Course Description:  (Prerequisites for this course are English 1013 & 1023 or presentation of writing portfolio/consent of instructor.)

This is the first semester of a two-semester sequence here at NWACC. (2033 is usually offered in the Spring term, if there is sufficient interest.) In this course we will be working on the construction of both poetry and short fiction. Emphasis will be on using poetry to discover the power of language, of the single word and its impact on a reader. In conjunction with this exploration of the power of poetry, we will explore the single scene and its impact on the overall narration of the short story form. We will also explore all elements of characterization, plot, setting, mood, tone, atmosphere, voice, etc. in the development of the short story form. In order to accomplish these lofty goals, we will write together one complete short story and revise it at least once—all the way through—and about a dozen poems, also revised. This class will be a workshop where we bring ideas and work to share with one another and where we learn from each other as much as, if not more than, we learn from the act of creating.

Required Texts and Supplies:
--Writing Fiction, by Janet Burroway, 6th Edition
--Writing Poetry, by Barbara Drake, 2nd Edition
--access to a typewriter or computer for final versions of assignments
--notepad or notebook in which to keep a writing Journal
--photocopying budget!!  (to make copies of your work for classmates and me)

Inclement Weather:  If the college is closed due to inclement weather, the announcement will be made on the local radio stations.  Be sure to check before driving in any hazardous conditions.  (Since I will be coming from Fayetteville, I will be doing the same.)

Attendance:  As described in the NWACC College Catalog, attendance is very important in this course.  Since this class is a workshop and every meeting is important, after THREE absences, you will automatically FAIL this course.  If you are sick, you should contact me and find out what you missed and follow the attached calendar.  Being absent is no excuse for missing assignment deadlines. Call and leave a message for me, and I will get back to you.  Staying in contact, whether you miss all or part of a class, is the best way to keep up with the work load.  This attendance policy is for this class and should not be compared to any other, especially one which emphasizes more of a lecture format.  In order to make this policy fair for everyone, it is NOT NEGOTIABLE under any circumstances, for any reasons.  Sorry if that sounds hardnosed, but it is necessary.

Grading system:  I will use a portfolio grading system for this course.  By this I mean that each individual poem or scene or revision of either will not receive a letter grade.  Instead, I will give you extensive written feedback on how to revise the scene or poem and possibly how to edit it for greater strength and precision of language.  (I will mainly coach you to explore, improve and try out new ideas and methods to see how they work in your writing.)  This class, like many other writing workshops, will
attempt to help you develop a sound creative and editing process which will remain with you long after this course ends.

The portfolio system will also allow you to worry about improving the material you have written rather than just the grade. At the end of the term, you can arrange your work from strongest to weakest or from best to worst or any other scheme you design. This input gives you a greater sense of control over your own grade, by providing information I might have missed all semester long in my assessment of your performance. The self-assessment you will write in lieu of a final exam will add to this arrangement your own logic and overview of your own performance. Grading in this manner should help de-emphasize competition and help foster cooperation, which is necessary for any workshop to function well.

Since this is a workshop, HALF of your grade will be determined by how you perform in class—verbal and written critiques of each others’ work, class participation, reaction and responding to homework, etc. (Positive, constructive feedback is required from each student. Tearing down/destructive criticism will not be allowed.) Reading and responding to the assigned homework is essential for your writing to improve. Doing the writing assignments alone will not affect your writing significantly (see diagram below). Part of how I will determine your final grade will be based on how you incorporate the suggestions from both writing texts as well as from class input and my own input. In other words, you must avoid being shy and quiet if you desire both to improve your writing and get a good grade. (I know this can be hard for many writers and poets.)

The other HALF of your grade will be based on the writing components of the course—the poems and the short story, with particular emphasis on revision. Be sure to keep everything you write all term long, no matter how little you might like any particular version of any piece. In no way will your work ever be compared to any other student’s work, so the Portfolio System emphasizes improvement from one assignment to the next, from one version of an assignment to another. Little or no content revisions on any pieces, even with satisfactory completion of all assignments, would mean a grade of “C” for the writing component of the course. Vast improvement through extensive revisions of all your work would almost assure an “A” grade in this area of the course.

Let me change gears here and say a few words about “talent.” I do believe that some people can be more “talented” than others at writing or critiquing or reading and analyzing, but at no time will I ever assess your “talent” at doing any of the aforementioned activities. I will, however, make every attempt to assess, as objectively as is humanly possible, your EFFORT at doing all that is required of you in this class. In seventeen years of teaching, I have seen very “talented” students work very little and receive grades of “C” or lower and less “talented” students earn a grade of “B” or higher for their work. Thus, I try never to get into the dangerous area of determining whether or not you should be a writer or a poet—that is for you to decide.

Finally, if you ever have any questions about the class or want an approximate grade on any assignment, feel free to talk to me during office hours or leave a message on my voice mail, and I will be sure to get back to you. Remember both the Quality and the Quantity of your work determine your grade in this class.

Let’s work together and have fun this semester!!

If you really want your writing to improve, you must
READ, ANALYZE what you read, and WRITE, WRITE, WRITE!!!!!