

English 533 I

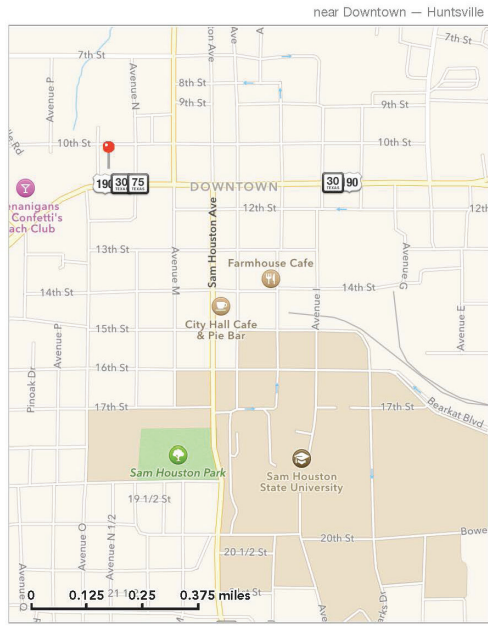
Graduate Creative Writing Workshop: Fiction

Fakes & Fraudulent Artifacts: A Syllabus in Search of a Form

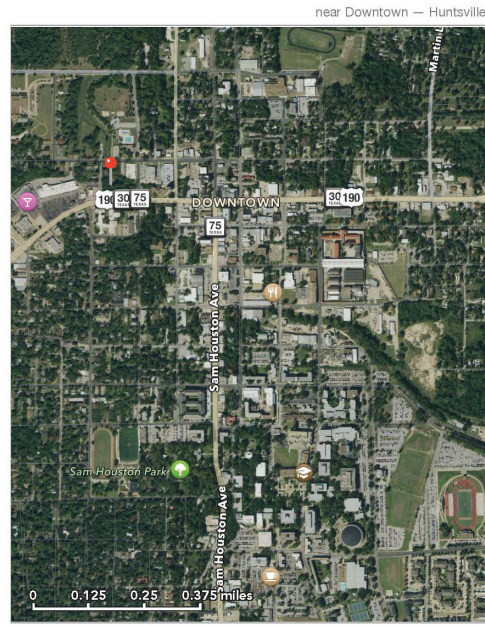
Sam Houston State University

Fall 2017 M 6:00–8:50 p.m.

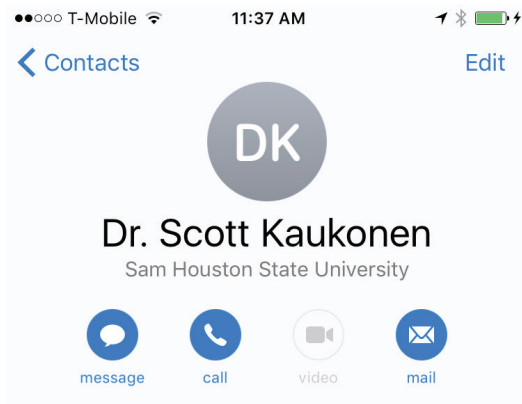
Location: Wynne Home, 1428 11th St. (see maps below)



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work

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Notes

Office: Evans 412

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Send Message



Favorites



Recents



Contacts



Keypad



Voicemail

“Let me start off by saying that everything about this course is fake! It’s fake news! It’s fake fiction! It’s fake nonfiction! The prof, the guy who’s teaching this so-called class? A fake! A total fraud! He just makes up this crap. I mean, who does that? And a loser. He’s a loser. Just remember that. You heard it here first.” —Donald J. Trump

Course Description

It was autumn, but it was Texas. In the sweltering old house, just down the street from the old prison where they'd been executing men (and, rarely, women) for years now, students gathered. The students gathered as students gather every autumn: full of expectation and hope. They came with pencils sharpened and hair freshly cut, burdened by debt and dreams, dreams for novels and stories, some drafted, many not yet written, debt from loans, mistakes, ex-lovers, bargains with the devil, all of it teeming in their minds. On Monday evenings, they gathered. For weeks, they gathered. And when they gathered, they talked about each other's work, talked about it as if it were the most important thing in the world. Because maybe it was. Or could be. And in those gatherings and in the time between those gatherings, they learned that writing was hard. It was just one damned word after another, but it was hard, so much harder than the world wanted you to believe. But the world was wrong. The stranger at the front of the room told them this. He gave them books to read. They turned out to all be fakes.

Workshop, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /'wə:kʃɒp/, U.S. /'wɜ:kʃɑp/

Forms: see work *n.* and shop *n.*

Origin: Formed within English, by compounding. **Etymons:** work *n.*, shop *n.*

Etymology: < work *n.* + shop *n.*

1.

a. A room, small building, etc., in which goods are manufactured or repaired.

