

## English 254D – Radio Fiction

AUB Spring 2016-17  
Wed. 2-430 Nicely 103

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Office Hours Wed. 1-2, Thu 11-12

### Course Description and Objectives

This course is a writing and production workshop in which we will conceive radio story ideas, develop and write well-crafted original scripts, plan the various stages of production, gather and record audio (interviews, performance of scripts, ambient sound, sound effects), and finally – edit the audio into fully realized literary podcasts.

This course will be a supportive and challenging community that will experiment and take creative risks together. We will learn to make story radio *by making story radio*.

### Fiction?

This name for this course – *Radio Fiction* – is something of a misnomer. We will *not* be limited to “fiction” (completely imaginary or made up things) in terms of the material we work with. Indeed, we will be drawing extensively from personal experience and that of family and friends and anyone else around us.

That said, there is some fiction in all so-called non-fiction, and some non-fiction (or truth or reality) in all so-called fiction.

### Methods / Approach

We will read, listen to, and analyze literary podcasts from a wide spectrum of genres and artistic sensibilities in order to better understand the form. We will then apply this knowledge to writing and producing our own story radio podcasts.

In class discussion and short written reflection-responses, we will analyze these podcasts from both a *content* perspective and a *form* perspective.

*Content:* How does the piece establish the tone, the character/s and the world they live in? What narrative strategy is employed? What is at stake? (i.e. Why is this worth listening to?) What is the story set-up and progression? What question does the piece ask and answer?

*Form:* What combination of production elements (writing, acting / interviews, narration, ambient sound, sound effects and scoring) come together to as an integrated piece?

If the piece is a radio drama – what style of performance and interpretation of the script is employed by the actors? If the piece utilizes snippets of “interviews” (either real or performed) – how are they interspersed within the story?

What rhythm and flow of information is orchestrated through the editing? (Or “sound design” as it is referred to in the radio/podcast world.) How does the writer/producer make all these elements work together in a coherent and artistically compelling whole?

When exploring a given podcast, you will listen to it once for the simple experience of it – the way any typical radio listener does. Then we will listen again – taking notes and asking the following:

*What different sounds (i.e. sources of sound) am we hearing at any given moment?*

*How did the producers do this?*

*Can we do this?*

*We being all of us in ENGL 254D.*

### **Equipment / Production Philosophy**

Following a "Guerilla Radio" philosophy, we will make podcasts using tools that we already have: mobile phones and computers. Simply put – our goal is to create the most impressive radio we can for little or no money.

That said, if you have access to or want to invest in better equipment – higher quality mics, a digital recorder – by all means do so.

The course will have a 2 decent UBS mics, 2 shotguns mics and 2 sound recorders. However these are shared with a film-making course.

External USB mics and basic shotgun mics are not terribly expensive. I will talk to you about some options for those interested in purchasing them.

## **Data Storage / External USB Drive**

Over the course of the semester you may end generating up to 50-100 GB or more of source material and edited material and project files. All this material needs to be securely backed up – separately from your computer.

If you don't own one already, I strongly recommend that you invest in an external USB drive. (Not the tiny thumb drives, which you also need one of – but the kind that are about the size of a smart phone, but thicker.) They usually come in 500GB, 1TB or 2TB sizes. Maliks sells a 1 TB unit for about \$100, but they often have sales where it's closer to \$66. (And the whole family can use it.)

You need one of these devices – and not just for this class.

Computer hard drives fail. If you have tons of audio material and editing project files and your computer crashes and you're not backed up, it will break your heart. And I don't want you to break your heart.

## **Course Breakdown**

### 1. Foundation / Intake:

Podcast listening / discussion

Reading of scripts (and source texts) and Analysis

### 2. Technical Instruction on:

sound design software (Audacity)

recording techniques

### 2. Generation of Original Texts:

story conception / planning

script-writing, work-shopping and revision

### 3. Production:

Script breakdown

Production Planning

Direction of Actors (if it is a dramatic piece)

Planning of Interviews (if this is an element)

### 4. Post-Production:

Editing performances and/or interviews

Sound Design (editing of ambience, effects, music score)

## Participation

As previously mentioned, a significant part of this class will be collaborative, so everyone's participation is crucial and will constitute a significant part of your final grade.

Participation includes coming to class having done the required readings (or “listenings”) and being prepared to discuss them in depth. It also includes having read your fellow students' project treatments and scripts and being ready to actively engage in workshops. Having no opinion or ideas to contribute to the conversation is not an option – and I will assume that this means you haven't done the reading/listening.

Once we move into group production mode – everyone's ability to do her/his work with rigor will be even more crucial – as you will be part of team that depends on your duties to be executed in a timely and professional manner.

## Phones and Computers

We will be using our computers and phones extensively during class meetings for one purpose only: *making radio*. Not emailing, texting, whatsapp-ing or whatsoever-ing. If you use them for other things, I may end up owning your iPhone and/or counting you absent.

## Attendance

Come to class and be on time. In the production business there is zero tolerance for flakiness. Treat this course like a dream job you're *thrilled* to have. You will lose participation points – and the good will of your fellow classmates – if you regularly arrive late. 3 late arrivals = .5 points. Arriving 25 minutes late 3 times = 1 absence.

Missing class sessions for anything other than documented medical reasons will be constitute an unexcused absence.

Life is full of the unexpected, so you can miss one class session without excuse or explanation. After that, unexcused absences cost you .5 points per absence. Missing 1/5 of class sessions can result in your being dropped from the course or, if the drop period is over, receiving a failing grade. This is the last thing I want to do, so please come to class.

## Assignments

Complete all assignments and readings before class. Late assignments will be penalized by one letter grade (10 points) per day. Assignments will be submitted as:

- 1) a hard copy and (I may do away with this at some point in the semester).
- 2) an e-copy via Moodle.

If you are having difficulty with a deadline – contact about it well in advance.

It is almost always better to turn in something imperfect *on time* than something perfect *two or three days late*.

## All those Other Classes

Please note that I will not excuse you from class to take quizzes, exams, so-called "mandatory" presentations for your other much less important courses. *Period.*

I promise not to schedule mandatory sessions during your other course meeting times and your other professors are not allowed to require you to be anywhere on Wednesday from 2 – 4:30. I'm well aware that many professors violate this absolutely crystal clear AUB policy.

If they try to violate this policy, please bring it to my attention – well in advance – and I will work something about with him or her that will not get you in trouble or jeopardize your grade in the course. However, if you inform me at the last minute and miss class, you will be counted as absent.

## Evaluation / Grade

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 1) | Engaged Class Participation  | 15 % |
| 2) | Assignments (written responses, scripts, production plans, podcasts) | 60 % |
| 3) | Final Project  | 25 % |

## Texts

will be provided to you via email / Moodle in PDF format – free!

They will include source material that was made into podcasts and/or podcast scripts, and articles about story radio.

## Podcasts

that we examine will include the following:

Serial	Homecoming	War of the Worlds
Snap Judgement	Life After	Limetown
The Truth	National Public Radio	
This American Life	The Miniature Wife	

## Software Resources (free)

Audacity	(sound design)
Mpeg Streamclip	(file conversion)
celtx.com	(scriptwriting)
<a href="http://www.freesound.org">http://www.freesound.org</a>	(sound effects)
<a href="https://www.audionetwork.com">https://www.audionetwork.com</a>	(sound effects – not free)

## Special Needs

AUB strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please inform me immediately so that we can privately discuss options. In order to help establish reasonable accommodations and facilitate a smooth accommodations process, you are encouraged to contact the

Accessible Education Office:

[accessibility@aub.edu.lb](mailto:accessibility@aub.edu.lb)

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