

Writing the City

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: BCLA 3013W

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: On-Site Faculty

Course Description

The course explores the craft of creative writing in relation to the city and investigates the particular challenges of writing about place. Students will examine different aspects of the city in relation to Barcelona narratives, including the old city, travel, urban spaces, solitude, politics, ethnicity, particular boroughs, and characters (both fictional and real), as well as making use of practical exercises and fieldwork.

Course Objectives

This practice-based course aims to provide a theoretical and practical platform to enable students to develop their understanding of Barcelona, utilize the city within their own creative writing, and develop an understanding of the potential of place within narrative, including travel writing, prose fiction, poetry, and film. Through extensive reading and writing practice (including rewriting) and an overview of various styles and narrative devices, they will develop their grasp of literary technique and explore and improve their own writing. The course seeks to enable students to “write the city” for themselves. Students will explore the concept of the “global city” and the urban environment in which they find themselves. They will explore the diversity of the city and observe the way in which people interact with one another so that they can use their observations as the basis for character studies within their own writing.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to demonstrate the following skills:

- Identify and utilize various writing styles and narrative devices; locate and critically evaluate different types of writing about the city of Barcelona.
- Communicate effectively about their own writing and provide constructive feedback to others in the class about their writing.
- Gain a deeper understanding of the diversity of Barcelona. They will be able to describe, interpret, and respect the differences within their student community, as well as between their home country and the host country
- Improve their own creative writing and editorial skills.
- Recognize, describe, and interpret examples of the impact of globalization in the urban environment.
- Explore and analyze the spaces they inhabit and reflect on differences and similarities between their home and host environments.
- Understand the concepts and implications of power, privilege, and inequality in urban environments.

Developmental Outcomes

Students should demonstrate:

- Responsibility and accountability
- Independence and interdependence
- Goal orientation
- Self-confidence
- Resilience
- Appreciation of differences

Methodology

Lecture, workshop, discussion, the use of film, group work, fieldwork, class exercises, student oral presentation, weekly writing assignments, and analysis of published Barcelona authors' work.

Field Components

CAPA provides the unique opportunity to learn about the city through direct, guided experience. Participation in field activities for this course is required. Students will actively explore the global city in which they are currently living. Furthermore, they will have the chance to collect useful information that will be an invaluable resource for the essays/papers/projects assigned in this course.

The assigned field components are:

1. Exploring the heart of Barcelona and its literature: Barri Gòtic, Raval and Las Ramblas.

2. 22@: The narrative construction of the technological district of Barcelona
3. A tour of Santa Maria del Mar and the Born neighborhood, the literary heritage of Falcones and Zafón
4. An emotional journey through the literary squares and streets of Mercè Rodoreda

Required Reading / Materials

- The means with which to write! Students should obtain two notebooks: one that they will use throughout the course for classwork, and one to use as a journal. They should learn not to rely on electronic devices; they are too full of temptations for the writer!

Required Readings

- Class handouts
- ONE book from the following OR a Barcelona narrative of their choice from which they will produce the first of their 1500-word assignments (A1)

Recommended Reading(s):

- Classic Texts (with English translation):
 - *To Barcelona* by Jacint Verdaguer
 - *Selected Poems* by Joan Salvat Papasseit
 - *The Time of the Doves* by Mercè Rodoreda
 - *Nada* by Carmen Laforet
 - *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell
- Classic Texts (without English translation):
 - *Últimas tardes con Teresa* by Juan Marsé
 - *Un señor de Barcelona* by Josep Pla
- Modern Texts:
 - *The City of Marvels* by Eduardo Mendoza
 - *No Word from Gurb* by Eduardo Mendoza
 - *The Enormity of the Tragedy* by Quim Monzó
 - *O'Clock, Olivetti, Moulinex, Chaffoteaux et Maury* by Quim Monzó
 - *The South Seas* by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán
 - *Barcelonas* by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán
 - *The Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafón
 - *Cathedral of the Sea* by Ildefonso Falcones
 - *Victus* by Albert Sánchez Piñol
 - *The Best Thing that can Happen to a Croissant* by Pablo Tusset
 - *I Confess* by Jaume Cabré

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Class participation including small-group discussions, class exercises, and fieldwork/notes	20%
10-minute class presentation of a poem or short essay (1000 words) written in response to matching a piece of literature with a place in Barcelona/Spain and a description of their process	20%
A1: 1500-word short story inspired by a character from one of the novels in the reading list	20%
A2: 1500-word short story—fiction or life writing (travelogue, memoir, or science writing)	20%
A3: 1000-word self-reflective essay	20%
Overall grade	100%

Assessment Details

Fieldwork:

- A. 500 words inspired by their first field trip (week 2), to be delivered the following week
- B. Observational notes based on their second field trip (week 4), for their own use.