1556 N. Grimald tr. Cicero *Thre Bks. Duties* i. f. 59 Neither can the workshoppe [L. *officina*] truly haue in it any gentlemanly doing.

b. *fig.* and in extended use: a (notional) place in which things are produced or created; *spec.* a center of industry; frequently in *workshop of the world*. Also, *creative writing workshop*.

1781 Gibbon *Decline & Fall* II. xvii. 62 Two accurate treatises, which come from the workshop of the Benedictines.

c. A gathering of artists for the purposes of mutual constructive criticism of works, i.e., artistic creations, in progress.

d. A (notional) place of high expectations and great insecurities. See also, ego. See also, tears. See also, progress.

e. Involves elements of subjectivity and objectivity.

f. Where some carry their assumptions like a sledgehammer.

g. Others like raw eggs, easily shattered.

Workshop, v.

trans. To develop or improve (something) by means of a workshop (workshop *n.* 2); *spec.* (*Theatre*) to stage an experimental or preliminary performance of (a dramatic work) in this way, typically incorporating improvisation and group discussion, in order to explore and refine aspects of the production prior to formal staging.

1961 *Muscatine* (Iowa) *Jrnl.* 14 Mar. 3/5 All new figures and material are work-shopped at these dances.

2016 Syllabus, English 5331, Sam Houston State University: We will workshop your stories this semester with your own work forming the core of the class.

(from the *Oxford English Dictionary*; modified)

Required Fake Texts: Annotated

Abrams, J. J., and Doug Dorst. *S*. New York: Mulholland Books, 2013.

Doug once was a lawyer. He was also a champion on Jeopardy! He's also written a short-story collection (*Surf Guru*) and a novel (*Alive in Necropolis*). He collaborated with J. J. Adams (if you don't know Adams, look him up; he's famous) on this project, and since then he's gone on to write for the Amazon series *Z*, about Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and starring Christina Ricci. A little-known fact: He gave his child a one-letter name. A lesser-known fact: Roland Barthes was inspired by Doug to write *S/Z*. Oh, and Doug will come to visit us later this semester. He directs the MFA program at Texas State University in San Marcos.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pale Fire*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

This isn't *Lolita*. Different fire. Different loins.

Schumacher, Julie. *Dear Committee Members*. New York: Anchor, 2014.

I saw Julie Schumacher read from this at a panel a couple of years ago. I'd gone to see Doug Dorst (see above). He was on the panel, too. This is merely a coincidence. Now that I think about it, it wasn't Doug on the panel. It was Tony Varallo. But Tony is the one who introduced me to Doug many years ago at the same conference (different year), in Austin. Another coincidence. (True fact: My initial interview with SHSU was conducted by phone while I was in Austin for said conference.) Tony and Doug had been roommates in California. (The writing world is a small world.) But I digress. I promise that my letters of recommendation for you will not be like these.

Shields, David, and Matthew Vollmer, eds. *Fakes: An Anthology of Pseudo-Interviews, Faux-Lectures, Quasi-Letters, "Found" Texts, (and Other Fraudulent Artifacts)*. Norton: New York, 2012.

Let me be honest. This is the inspiration for the course. Vollmer sent me a free copy after I saw a note on Facebook posted to the Creative Writing Pedagogy Course offering a handful to those who responded. I responded. So if you don't like the book, blame him. Or blame the poverty of my childhood that makes me horde books like they were baseball cards. And baseball cards like books.

