

BENEDICTINE UNIVERSITY

Artist in Residence Writing Compassion Spring 2018

Instructor: Crystal Chan

Email:

Class:

Location:

Office Hours: Available by appointment

Course Description:

In this polarized country, a significant portion of the population has decided to retrench into their own ideological tribes, and swathes of people are losing the ability to engage with ideas and philosophies different than their own. One result of this self-segregation is that it is much easier to dehumanize the Other – anyone perceived to be different than yourself. Not only has this strained the fabric of our society, but as families and communities are torn apart, it has also impacted our form of art. How? As the politics of this country pushes to the extremes, so does the written word: bloggers, reporters, novelists, and writers of all kinds are creating and consuming art and writing that supports only their worldview.

While there is a time and place to surround yourself with likeminded people, there is also a time and place to engage with the Other, to open your mind and heart to someone else's worldview. As pipe bombs are received in politicians' mailboxes, hate crimes increase, and people increasingly talk about political issues only with like-minded company, the healthy balance of surrounding yourself with Like and with Other has been thrown severely off.

As our country continues to be strained by daily experiences where people both dehumanize others and are dehumanized by them, the value of compassion is never more important. That is, to be able to see the Other – whoever they are – as fundamentally equal in worth and value as yourself and to treat them accordingly.

In pursuing the path of compassion in this course, writers of all kinds will be challenged to open their hearts and minds to the Other; enter into Others' stories, experiences, and viewpoints with which to inform their art; and to create works of writing that depict the world not in terms of black and white, all or nothing, but in terms of nuance, being able to hold tension and multiplicity of worldview. For students to accomplish this, they will need to cultivate their inner qualities of discipline, forbearance, self-control, and self-awareness of pride, fear, and other emotions. Daily exercises will be assigned for them to begin this inner cultivation. Along with written and experiential assignments that will stretch their capacity to hold conflicting viewpoints, they will create writing compositions using the information they gathered in interviews and assigned work.

Prerequisite Courses: None.

Course Objectives:

1. To grow in the qualities of self-control, discipline, forbearance, and self-awareness of emotions;
2. To compassionately engage with the Other and practice holding a multiplicity of worldviews;
3. To learn and use the skills of deep listening to listen to and receive the Other;
4. To conduct multiple interviews with people whose philosophies are different than their own;
5. To use the written word to express 1) the information they received from their interviews, and/or 2) Their own struggles and rewards pursuing the path of compassion

Required Texts: DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT, by George Lakoff; BIRD, by Crystal Chan; ALL THAT I CAN FIX, by Crystal Chan

Required Materials: None to date.

Course Requirements:

1. Prompt and regular attendance
2. Participation in weekly experiential assignments
3. Completion of assigned readings and tasks
4. In-class participation of assignments and discussion
5. Course presentation

Assignments and Grading Policy:

Attendance: 25%

Course Work (Readings and Assigned Work): 25%

Class Participation: 25%

Final Presentation: 25%

Grade Scale:

A	90-100%	Excellent
B	80-89%	Good
C	70-79%	Satisfactory
D	60-69%	Passing
F	59% and less	Failure

Course Outline:

March 4	Intro to Compassion: Mastering Shame, Terror, Loneliness, and Their Masks
March 11	Deep Listening: In the Presence of The Other
March 25	Emotional Connecting
April 1	The Roller Coaster of Novel Writing
April 8	Entering and Engaging Discomfort
April 15	Courageous Openness
April 29	Holding Multiplicity
May 6	Integrating Compassion
Exhibit (TBD)	