Poem/Presentation

Students will identify a place in Barcelona and a poem or other piece of writing associated with it. They will briefly analyze this piece of writing—not necessarily in the sense of literary criticism, but rather to identify the links, both emotional and physical, between the place/location and the work itself, and the differences they find in them.

For instance, a student could analyze the description of Las Ramblas made by George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia* and Las Ramblas as they see them today. Students will, therefore, need to visit the place, preferably at the same time of day as the piece is set.

Then, students will write a poem inspired by this place and/or process. They will share this poem, and the work/place that inspired it, to their classmates in a presentation in Week 6. They should feel free to use photographs, maps, etc. in their presentation.

Students will be graded according to both the written work (10%) and their engagement with the process (10%).

Written assignments in detail

1. A1—1500-word short story based on a fictional character. This assignment will be handed in to be critiqued and subsequently rewritten before being graded. I will not grade the original submission, although I will give students notes. The grade will be based on their final submission.
2. A2—1500-word short story fiction/life writing. It should be inspired by students' experience of the city of Barcelona, but otherwise, the subject is theirs to choose. This is an opportunity for them to explore an aspect of the city that interests them. They may want to write a historical piece, a contemporary short story or piece of travel writing, or a story inspired by trips and visits that we will attend throughout the class. They will have plenty of time to decide on their subject and can ask for guidance if this level of freedom seems daunting.
3. A3—1000-word self-reflective essay. This is an opportunity for students to examine how far they have traveled since leaving the United States, and it is submitted in their last week.

Students' work is graded according to the following criteria:

1. Use of language; whether it's crisp and new or tired and secondhand
2. Style: the originality and authenticity of their voice
3. Understanding of, and success in, inhabiting their chosen form and genre (what kind of writing is it?)
4. Content: its originality and its relationship to the brief
5. Awareness of the reader
6. Presentation: punctuation, spelling, grammar, use of conventions for dialogue, paragraph breaks, etc.

Students should submit all work in a user-friendly font, size 12, double-spaced or 1.5 spaced so that I can annotate their script before returning it. They should include the word count. I will allow a 10% margin in word count, after which students will be penalized. It should be emailed directly to me via Canvas.

Students should submit work on time. Late work will be penalized by 10% and a further 10% each week it is late. If students require an extension, they should contact me to arrange this at least two days in advance of the delivery date.

Course Content

Unit 1

Introduction & Methodology

- Session 1
 - The course and its contents
- Session 2
 - General principles of literary writing
- First approach to the course and clarification of the main objectives and goals
- Realizing the student's "writing experience" and their main motivations for this course
- Outlining basic theory on writing and style
- Readings
 - ZINSSER, William, *On Writing Well*, Harper Perennial, 2016 (selected chapters TBA)
 - AXELROD, Rise B., et al., *Reading Critically, Writing Well*, Bedford, 2016 (selected chapters TBA)
 - KING, Stephen, *On Writing*, Scribner, 2010
 - *Writing Fiction: The Practical Guide...*, Bloomsbury, 2003 (selected chapters TBA)
 - *MLA Handbook*, MLA, 2016
 - A good English-language dictionary

Unit 2

Urban Writing

- Session 3
 - Lecture/Discussion
 - Literature and Urbanism
 - Travel Writing

- Session 4
 - Lecture/Discussion
 - The historical approach
 - The critical approach
 - The comparative approach
- Session 5
 - “Reaction writing” exercise
- Session 6
 - Lecture/Discussion
 - Literary genres in urban writing
- Introduction to the theory that will be examined throughout the semester
- Understanding the diversity of approaches to urban writing and developing skills to be able to produce them all
- Understanding the differences and connections between urban writing and travel writing
- Producing a first piece of literature about Barcelona based on students’ first impressions of the city
- Readings
 - LEHAN, Richard. *The city in Literature: An intellectual and cultural history*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998 (selected chapters TBA)
 - PIKE, Burton. *The image of the city in modern literature*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981 (selected chapters TBA)
 - TAMBLING, Jeremy. *Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2017 (selected chapters TBA)
 - GEORGE, Don. *How to be a travel writer*, Lonely Planet, 2017 (selected chapters TBA)
 - HULME, Peter, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Cambridge UP, 2002 (selected chapters TBA)