Recommended Texts

Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft, Janet Burroway and Elizabeth Stuckey-French; *On Becoming a Novelist*, John Gardner; *Mystery and Manners*, Flannery O'Connor; *How Fiction Works*, James Wood; *Burning Down the House*, Charles Baxter; *Narrative Design*, T. C. Boyle; *Unconventions*, Michael Martone; *The Half-Known World*, Robert Boswell; *The Writing Life*, Annie Dillard; *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott; *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Marie Rilke; *Reading Like a Writer*, Francine Prose; *One Writer's Beginnings*, Eudora Welty; the *Oxford English Dictionary*; *Gardner's Modern American Usage*, fifth edition; the *Complete Works of William Shakespeare*; the *Holy Bible*, King James Version; *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Homer; *The Metamorphoses*, Ovid; *Don Quixote*, Miguel Cervantes; *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert; *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy; *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Dostoevsky; *The Red and the Black*, Stendahl; *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf; *Ulysses*, James Joyce; *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway; *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald; *Beloved*, Toni Morrison; *Housekeeping* and *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson; *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy; *The Power and the Glory*, Graham Greene; *Selected Stories*, Andre Dubus; Everything by Anton Chekov; *Gravity's Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon; *White Noise*, Don DeLillo; *The Corrections*, Jonathan Franzen; *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Jennifer Egan; *Sixty Stories*, Donald Barthelme; *Lost in the Funhouse*, John Barth; *Jealousy*, Alain Robbe-Grillet; *The Complete Cosmicomics* and *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Italo Calvino; *Ficciones*, Jorge Luis Borges; *The Emigrants*, W. G. Sebald; *Selected Stories*, Alice Munro; *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster; *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko; *Ava*, Carole Maso; *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, David Markson; *My Struggle*, Karl Ove Knausgaard; *My Brilliant Friend*, Elena Ferrante; *Civil War Land in Bad Decline* and *Lincoln in the Bardo*, George Saunders; *The Recognitions*, William Gaddis; *Remainders*, Tom McCarthy; *Mumbo Jumbo*, Ishmael Reed; *Tripmaster Monkey*, Maxine Hong Kingston; *Tender Buttons*, Gertrude Stein; *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville; *Time's Arrow*, Kingsley Amis; *The Age of Wire and String*, Ben Marcus; the *Complete Stories*, Franz Kafka; *Missing Persons*, Patrick Modiano; *Hopscotch*, Julio Cortazar; *An Exercise in Style*, Raymond Queneau; *Last Days*, Brian Evenson; *Cane*, Jean Toomer; *Blood and Guts in High School*, Kathy Acker; *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie; *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*, Samuel Beckett; *One Hundred Years of*

Solitude, Gabriel Garcia Marquez; *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, Haruki Murakami; *2666*, Roberto Bolano; *The Brief and Wonderful Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Diaz; *The Goldberg Variations*, Richard Powers; *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy: A Gentleman*, Laurence Stern; *The Master and Margarita*, Mikhail Bulgakov; *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera; *Absalom! Absalom!* William Faulkner; *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust; *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac; *Naked Lunch*, William S. Burroughs; *Life: A User's Manual*, George Perec; *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace; *House of Leaves*, Mark Danielewski; *The War of the End of the World*, Mario Vargas Llosa; *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Michael Ondaatje; *Changing*, Lily Hoang; *The Universal Baseball Association*, J. Edgar Waugh, Prop., Robert Coover; *The Unfortunates*, B. S. Johnson; *The Lazarus Project*, Alexander Hemon; *Jesus' Son*, Denis Johnson; *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien; *Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson; *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, Raymond Carver; *Varieties of Disturbance*, Lydia Davis; *Fools Crow*, James Welch; *Cloud Atlas*, David Mitchell; *Women Hollering Creek*, Sandra Cisneros; *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith; *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Sherman Alexie; *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote; *Annals of the Former World*, John McPhee . . . and poetry, lots of poetry, and. . . Forever and ever, reading without end, amen.

Course Objectives

Dear Nathaniel,

I don't think you know what you want. Every day when we're together, we go for long walks and you say things, you say a lot of things, and you talk about goals and objectives, but you never actually name those goals and objectives. Ann Landers and certain bureaucrats and administrators and people who've studied what really happens in this sort of relationship (not like in the movies, which we know are all fake, fake people, fake relationships, fake endings, even fake dogs) say that's important that goals and objectives are expressed between both parties, and right from the very beginning. And I know we've known each other for a long time, and sometimes I feel like I've known you hundreds of years, but I just want us to be clear. I think when you're teaching you should provide students with an environment in which to develop their craft as writers of fiction. I mean, that's what they're there for, right? It's not like you're trying to turn them into poets or harpooners or decent human beings, though if that happens, too, well, all for the good! And you need to sharpen the students' critical skills, both as readers and editors, most importantly of their own work, of course, but of fiction in general. And while you wish to introduce students to advanced discussions of craft and theory in the creation of fiction, I think, too, that you'll want to expand the students' ideas of what fiction can be, of the forms it can take (see all those cetology pages at the start of Herman's doorstopper of a book)! Because it can take so many forms; it's doesn't necessarily require a beginning, a middle, and an end (like us, Nathaniel, and that's what makes me sad. The end, Nathaniel). You need to push students from possibility to realization, from sentence to story, from creation to publication! Those should be your goals and objectives! And love, Nathaniel. Of course, love, too. But really you can't do any of this for them. They have to want it for themselves. They must have their own goals and objectives. The class can only be a framework. Tell them to sit down and do the work. Tell them that's the hardest thing. Then tell them to put down one word after another. That's the second hardest thing. And the doubts, Nathaniel. Tell them about the doubts. Or don't. Perhaps they already know about the doubts. Tell them it's worth doing. The act itself, not just the ends. I suppose I should be going. It's late, and I'm probably boring you with my mad scribbling.

