STANFORD CONTINUING STUDIES
Novel Writing – NVL 134, Fall 2015
Tuesdays 6:30 - 9:20 p.m.
September 22nd - December 1st

INSTRUCTOR: Lynn Stegner

OFFICE HOURS:

While I do not hold regular office hours for this course, I am happy to meet by appointment on Tuesdays before class meetings.

TEXTBOOK:

THE PARIS REVIEW INTERVIEWS, Vol. I, Vol. II, & Vol. IV. These collections derive from the original Paris Review interviews called “Writers at Work,” and are intended to provide students with a sense of the various narrative matters facing all writers, ranging from personal habits of composition to the overarching themes of a culture.

I will also distribute a suggested reading list during our first meeting on September 22nd and students are encouraged to deepen their practical understanding of the novel as both a traditional and evolving narrative form.

MATERIALS AND/OR EXPENSES:

In addition to the three volumes of the Paris Review Interviews, there will be minimal printing expenses: when students submit manuscripts for scheduled workshop discussion, they are asked to make copies for each member of the class, usually twenty-one. Double-spaced required; double-sided just fine.

REQUIREMENTS FOR CREDIT:

Several grading options are available to students registered in the workshop. If students wish to receive transcript credit for the course, and/or a letter grade, then they must attend most of the class meetings; produce one to two chapters of a novel (length dependent), or one chapter and one revision; and participate regularly and respectfully in workshop discussions. Those choosing the NGR option are not subject to attendance constraints; that being said, the workshop dynamic relies upon a consortium of voices working together toward a single goal—making our novels the best that they can be. So, though not required of everyone, attendance with active participation is desired as part and parcel of being a solid citizen of the workshop community.
**WEEKLY SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE:**

* NOTE: Neither the subject of novel writing nor the dynamic of a writing workshop lends itself to a rigid schedule of topical presentations, since issues arise organically from the material under discussion week by week. Nevertheless, we will follow roughly the natural sequence involved in developing, composing, and editing a novel, something along the following lines:

**WEEK 1 – September 22**

* **Housekeeping**
  - Student sign up: manuscript presentation calendar
  - Handouts & explanations
  - Discussion of workshop protocol and dynamic
  - Guidelines for thinking and talking about works in progress

* Student manuscript presentations & discussions *

* For next week: Read the interview with Hemingway from Volume I of *The Paris Review Interviews*

**WEEK 2 – September 29**

* Brief Talk – *Before you begin*
  - Fomenting ideas with imagination; the art of weaving autobiographical material into the fabric of fiction; truth vs. fact
  - Research, homework, and respectful preparedness
  - Organizing your material & notes
  - Good habits, good writing

* Student manuscripts *

* For next week: Selected reading from *The Paris Review Interviews*

**WEEK 3 – October 6**

* Brief talk – *Point of View*, the most important decision you will make

* Student manuscripts *

* For next week: Selected reading from *The Paris Review Interviews*
WEEK 4 – October 13

* Brief talk – *Chapter One*
  - Brushing in a background
  - introducing characters
  - seeding conflict
  - initiating the fictional situation & early stages of plotting

* Student manuscripts *

* For next week: Selected reading from *The Paris Review Interviews*

WEEK 5 – October 20

* Brief talk – *Composing the material*
  - dramatic scenes
  - narratively relevant description
  - experiential language & details vs. *telling* through summary & abstractions
  - more about causative plot elements and loading the spring

* Student manuscripts *

* For next week: Selected reading from *The Paris Review Interviews*

WEEK 6 – October 27

* Brief talk – *Characterization & development* – breathing life into your players; plot-driven vs. character-driven narratives: “What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?” Henry James

* Student manuscripts *

* For next week: Selected reading from *The Paris Review Interviews*

WEEK 7 – November 3

* Brief talk – *Furnishing the House* – The narrative toolbox
  - Dialogue
  - Metaphor, simile, & symbolism – forms of analogy or comparison
  - narrative voice & atmosphere
  - Necessary exposition & summary; interpretation of events
- Flashbacks and the informing past; backstories
- The language of the senses

* Student manuscripts *

* For next week: Selected reading from The Paris Review Interviews

**WEEK 8 – November 10**

* Brief talk – *Narrative Architecture*
  - orchestrating content, scenes, backstories and anything else meant to enrich, expand, or explain the central narrative line
  - Pacing and dramatic syncopation

* Student manuscripts *

* For next week: Selected reading from The Paris Review Interviews

**WEEK 9 – November 17**

* Brief talk – *Thematic considerations*
  - point, import, and organizing conceits
  - how a novel *means*

* Student manuscripts *

* For next class: Selected reading from The Paris Review Interviews

*** No Class Tuesday November 24th ***

**WEEK 10 – December 1**

Q & A – *The road to publication*
  - final line editing
  - submissions, contests & awards
  - agents, presses and publishers

* Student manuscripts *