Unit 3

The Barcelona of the Past

- Session 7
 - Field trip to the City Center
 - Barri Gòtic, more than 2,000 years old
 - Raval and the multicultural reality
 - Las Ramblas, from sewer to symbol
 - Authors that use these scenarios
- Session 8
 - Group reflection on the field trip
 - History writing
 - Writing about immigration and cultural diversity
 - Classwork on poem/story and presentation
 - Writing poetry and short stories
 - How to give a presentation on our writing
- Session 9
 - Presentations/Discussion
- Session 10
 - Presentations/Discussion
- Getting to know the oldest part of the city, its different neighborhoods and its cultural diversity
- Reflection about the urban and social consequences of globalization; gentrification, speculation, and sponging
- Reflection and group discussion about the field trip and its relationship with the course content and goals
- Learning specifics about history, social, and poetry writing
- Preparation and delivery of students' presentations

- Readings (extracts from):
 - ORWELL, George, *Homage to Catalonia*
 - SAGARRA, Josep M^a de, *Vida Privada*
 - PLA, Josep, *Quadern Gris*
 - CERVANTES, Miguel de, *El quijote*
 - MONTALBÁN, Manuel Vázquez, *Los mares del Sur*
 - GONZÁLES, Mike, *Barcelona: A Literary Guide for Travelers*, I.B. Tauris, 2018 (selected chapters TBA)
 - BALFOUR, Gil, *Quite Literary Barcelona*, Kindle Edition, 2015 (selected chapters TBA)
 - VILA-SAN JUAN, Sergio & DORIA, Sergio, *Walks through literary Barcelona*, Península, 2005 (selected chapters TBA)
 - THOM, James A., *Once Upon a Time as it Was Now*, Blue River Press, 2017 (selected chapters TBA)
 - DARWIN, Emma, *Get Started in Writing Historical Fiction*, Teach Yourself, 2016 (selected chapters TBA)
 - CLIFFORD, Elizabeth & KALYANPUR, Maya, “Immigrant Narratives: Power, Difference and Representation in Young Adult Novels with Immigrant Protagonist,” *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2011
 - LACKEY, Chad, “Social Science Fiction: Writing Sociological Short Stories to Learn about Social Issues,” *Teaching Sociology*, Vol. 22, no. 2, 1994
 - RUNYAN, Tania, *How to Write a Poem*, T.S. Poetry Press, 2015
 - STORZ, C., *Oral Presentation Skills: A Practical Guide*, Envry, 2002

Unit 4

The Barcelona of the Future

- Session 11
 - Field trip to the 22@district and the Besòs area
 - The “Silicon Barri”
 - Glòries: from cars to people

- Making the city smart
- Session 12
 - “Writing about the unknown” exercise
 - Writing about science/technology
 - Writing about the future
- Session 13
 - Analysis of authors that use these scenarios
- Session 14
 - Group reflection on the field trip + block
 - The importance of research and experts to our writing
 - Classwork on assignment A1
 - Creating a good fictional character
- Getting to know the newest area of the city, its different parts, and its contrasts
- Glimpse into what the future city will be
- Reflection about urban improvements and innovations encouraged by globalization
- Reflection and group discussion about the field trip and its relationship with the course content and goals
- Learning specifics about science/technology writing
- Preparation of Writing Assignment A1
- Readings (extracts from):
 - JIMÉNEZ FRONTÍN, José Luis, *El idiota enamorado*
 - BARBAL, María, *Carrer Bolívia*
 - NIN, Anaïs, *Linotte*
 - BAUÇÀ, Miquel, *Carrer Marsala*
 - PÉREZ ANDÚJAR, Javier, *Los Príncipes Valientes*
 - GONZÁLES, Mike, *Barcelona: A Literary Guide for Travelers*, I.B. Tauris, 2018 (selected chapters TBA)

- BALFOUR, Gil, Quite Literary Barcelona, Kindle Edition, 2015 (selected chapters TBA)
- VILA-SAN JUAN, Sergio & DORIA, Sergio, Walks Through Literary Barcelona, Península, 2005 (selected chapters TBA)
- SCOTT CARD, Orson, How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy, F&W, 2005 (selected chapters TBA)
- ROBERTS, Adam, Get Started in Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy, Teach Yourself, 2014 (selected chapters TBA)
- WOLF, Grey, How to Write Alternate History, CreateSpace, 2013 (selected chapters TBA)
- BASSET, Caroline et al., “Better Made Up: The Mutual Influence of Science Fiction and Innovation,” Nesta Working Paper 13/07, 2013
- BARCELÓ, Miquel, “Science Novels: Science and Technology in Fiction,” Mètode Science Studies Journal, no. 5, 2015

Unit 5

The Political Barcelona

- Session 15
 - Field trip to the Born and La Ribera neighborhoods
 - Sta. M^a del Mar: the religious heart of a neighborhood
 - Born CC: a national and local defeat
 - Ciutadella: from fortress to Parliament
- Session 16
 - “Writing about delicate topics” exercise
 - Writing about politics
 - Writing about religion
- Session 17
 - Analysis of authors that use these scenarios
- Session 18
 - Group reflection on the field trip + block