Your scribe and your scribe alone,

Sophia

Grades

$$RR * .30 + S * .35 + PC * .20 + AP * .15 = X$$

Reading Responses (30 percent): In your blog posts, you will be asked to respond to the published fiction and its formal innovation. Since the focus of our readings this semester involves this idea of fakes—or fraudulent artifacts, or whatever else we might wish to call them—I would like the posts to respond both objectively and subjectively to the readings. More objectively, we might describe, analyze, and evaluate the formal choices made by each author—the type of artifact emulated, decisions about voice and language, metaphor and image, structure and design, and more subjectively, we might describe, analyze, and evaluate our responses to these artifacts—were we moved in some way, were we made to see something in a new light, did we find aesthetic pleasure in the experience, did we merely shrug our shoulders and say, “Well, at least it was short”? We might return routinely to the question (obviously subjective) of what makes a successful fraudulent artifact and what does not. Why might some of these efforts succeed for us while others fail? What are the implications for our own fictions, whether our own fictions are of this sort or something in a more traditional vein? Students should make an initial post by Friday at 5 p.m., and then respond to one or more peers’ posts before class on Monday evening. Posts should demonstrate significant critical engagement and intellectual rigor. Remember, we are not reading these works as literary scholars but as writers.

Stories/Novel Excerpts (35 percent): By the end of the semester, you should have submitted a minimum of 45 pages (three stories or three novel excerpts or some combination thereof) to the workshop. Each student will have three opportunities to workshop material over the course of the semester. The material should be new to this particular workshop. (I’ll allow an exemption for those who are working on novels and wish to continue forward with material begun in other workshops.) Each workshop could consist of entirely new material (in other words, your second and third workshops should not involve revisions of your first and/or second workshop stories or novel excerpts). In keeping with the spirit of the class, at least one of your submissions to the workshop should take the form of a fraudulent artifact. All of this material should be revised and submitted for a final grade (see the class schedule for due date). Substantial revision is expected.

Peer Critiques (20 percent): The responsibility here belongs to the class as a whole. In joining this class, you accept a contract with each other—to present your best possible work, both as a writer and as a critic, in exchange for an equal commitment from your peers. I don’t expect brilliance. I do expect effort. You will be responsible for posting peer reviews to Blackboard for all stories submitted to the class. In order to receive credit, these reviews must be posted before the class in which we workshop the story. [Each author and story will have its own forum for the reviews of his or her story. The author will be unable to read the reviews until after the workshop of his or her story.] Please pay close attention to the schedule. We’ll discuss this in greater detail in the days to come.

Participation (15 percent): I expect all students to be in attendance each day and to participate significantly each day. This means not only being present, but talking. We will be a very small class this semester, so it will be impossible for people to hide and let others carry the conversation.

Extra credit (up to 50 points total, up to 10 points apiece): by attending local readings (fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction) and writing a brief 2 to 3 paragraph review. I strongly encourage you to be present at campus literary events, in particular those sponsored by the MFA Program in Creative Writing, Editing, and Publishing, of which we are all a part.

MANUAL OF STYLE

PAPER

- 1.1 **Size and Color.** As a general rule, all submissions to the workshop should be printed upon standard letter-sized paper. In North America, the standard is 8 ½ x 11 inches in dimension. Preferably, the color of the paper will be white, permitting sufficient contrast between paper and the type printed upon it so as to allow the greatest ease of reading. As we age, this matters more perhaps than it once did, as does the quality and the direction of the light beneath which we will read your submissions (see **LIGHT, Natural and Artificial**).
- 1.2 **Weight.** The most commonly used paperweight in higher education is 20 lb. This provides an optimum balance between strength and relative thickness so that the paper should neither tear too easily nor consume unnecessary space in one's backpack, messenger bag, or car seat. At lower academic levels (for example, elementary schools or undergraduate classes in certain disciplines), a heavier paperweight may be used.
- 1.3 **Margins.** The standard measurement for all margins in this class will be one inch as measured from the edge of the page to the edge of the type. From the top, one inch. From the bottom, one inch. From the left margin and the right margin, one inch respectively. Although the defaults of certain word processing programs, as dominant as they might be in the marketplace, might urge you to choose otherwise, we prefer the symmetry of this equilibrious distribution. Students who try to pad the page length of their submissions by adjusting the margins so that they are greater will be subject to the ridicule of their peers (see **PENALTIES, Spiritual and Emotional**).
- 1.4 **Collation.** In whatever order you see fit but please staple. Manuscripts fall apart. The center cannot hold (see **AUDEN, W.H.; ACHEBEE, C.; MODERN AMERICA**).

