TEXTS: Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (Bantam)
Ernest Hemingway, First Forty-Nine Stories (Simon & Schuster)
J.D. Salinger, Nine Stories (Little Brown)
Flannery O'Connor, Complete Stories (Noonday Press)
Raymond Carver, Cathedral (Vintage Books)

CONTENT: This term the focus of this Topics class will be the modern/contemporary American short story. I have chosen five books, each of which arguably is one of the most important collections in this genre and all of which, taken collectively, represent some (by no means all) of the finest moments in the development of the short story in America in modern times. The books will give us a variety of distinctive voices and thematic concerns. The focus in the class will be 1) on gaining some insight into the nature of the short story itself—its history, its theoretical foundations, and its major elements or "architecture"—and 2) on acquiring some strategies for making meaning out of literary texts. Part of this meaning-making process is inevitably shaped by the matrix of your own personal experience and part is guided by background information and interpretive strategies good readers acquire through practice and with the help of an experienced guide. My job is to serve as that guide as we negotiate meaning together this term. I will assign a number of stories in each collection, and I will expect you to share your reactions and responses both orally and in writing. We will read the collections in the order of their original composition and/or publication, i.e., the order in which they are listed above. We will read only a selection from most of the collections, but you are certainly welcome to read beyond the required number. Class sessions will focus on one or more selected stories from each of the collections.

APPROACH: Informal lecture, discussion, and small group work. I am committed to collaborative learning and the power of personal connections as learning tools in a literature class. Both are for me important pedagogical tools. The class will stress both. If you are uncomfortable with such approaches, this class is probably not a good choice for you.

ASSIGNMENTS: A series of personal response papers collected as an end-of-term journal (300 points; see separate sheet) and a comprehensive final exam (100 points). Course total=400 points. Anyone interested in trying his/her hand at writing an original short story for bonus credit should let me know no later than end of week 9.

READINGS: Because my teaching style is to a good degree "existential," I am providing no specific calendar of reading assignments; instead, I will make reading assignments as needed throughout the term. We will begin with some background material in the first week or so; we will start working with the stories immediately thereafter. You can expect to spend roughly 2 1/2 weeks on each of the five authors. Begin reading Sherwood Anderson’s Winesburg, Ohio as soon as you can get a copy. As a rule, you must complete all assigned reading prior to the class for which it is assigned, and with a significant degree of aesthetic attention. This notion of aesthetic attention is something I will help you with in the first few class sessions, but it will be an ongoing and cumulative process. You must read carefully and slowly, focusing not only on plot but also on what the story seems to be trying to say about the human condition we all share. You will frequently need to read stories more than once. If you miss a class session, you are responsible for finding out what the next day’s reading assignment is. Get to know others in the class who can give you a reliable summary of what went on in class during the day you missed. As part of my existential approach, I may...
eliminate or atter assignments as circumstances warrant.

ATTENDANCE: You will be allowed two unexcused absences w/o penalty. Anything beyond that will affect your grade at a cost of 15 points per miss.

EVALUATION: Total points=400. I will start with these basic criteria: A=93-100%, A/B=88-92%, B=83-87%, B/C=78-82%, C=70-77%, D=60-69%, F=below 60%. I will then take a look at how the class has performed overall and make possible adjustments up or down in the above scale in order to determine grades. I will add points for strong class participation, and I will deduct for absences beyond the allotted two.

NOTE: MTU's Affirmative Action Officer has asked that all faculty include the following statement on each course syllabus:

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Dean of Students, (7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (7-3310).