to be copied, reading without the instructor's consent a copy of the examination prior to the date it is given, submitting the same work product in more than one course without the express permission of the instructor(s); or disclosing or accepting information if one takes a test at a different time than other students in the same course;

--*Plagiarism*, which is stealing or using the ideas or writings of another as one's own. It involves the failure to acknowledge material copied from others or the failure to acknowledge one's indebtedness to another for the gist of important thoughts in a formal statement, whether written or oral. Charges of violating academic integrity shall be handled according to established student discipline procedures published in the Catalog and the Student Handbook.

### **Tutoring**

If you would like additional help in this course, please contact me. I am available by special appointment to work with you on an individual basis to help you correct any difficulties you may be experiencing. Please talk with me whenever you need help, and do not wait until the end of the semester to become concerned about your lack of progress. By this time it may be too late! You also are encouraged to contact the Regent University Writing Center for additional assistance and advice.

### **Plagiarism**

Please be familiar with the definition of plagiarism so that you know how to document and quote the work of others. Make sure that you attribute properly and give credit where credit is due. Penalties for plagiarism can range from failing an assignment to failing an entire course. Also, note that all of your papers in this course will be run through Turnitin, a program designed to prevent and detect plagiarism.

### **Grade percentages**

Student grades will be evaluated on the following weighted criteria:

- 40% for attendance/participation in course discussions and critiques
- 40% stories and assignments
- 20% semester writing project



### **Assignment grading**

Unless otherwise specified as "pass-fail," all assignments are graded along the following parameters:

A = 96-100

A- = 93-95

B+ = 90-92

B = 85-89

B- = 81-84

C+ = 78-80

C = 75-77

F = 74-below

### **Incomplete and in-progress grades**

Students desiring an incomplete must submit their request to the course instructor and academic dean prior to the end of the term. An incomplete grade will be given in a regular course only for legitimate deficiencies due to illness, emergencies or extraordinary reasons acceptable to the professor, including equipment breakdown or shortages, and not because of neglect on the student's part. Incompletes require the final approval of the school dean or his/her authorized representative. A regular grade will be given by the instructor if all requirements for the course are submitted by the end of the following academic term. The instructor will submit the new grade to the Registrar's Office no later than two weeks after the beginning of the subsequent term. If all work is not submitted by the end of the term following the granting of the incomplete, a grade of FX (NP for pass/fail courses) will be posted automatically unless a Request for Extension of Incomplete has been approved and submitted to the Registrar's Office. The FX shall be counted as an F in the computation of the GPA. Any student desiring reinstatement to the course after an FX or NP has been posted must register for the course in a subsequent term and, in addition, pay the full current tuition for the course.

In-progress grades shall be given when work is not completed by the end of the term for the following academic work: independent studies, internships, practica, portfolios, theses and dissertations. An IP is also an appropriate grade for courses in which the completion of course requirements for ALL students extends beyond the academic term in which the course is offered. An IP may be continued to a maximum of two terms when the student requests and extension and the approved form is submitted to the Registrar's Office prior to the end of the first term. If the requirements for removal of the IP grade are not completed by the end of these two terms, a grade of FX (NP for pass/fail courses) will be posted automatically. Exceptions may be made for dissertations, which may continue without penalty. Any student desiring reinstatement to the course after an FX or NP has been posted must register for the course in a subsequent term and pay the full current tuition for the course.



### **Course readings**

You need to complete all of the assigned readings on the following pages by the beginning of the class listed. Please do not fall behind because it will be difficult to catch up.

### **Assignment changes and announcements**

Any changes will be announced in class and posted in Blackboard. It is your responsibility to make sure you receive the information in case you are late or absent.

### **Reservation of right to make modifications**

The School of Communication and the Arts has attempted to provide information which, at the time of preparation of the syllabus, most accurately describes policies, procedures, regulations and requirements of the school and this course. However, the current syllabus does not define the complete nature or parameters of the course. Please note that the professor reserves the right to add to, cancel, alter or change any statement, requirement, assignment, deadline or element of this course without prior notice.

### **Circulation and use of student material in course**

Be advised, students will routinely critique each other's work in course exercises. All work submitted in this course may be circulated and used in course critiques and exercises.