- Considering other people's sensibilities when writing
- Classwork on assignment A2
- Capturing and explaining our experience
- Getting to know one of the most politically symbolic areas in the city, key to understanding the historical Catalan nationalism and some of the most important political and military conflicts with the Spanish state
- Reflection about national identity, nationalism, political confrontation, and diverse types of resistance
- Reflection and group discussion about the field trip and its relationship with the course content and goals
- Learning specifics about politics and religion writing
- Preparation of Writing Assignment A2
- Readings (extracts from):
 - FALCONES, Ildefonso, *La Catedral del Mar*
 - RUIZ ZAFÓN, Carlos, *La sombra del viento*
 - OLLER, Narcís, *La Febre d'or*
 - MONZÓ, Quim, *L'illa de Maians*
 - SALVAT-PAPASSEIT, obra completa
 - GONZÁLES, Mike, *Barcelona: A Literary Guide for Travelers*, I.B. Tauris, 2018 (selected chapters TBA)
 - BALFOUR, Gil, *Quite Literary Barcelona*, Kindle Edition, 2015 (selected chapters TBA)
 - VILA-SAN JUAN, Sergio & DORIA, Sergio, *Walks Through Literary Barcelona*, Península, 2005 (selected chapters TBA)
 - REZAEI, Tahereh et al., "Political Narrative Fiction and the Responsibility of the Author," *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Science*, Vol. 76, 2016
 - TARAS, Raymond, "Why We Need the Novel: Understanding World Politics through Literature," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2013
 - MARKS, Peter, *Literature and Politics: Pushing the World in Certain Directions*, Cambridge, 2012 (selected chapters TBA)

- FESSENDEN, Tracy, Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature, Princeton UP, 2006 (selected chapters TBA)
- KNIGHT, Mark, An Introduction to Religion and Literature, Continuum, 2009 (selected chapters TBA)

Unit 6

The Barcelona of the People

- Session 19
 - Field trip to the neighborhood of Gràcia
 - A city within a city
 - Streets and squares as social landscape
 - Political activism: from anarchism to associacions de veïns
- Session 20
 - “The subjective/opinion approach” exercise
 - Writing about war
 - Writing about normal daily life
- Session 21
 - Analysis of authors that use these scenarios
- Session 22
 - Group reflection on the field trip + block
 - The subjective element in literature
 - Classwork on assignment A3
 - The specifics of writing essays
- Getting to know the neighborhood with more personality and exploring its spaces and people
- Reflection about civil society in action, normal daily lives, and extreme situations (Civil War)
- Reflection and group discussion about the field trip and its relationship with the course content and goals

- Learning specifics about conflict and daily life writing
- Preparation of Writing Assignment A3
- Readings (extracts from):
 - ESPRIU, Salvador, La pell de brau
 - MARAGALL, Joan, Cant Espiritual
 - RODOREDÀ, Mercè, La Plaça del Diamant ○ PERUCHO, Joan, Poesia
 - PUJADÓ, Miquel, Les places de Gràcia
 - GONZÁLES, Mike, Barcelona: A Literary Guide for Travelers, I.B. Tauris, 2018 (selected chapters TBA)
 - BALFOUR, Gil, Quite Literary Barcelona, Kindle Edition, 2015 (selected chapters TBA)
 - VILA-SAN JUAN, Sergio & DORIA, Sergio, Walks Through Literary Barcelona, Península, 2005 (selected chapters TBA)
 - BASKARAN, Niththijanantham, “The Relationship Between War Literature and Certain Specific Social and Political Realities,” Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol. 5, No. 6, 2017
 - AAVV, War, Literature & the Arts (different issues & articles TBA)
 - LACKEY, Chad, “Social Science Fiction: Writing Sociological Short Stories to Learn about Social Issues,” Teaching Sociology, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1994
 - SINGER, Amy E., “A Novel Approach: The Sociology of Literature...,” International Journal of Qualitative Methods, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2011

Unit 7

Cellulose or Celluloid?

- Session 23
 - Movie: Lo mejor que le puede pasar a un cruasán
- Session 24
 - Analysis of the novel and its film adaptation
- Session 25
 - “Film adaptations” exercise

- Reflection on how the platform used changes the way the same story is told
- Reflection and group discussion about the specific differences between the novel and the movie *Lo mejor que le puede...*
- Learning specifics about film adaptations
- Readings (extracts from):
 - TUSSET, Pablo, *Lo mejor que le puede pasar a un cruasán*
 - STAM, Robert, *Literature and Film*, Willey-Blackwell, 2004
 - HUTCHEON, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Routledge, 2012.

Unit 8

Closure and Feedback

- Session 26
 - Farewell
- General reflection about the semester, our experience, and newly gained skills and perspectives

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).