

## **English 326: Community Writing and Public Culture – The Portfolio Project**

In English 326, students work one-on-one with incarcerated youth, helping them create a portfolio of their writing and art to present to their judges, employers, teachers, and family members. Students go each week to one of four or five youth facilities. We will be reading from a variety of texts, and students will keep weekly journals, make weekly reports on their work with the youth, complete a final creative project, and attend meetings of the Prison Creative Arts Project every other Wednesday night 6:30-9:00pm.

Interviews are required for admission to the course; students with some experience in youth facilities or with some understanding of youth incarceration will have priority, but others are definitely welcome as well — it is interest and commitment we're looking for.

Winter Term 2012 Buzz Alexander Office Hours: Thurs. 11:30-1 3275 Angell	<p><b>Meeting times:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tuesday 1-3, 1624 Chemistry</li><li>• Thursday 1-30, 1624 Chemistry. <b>January 5, 12 and 19.</b></li><li>• Every other Wednesday, Social Hall, Methodist Church on State Street, across from North Quad <b>or in 3222 Angell</b>. For the church, go to back of the church and, once entered, straight ahead. 6:30-9 pm.</li><li>• PCAP training meeting, Saturday, January 7, 11-1, Ginsberg Center (Corner of East University and Hill), lunch at 1.</li><li>• Specific portfolio training will be in class January 10.</li><li>• Class retreat. We will brainstorm an evening, with food, early in the term (I may have emailed you all about meeting the first Sunday of term for this retreat).</li><li>• As soon as we are ready, we will meet in small groups (depending on site, for an hour each week). This will fit our schedules.</li><li>• <b>After January 19</b>, we will no longer meet on Thursday.</li></ul>
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### **Books**

At Michigan Book & Supply:

- Jimmy Santiago Baca, A Place to Stand
- Geoffrey Canada, FistStickKnifeGun
- Lorna Dee Cervantes, Emplumada
- J.M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians
- Myles Horton, The Long Haul
- Edward Humes, No Matter How Loud I Shout
- Illustrations from the Inside
- Jonathan Kozol, Savage Inequalities
- Cormack McCarthy, The Road
- Lillian E. Smith, Killers of the Dream
- Simon Wiesenthal, The Sunflower

### **Course Pack**

At Dollar Bill's, Church Street:

- Calumet Center 2005 anthology, Breaking the Shackles with my PEN.
- Donna Maria Poetry Workshop 1998 anthology.
- Thomas L. Friedman, Hot, Flat, and Crowded, chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 63-109)

- Ellie Wiesel, Legends of Our Time.
  - “Appointment with Hate”
  - “A Plea for the Dead”

#### SITES (we must have at least one portfolio person at each site)

- Holy Cross Children’s Services, Boysville Campus: A boys’ facility. They are usually interested in an art as well as a writing portfolio. The drive is 35 minutes each way.
- Calumet Residential Treatment Center: This is a boys’ facility. The drive is fifty minutes each way.
- Lincoln Residential Treatment Center: This is a boys’ facility. The drive is fifty minutes each way.
- Maxey Boys Training School: The drive is fifteen minutes each way.
- Thum Correctional Facility: This is where male youth who have been sentenced as adults are housed. The drive is an hour and twenty minutes each way.
- Vista Maria: This is a girls’ facility. The drive is forty-five minutes each way.
- Central High School: Writing portfolio with a girl.
- Cody High School: Writing portfolio with a boy.

#### Schedule:

January 5	Introductory meeting After some talk about the course, we'll start sorting out schedules and where people wish to work. We need to move very quickly, because it can take a while to get inside. Begin reading for the course.
January 10	Vanessa Mayesky, Coordinator of the Portfolio Project, and I will be doing the portfolio training with you.
January 12	<u>Savage Inequalities</u>
January 11	Orientation at site
January 17	Open session*
January 18	Orientation at site
January 19	<u>FistStickKnifeGun</u>
January 24	Open Session <i>Note: Journals come in for the first time this week.</i>
January 26	No Class Thursdays from now on. Instead, one hour meetings by site each week. Note: We will discuss poems from Breaking the Shackles with my Pen and from the Donna Maria Poetry Workshop, as well as Illustrations from the Inside during site group meetings.
January 31	<u>No Matter How Loud I Shout.</u>
February 7	A Place to Stand. Five poems from Emplumada: “Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway,” “For Virginia Chavez,” “From Where We Sit: Corpus Christi,” “An Interpretation of Dinner by the Uninvited Guest,” and “Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between Races.”
February 14	Waiting for the Barbarians
February 21	The Sunflower and “Appointment with Hate”
March 6	Selections from <u>Hot, Flat, and Crowded</u> .
March 13	<u>The Road</u>
March 20	Open session
March 22	Horton, The Long Haul and “A Plea for the Dead.”
April 3	Killers of the Dream, pp. 11,190, and Emplumada: “Lots: I,” “Lots: II,” “For Edward Long,” “Caribou Girl,” any others you’d like to discuss.