TYPE

- 2.1 **Typeface.** No wacky typefaces, please (yes, comic sans, I'm talking about you—and your friends). Studies have demonstrated that choosing a professional but non-default typeface can result in the inflation of your grade. Remember, your typeface selection says something about you. For example, Times New Roman says, "I don't think about typography. I don't care about aesthetics. I'll have a vanilla latte, please" (see **BASIC; WHITE BREAD; STARBUCKS**).
- 2.2 **Font size.** The body of your text should be printed in a 12-point font.
- 2.3 **Line spacing.** All work submitted on paper should be double-spaced. This permits sufficient room for your critics, students and professors, to leave notes, comments, questions, corrections, exclamation marks, emoji, and coffee stains in their responses. Please do not leave additional spacing between paragraphs. Take control of your word processing program and its defaults. Do not permit it to control you (see **MICROSOFT, WORD; see EVIL**).

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1 **Identifying marks.** All submissions should include, at the top the first page, either flush left or flush right, the author's name and email address. Word counts are spiffy, too.
- 3.2 **Title.** Yes.
- 3.3 **Grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling.** It is expected that correct grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling should be honored (unless necessary). Work flawed by pervasive mechanical errors will be penalized accordingly (see **LANGUAGE, LIVING; see ORGANIC; see "TENSE PRESENT," by D. F. WALLACE**).
- 3.4 **Most Important Keyboard Shortcut.** Command-S. Always be certain to keep a hard copy and a digital copy in at least two locations (in case of fire and in case of Russian hacking, respectively).
- 3.5 **Bonus Points.** If your manuscript is typed and then reproduced on a ditto machine.

On Timely Submissions

Dear _____,

On behalf of the entire class, I would like to thank you for your timely submissions to our workshop this semester. Since we all have very busy lives, and though the professor would like to pretend that this class is the first and only priority for each student this semester, we recognize that this is not the case. There are bills to be paid, children to be cared for, meals to be cooked (or purchased at the drive-thru), and laundry to be folded and stowed away in dressers, at least until the children can pull it all out and leave the shirt and shorts and underwear scattered across the floor like so many dead orcs. There are also other classes with other requirements for reading and writing and some of these are extensive, perhaps even overly burdensome (we won't name any names here), taking away from necessary family time, necessary personal time, necessary Netflix time. Should you, however, find yourself unable to submit your work to the class on time, please be aware that it will be penalized one full grade for each day it is late, a small incentive perhaps, but an incentive nonetheless, even if not a positive one. If you want a positive incentive, think about the goodwill earned (or lost) by your (un)timely submissions. Note: Because of the demands of distribution and the demands of our ridiculously busy lives, stories for workshop will not be accepted late. Failure to submit the story in class on the date it is due will result in a zero for the story! So don't do it! That would be terrible! And please don't assume that you can just email the submission to your professor and your peers later in the day or night, after the deadline has passed, and that they will stay up late to read and comment upon your work anyway because all they have done all week is to wait with bated breath to read your masterpiece. Keep in mind that if they choose to stay up late and read your masterpiece at the last minute, this is their choice, but at least it is their choice. Your only duty is to leave them that option and to not make it a necessity. The professor says that extensions will be granted only in advance and only in cases of emergency, because he realizes that stuff can happen (like hurricanes, which we now know all too well). But plan ahead for stuff happening. Because it will. (Also, back up your stuff. Also, keep it above the flood waters. Also, if you have to choose between your life and your work, choose your life.) Again, thank you! Thank you for your courtesies.

Sincerely,

Your classmates

Attendance

If you miss
more than three
classes

for the semester
(or two workshops),
regardless of the reason,

I may fail you
in the class.
If you know
you will be absent
in advance,
be sure
to let me know
in advance.

You are still
yes still
respons-
-ible
for work that
you may
miss.

If circumstances arise
arise like doves
or balloons

or leaden weights
during the course
of the semester
that interfere with your ability to attend class
or to complete
assignments,
see me

as soon as poss-
-ible.

Also, plums.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism¹

Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented.² Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that range from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, or collaboration, consult the course instructor. See *Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).³

Americans with Disabilities Act

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. See *Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

Religious Holidays

Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. See *Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

1 To be honest, I did not write this. I copied (command-C) and pasted (command-V) it from the university's official policy as posted on the university website (the url is provided above). This does not, for the record, constitute plagiarism since all policies for this course are subject to university policies, and so I am merely stating the university policy as course policy and admitting as such.