Submission of materials in this course implies the student's full permission to copy, circulate and use student material in course discussion and exercises.



### **Christian principles**

Journalism in its truest form is a ministry of truth-telling. Along with the gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, Luke 1:1-4 provides an example of the great responsibility that journalists and writers have in today's world:

*"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."*

In addition, we are reminded by St. Paul about our personal and professional responsibility to the Lord:

*". . . I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* Ephesians 4:1-7

### **Integration of faith and learning**

Education allows us to see more of the great and wonderful world that God has created. Whenever we study any subject, we begin to understand the vast complexities and beauties of creation. The poet John Milton once wrote that the true purpose of learning is to help us see, with greater clarity, the world in all its fullness:

"Therefore nothing can rightly be considered as contributing to our happiness unless it somehow looks both to that everlasting life as well as to our life as citizens of this world. Contemplation is by almost universal consent the only means whereby the mind can set itself free from the support of the body and concentrate its powers for the unbelievable delight of participating in the life of the immortal gods. Yet without learning, the mind is quite sterile and unhappy, and amounts to nothing. For who can rightly observe and consider the ideas of things human and divine, about which he can know almost nothing, unless his spirit has been enriched and cultivated by learning and discipline? So the man who knows nothing of the liberal arts seems to be cut off from all access to the happy life – unless God's supreme desire was that we should struggle to the heights of knowledge of those things for which he has planted such a burning passion in our minds at birth. He would seem to have acted vainly or malevolently in giving us a spirit capable and insatiably curious of this high wisdom. Scrutinize the face of all the world in whatever way you can. The Builder of this great work has made it for his own glory. The more deeply we search into its marvelous plan, into this vast structure with its magnificent variety – something which only Learning permits us to do – the more we honor its Creator with our admiration and follow him with our praise. In doing so we may be securely confident that we please Him." Seventh Prolusion by John Milton (1630)

In studying journalism, for example, we create a framework for telling the truth as well as presenting facts clearly and honestly. Luke gives us an ideal example in his gospel when he says he is writing to tell others the truth about Christ. Luke records his observations for others to see and comprehend; in doing so, he gives his readers a chance to experience firsthand what he has witnessed.

### **E-mail guidelines and etiquette**

Please conduct all correspondence using Regent e-mail addresses. Please do not use the Digital Drop Box or the Compose Mail features in Blackboard for assignments. Please send all completed papers via e-mail as an attachment in MS Word. Whenever you send an e-mail to my account, you will receive a confirmation or response usually within 24 hours, except on weekends. Also, make sure you follow proper e-mail etiquette when you write a message or a response. You may wish to consult the following site, which is maintained by the Purdue Online Writing Lab, to learn more about acceptable e-mail protocol:

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p\\_emaillett.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_emaillett.html)

### **Required textbook**

*Three Genres: The Writing of Poetry, Fiction and Drama* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.) by Stephen Minot.



### **Discussions with professor**

Please let me know whenever you would like to meet with me. I am available during office hours, by special appointment and by phone at the office or at home. I want to help you do your best so please talk with me about your story ideas and story development.

### **~Tentative Schedule~**

#### **Week One – Introduction**

Discussion question (5%)  
Exploring the philosophy and elements of fiction

#### **Week Two – Analyzing a story**

Discussion question (5%)  
Assign analysis of a short story (10%)

#### **Week Three – Writing a story**

Discussion question (5%)  
Assign draft of story (10%)

#### **Week Four – Revising and improving a story**

Discussion question (5%)  
Assign editing assignment on short story (5%)

#### **Week Five – Story development**

Second story or second chapter due (10%)  
Discussion question (5%)

**Week Six – The fine points of fiction**

Discussion question (5%)  
Developing memorable characters

**Week Seven – Getting published**

Discussion question (5%)  
Finding a publisher and preparing a query  
Query letter (5%)

**Week Eight – Final work**

Discussion question (5%)  
Semester project due August 15 (20%)

**(Please note that there are only eight weeks in this intensive, three-hour course, but you will have until Friday, August 15, in order to turn in all revisions and final drafts.)**