April 10	Open Session
April 17	Open session
April 22	Evening meeting at Buzz's house, final creative project and good talk. Come with food to share at 6:00, and we'll start in with presentations by 7:00. Be prepared to stay as long as it takes (10-11) – it's an evening we'll be very ready to have time with each other.

\* During open sessions, we will feel out what it is we as a group need to talk about, what our pressing issues are, and we will go with that.

### The Work

1. You will go once a week to one of our sites and work with an individual boy or girl, assisting them in creating a portfolio of their art or writing. In most cases, you will drive together with the others working at the same site – we will try to arrange both schedules and cars in a way that will enable that. But there may be exceptions, either because of the number of portfolios at a site or because of your schedules. You will make a regular though brief report – over e-mail - immediately after each session. You will also meet with me once a week for an hour, usually with the others going to your site.
2. We will talk together about what happens in your first and subsequent meetings with the youth, and we will have materials for you to read and draw upon. You will want the youth from the start to understand that the project is about *their* work, what they want to say or express. From the beginning we let them feel our respect for who they are and for what they are going to do in the space we are lucky enough to share with them.
3. The *process* of our work is most important, that is, how we communicate with the youth, how they learn technical skills and pride in their abilities to create, how they grow and feel supported through the work. But almost equally important is the *product*, both the portfolio and the presentation of their work before an audience at the end of term.
4. You will have an orientation with our liaison at the site and will wish to stay in touch with that liaison as things come up, or just let them know on a regular basis how things are going.
5. At the end of the term, you will present the youth to an audience at the site and he or she will show their art or read their poetry. Often this happens on the same occasions that one or two English 319 workshops are performing or presenting their work. We will try to get this scheduled as far ahead as possible.
6. A **highly recommended** experience. Invite your liaison (and others from the facility) to dinner. S/he has been working at the site for a significant amount of time, has made commitments, has a range of experiences (good and bad), ideas, and aspirations, and had done significant thinking about what it means to work there and about the social context in which s/he is working. And you'll have a lot of questions. You'll learn a lot.

### The Course

1. I am facilitating the class, but expect everyone to facilitate, teach, and coordinate. We want to be a tight group, to stay in touch with each other and with what is happening, to work out problems as soon as they are identified, to have a good time together.
2. Reading assignments. I have combined reading that will be helpful in thinking about the circumstances of the youth you are working with with some novels, essays, and poems that will be challenging to us. We will see how things go in terms of developing our own themes as a class and can make some adjustments in the schedule as we go
3. Written assignments: **During the term** you will keep a journal on your experience working with the youth, your experience at the site, on the reading, the class, anything

else that ties in for you - I will read your journal and write something back every week. You may take three weeks off from the journal (not three weeks in a row and not a week in which something seriously problematic has come up for you). Journals begin the week of January 24. You will have a total of eight journals. The final journal will be the week of April 11. Journals can come in in class, in small group meeting, or be put under the door of 3275 Angell. If a journal comes in after 5:00 pm on Friday, it will be read but receive minimal or no response.

4. **Your final project.** On Sunday evening, April 22, we will gather at my house, with food and drink. You will present a creative project of your own (a song, a sculpture, a drawing, a poem, a dance, etc.) which will reflect and in some way be analytic about your experience with the youth. You will also turn in at that time a four-page informal paper (informal = just sit down and write intensely, not worrying about structure, spelling, grammar) which reflects on your creative project.
5. Grades. I assume that you will get high grades for the course, because of your commitment to the work. I also expect you to be at every class session and every site group meeting, to have your journal in each week (except the three weeks you have off), to have the reading done, *to participate fully in our discussions*, and to be fully engaged with the youth (for me this is very important) and not let them down. If this isn't happening, the grade will go down.

#### Note

The facilities expect you to lock your car. You will be parking in secure parking lots, and I've never heard of theft from a car at a juvenile facility, but it is generally a good idea (wherever you are) not to leave anything visible inside the car.