2 Once upon a time, it was more difficult to plagiarize and more difficult to identify plagiarism. Technology has made plagiarism a more prevalent issue, especially at the undergraduate level, where students have been raised in an era of post and re-post, of online paper mills and a billion Internet resources, but technology has also made plagiarism an offense, in a sense, more easily policed. But I will admit, as well, that plagiarism does not carry the stigma it once did (see, politicians, contemporary), which is to say, we no longer flog, of course (we've progressed), but the penalties tend not to be as harsh as they could be. All teachers have plagiarism stories. Some night, ask me for my fo

3 You have an ego, yes? That's why you're here, right? You have something to say? Ideas. Language. Good. So I shouldn't ever have to worry about this in a creative writing workshop. I hope. Because what's the point of being in a workshop (see definition above) if all you're going to do is plagiarize someone else's work, offer it up as your own? So I'm glad you have an ego, and that your ego is entangled with your writing.

Visitors in the Classroom

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

A Handy, If Rather Incomplete, List

A prospective MFA student: Yes.

A significant other: No.

A prospective significant other: Really no.

Your child: Yes, but only if they do not disrupt the class.

The professor's child: Yes, but only if he does not disrupt the class.

Someone else's child: No.

Your parents: Not recommended. True story: When I was an MFA student, a classmate brought his parents to workshop one afternoon. My story was up first. It was discussed for nearly an hour. His story was up second. It was discussed for ten minutes. It did not go well for him. When it was over, and they were back at his apartment or their hotel room or out for dinner on Fourth Street, I'm sure the parents were questioning whatever investment had been made in their son's graduate education.

Your priest, pastor, rabbi, imam, or spiritual advisor: Only if you feel it's necessary.

Your imaginary friend: Yes, but only if they do not disrupt the class.

Aliens: Of course.

Elected officials: _____.

Other professors: When necessary.

Pets: No.

Strangers: Only if it's snowing.

Instructor Evaluations

Near the end of the semester, students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form.

Sample Evaluations (Actual Evaluations May Vary Based on Individual Experience):

[Imagine the following emojis: kitty cat, fire truck, baseball, rocketship, space shuttle]@Nicholas Kaukonen #Second Grade #Stewart Elementary #bestsonnever

★★★★★ — Janet Kaukonen, “Mom,”TOP Reviewer

“I put all his syllabi on my fridge.”

👉 — Michiko Kakutani, NY Times Book Review

“This isn’t a syllabus. This is typing.”

😊😊—Random Dude

“I’ve never met him and I never took his class, but if I had, I’d give him 2 smiley faces, because that’s about average, and so that’s probably what he is.”

3 of 10 —Russian Judge

“Did not stick the landing.”

“Fake” — Donald T. “45”

“Fake. Fake. Fake. Fake. #liberal #fakemedia #cantfollowtherules #whathappenedtostandards”

“Once the floors were dirty. There were paper towels on the floor.”

—Student in ENGL 266, Fall 2006

“This is so fricking pointless. He probably doesn’t even read these things.”

—All Students, Everywhere

Classroom Etiquette

Be kind. Be courteous. Be helpful. Take joy in the privilege.

Tentative Schedule (Subject to Change, Especially in Case of Hurricane)

~~August 28, 2017: If you are here, then you have already successfully completed the first part of your mission (and the world did not end with last week's total eclipse of the heart). You have found your way to the Wynne Home. You have engaged with the previous pages of this fake syllabus. You have (perhaps you had no other choice) indulged the unorthodox syllabus strategies of your professor. And by now, you've come to understand that we will, over the course of this brief evening, review the fake syllabus, chatter about what we did with our respective summers and how quickly the time went by, discuss the world events that have most recently left us most distressed, and gazed at the stained-glass windows through which the sun streams, thankful for the blinds and for our good fortune (for some of us once again) to be holding this course here, around this beautiful antique table, and not up the road in the Evans Complex, where, nice as it might be in its way, the classrooms are generic and tiled and overfilled with desks of plastic and metal which must be shoved and dragged around the room to make an acceptable arrangement, which may be fine for undergraduates or literature students, but you are graduate students and we are writers, dammit. (Hurricane Harvey)~~

September 4, 2017: Because of your studiousness and the challenges of transitioning from summer to what passes for autumn in these parts, you are being given this day off. Also, it's a national holiday, the unofficial mark of the end of summer. Be thankful for those who have labored before you and who labor even now so that we might enjoy the lives that we enjoy. By way of introducing yourselves to me (even if we have met before, even if you have been in my classes before) and to your classmates, please read "Primary Sources," by Rick Moody, in *Fakes: An Anthology* (316–21), and write your own version of "Primary Sources." Also, be writing. Always be writing. And reading. That's the unwritten rule, expect now I've made it written. Dammit.

September 11, 2017: Sixteen years ago, I awoke to my alarm clock radio reporting the tragic events of this day. Later in the morning, I made my way to a graduate course in nineteenth-century African American literature. I was a first-year Ph.D. student at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I say this because as students and writers and people, we never escape the world around us. It may then have felt like the end times, but these are always the end times. Still, we keep writing, sometimes urgently. No, always urgently. For this evening's class, you should read the introduction to, and the first twelve five entries of, *Fakes: An Anthology*. We will be discussing the works of these authors in class and the forms in which they've chosen to work and the choices they've made. Also, you should be writing. Also, we will finally get to discuss this syllabus and this class and say hello to each other.

September 18, 2017: The semester already feels as though it's going too fast. The first two fictions that we workshop will be due for distribution to the class on this night; the remaining three students will distribute their first fictions next week. If you are like I was that first semester as an MFA student long ago, you will race home to read your peers' stories with a mixture of fear and hope—fear that you don't really belong here and hope that you do. When I arrived for my first-ever graduate fiction workshop, two second-year MFA students brought copies of stories with them, ready for distribution. I hadn't even started writing anything for workshop yet and already stories were being distributed. Somehow they knew this. I had no idea what to expect. When class ended, I biked the two miles back to my apartment as fast as I could. It was Tucson. It was September. It was so hot (but it's a dry heat). Then I sat on my couch and read those stories. Then I went and started writing. Tonight, we will discuss entries ~~13 to 26~~ 6 to 19 in *Fakes: An Anthology*, and we will discuss my approach to workshop and my expectations for the class as well as logistics.

September 25, 2017: Tonight we will workshop the first two submissions from students in our workshop. These may be fictions, as we are calling them, or they may be short stories that take more traditional forms, or they may be excerpts from novels as well. We will have spent the week with them until we feel as though we know them as well as their creators. Maybe better. In any case, we will talk about those submissions while the respective authors listen quietly, without speaking, without interrupting, even though they may wish to reach across the table and strangle someone (not you, of course). They may even experience a moment where they wish to collect their belongings, rise from their chair, and leave the building. I don't think they'll really do this, or even really feel this way, but it would be dramatic, wouldn't it? For the record, I've only ever had one student cry during a workshop, and it was years ago and it was nonfiction and the essay wasn't very well written but the

material was raw and honest and an older woman complimented her on the courage to write about the material so honestly and, well, there were tears. What happens after class, in the parking lot behind Arby's or in the solitude of the apartment, I don't ask. We will also read the next set of fictions (20 to 34) in *Fakes: An Anthology*.

October 2, 2017: By the end of the evening, anyone who hasn't been workshopped yet will have had the first of their submissions critiqued. We will all officially be immersed in the workshop experience. We will also finish *Fakes: An Anthology* (35 to 40).

October 9, 2017: As part of Hispanic Heritage Month, and in cooperation with the CHSS Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the MFA program will welcome to campus poet and writer Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo. Xochitl's book, *Posada: Offerings of Witness and Refuge*, recently out from Sundress, is about her travels from LA to the Tucson Sector of the U.S.–Mexico border in August 2011 to volunteer with the humanitarian aid organization, No More Deaths. She's also a co-founder of Women Who Submit, an organization which came together to use social media and community events to empower women authors to submit work for publication to help close the gap between male and female representation in mainstream publishing. Because the reading and book signing will take place during our classtime and because I believe prose writers should study poetry and because I believe that being a good literary citizen is important (and thus it's important to support writers who come to campus), our class will attend the reading and signing and anything else we can that day that is associated with Xochitl's visit.

October 16, 2017: Dear Members of the Committee, It is my pleasure and privilege to write to you on behalf of these class members. We've reached the halfway point, roughly, and though I cannot vouch for their personal lives or the cleanliness of their homes or their credit histories, they all seem like fine people and fine writers, and if the future is in their hands, then we're in good shape (or at least, it can't get any worse). They've been working diligently each day (or at least a couple of times a week each week) to produce stories and fictions and responses to each other's work, and they've been absorbing ideas and generating new ones, and they've been kind to each other and generous, and that's all I can ask really, because so much of this is a mystery, how it works, how it gets done, and beauty in nature, that's another mystery, and the true nature of reality, a mystery, and whatever happened to D. B. Cooper, mystery upon mystery, and Bigfoot, of course. But I digress. These are terrific people, terrific writers, and you would do well to give them whatever they ask, because if you have it, then somebody has to get it, and why not ~~these students~~? With all sincerity, Dr. Scott Kaukonen, Associate Professor, Sam Houston State University

October 23, 2017: Workshop 3. Two students. Possible supplementary reading.

October 30, 2017: Worksho 4. Three students. Rinse. Repeat.

November 6, 2017: S. The whole shebang.

November 7, 2017: This is not a Monday. This is a Tuesday. But Doug Dorst could not come on a Monday because, like us, he gathers with his graduate students in San Marcos to workshop every Monday evening in the fall. But by now you've read his book. The one he collaborated upon with J. J. Abrams. You've read the things written in the margins. You've had objects fall out of the book and you've debated whether to stick them back into the same location or just shove them back in randomly. You've wondered if you've stuck them back in the right location or if it even matters. You've been torn between reading *The Ship of Theseus*, by V. M. Straka, first, or all its accouterments. You've wondered what the authors did first, and how they made decisions about notes and artifacts, and who was responsible for what, and just how many tiny hands in Malaysia were required to produce this object, which is beautiful in its own way. So Doug Dorst will drive here from San Marcos on a Tuesday instead, and we will get to hear him read from his work, and we will get to ask him many questions, many smart questions, and maybe even talk to him more over dinner and drinks, and when we are sated and feeling all well and good and like kindred human spirits, I will take him to his hotel and then we will all return to our homes and in the morning he will drive back to San Marcos and his family where he will tell them about the bright students at Sam Houston State University and the good time that was had by all. And then, inspired, we will all write some more. Or vacuum. Those damn carpets.

November 13, 2017: Workshop 5. Two students. Possible supplementary readings.

November 20, 2017: We are thinking of Thanksgiving. We are thinking of family perhaps or turkey or football (the Detroit Lions, thank you very much, who, based upon history, are surely disappointing me once again) or friends or just the long weekend, anything that will get us through these late hours of the semester, the end of which cannot arrive soon enough. We are thinking of the holidays ahead and cooler temperatures and the next semester's classes, which remain perfect in their potential, and we are creating lists on Amazon for those classes, and we are considering our life's choices. We are also coming to the semester's final workshop, the last of the student stories, and we are grateful for our peers and for this opportunity, because we have shared in it, and it is hard, it is damned hard, we knew it from the beginning and it has been so, but still we keep writing. Also, the final workshop of the semester. Three students. Possible supplementary readings or just a head start on *Pale Fire* (see below). Or turkey.

November 27, 2017: *Pale Fire*. It was only after I'd set these books for our class that I realized the three stand-alone books are all set in academia. This wasn't intentional. I'm not generally drawn to novels set in academia (though I heartily recommend Richard Russo's *Straight Man* for anyone who wants to know what it's really like or—especially—anyone who's contemplating pursuing a career within it), and had chosen them only with an interest in their formal play. But I trust there will a sense of recognition here, too, that the questions this novel raise—and the fun it has with language and form—will connect to your own experiences and reading and life as graduate students in a Department of English.

December 4, 2017: My birthday. To celebrate, we will have a party. We will hold it here at the Wynne Home Arts Center. We will open it up to the public. As a gift to me, you will read from the work that you have created for this class. You will share your creations with the public. Invite your friends, invite your family, invite your neighbors. Do not tell them that it is my birthday. They do not need to know. There will be no other gifts but the gifts of your words, your characters, your stories. Which is fine enough indeed. (Also, we'd be doing this even if it wasn't my birthday. The fact that it is my birthday is merely a coincidence.)

Contributor's Note

Scott Kaukonen, a fourth-generation Finnish American, was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and raised ninety miles to the south in a town of unfortunate nomenclature. It's also the Magic Capital of the World. The eldest of four children, he labored in lawn care and farm and factory work until the ghost of Grantland Rice came upon him, and he was moved to write about athletes doing their darndest. When he grew weary of quoting bad quotes from reasonably good athletes, he moved to Arizona to become a different kind of writer, the kind of writer who makes things up. All these years later, he's still making things up, and some of it he writes down, and some of it he sends out to publishers who make it available to people to read, kind of like people do on Facebook or Twitter but longer and on actual paper and with real glue and with greater mailing costs. He lives in Huntsville, Texas, but so far he's successfully raised his son to root passionately for teams from the state of Michigan, both collegiate and professional, and to hate the Cowboys. He loves coffee, bourbon, travel, the Upper Peninsula, baseball, the English Premier League, books of all sorts, and mountains. He directs the MFA program in creative writing, editing, and publishing at Sam Houston State University. Previous syllabi include ENGL 1301, ENGL 1302, ENGL 3381, ENGL 3382, ENGL 5331, ENGL 5333, ENGL 5336, and others.