INTRO POETRY WORKSHOP

Instructor: Alicia Mountain  
Email: Alicia.Mountain@umontana.edu  
Meeting: Tuesday/Thursday 8:10 - 9:30  
Classroom: LA 202  
Mailbox: LA133  
Office: Corbin Hall 349  
Office Hours: Mansfield Library Poetry Corner

“This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple “I must”, then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse. Then come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, try to say what you see and feel and love and lose.”  
-Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet  
(translation by Stephen Mitchell)

Though Rainer Maria Rilke wrote the above advice to a young poet in 1903, strikingly little has changed in the wisdom given to emerging writers. I like to think that this is because little has changed in the human heart, guts, tongue, breath, finger tips—the parts we use most often when we compose and consume poetry. In this 200-level workshop, I won’t interrogate you “in the most silent hour of your night”—that’s your job. Instead I’ll ask you to carry a poetry practice with you throughout the next few months.

In the most literal sense, you will carry a pocket-sized notebook with you each day (even on weekends). Carrying a pen is a good idea too; rarely have I been more frustrated than on the 3-hour flight I spent trapped in a middle seat with a poem in my head and no pen. The images and phrases slipped away until I landed empty-handed. This is all to say that you’ll be writing a lot, hopefully at least once a day, and turning in poems weekly.

You will, of course, carry books of poems in your backpacks, purses, and tote-bags. The texts on the reading list below (and others) will serve as mile markers throughout the semester. I expect that, individually and as a class, we’ll digest, discuss, adopt, reject, be confused by, and draw inspiration from these works. We’ll start off with Mary Oliver’s A Poetry Handbook. You will also hold fast to the work of your classmates, approaching their poems with curiosity, compassion, and thoughtfulness. They will do the same for you.

You’ll memorize poems to carry with you, you’ll revise your collected work into a chapbook, you’ll write letters to some of the poets whom we read to carry on the tradition of Rilke’s young poet. For one semester you will “build your life in accordance with this necessity”—the practice of writing poetry. I look forward to seeing the ways in which this manifests for each of you.

Course Texts

- Supplementary readings to be printed from our course website: https://sites.google.com/site/211Mountain

Other requirements

- daily internet and printer access
- comfortable notebook or notepad and pen/pencil for in-class writing
- pocket-sized notebook to be carried with you for phrases, lines, and images that come up unexpectedly
- binder, folder, or large envelope for holding on to classmates’ poems waiting to be workshopped
- alert, attentive, respectful disposition
Course Structure

We’ll begin by figuring out how to approach poems analytically—considering elements such as sound, meter, diction, rhythm, line, etc. Once we get into the swing of things, we’ll devote Tuesdays to discussions of technique, craft lectures, responses to assigned readings, questions about homework, and some in-class writing. Thursdays will be exclusively allocated for workshopping your poems.

Workshop:
After we’ve finalized our roster for this class, I’ll divide it up into either 2 or 3 workshop groups. The entire class will turn in one copy of their poems to me on Thursdays. The workshop group that’s up next week brings in enough copies for the entire class on the Thursday preceding their assigned workshop day.

Before coming to class, each student is responsible for marking up the workshop poems with comments and questions (see workshop guidelines sheet). In addition to the marked-up sheet, you’ll bring in two copies of your written response to the poem—one is given to the poet, the other to me. These responses must be typed and at least 150 words in length.

We’ll discuss the poems that you turn into me on your off-weeks (when you aren’t being workshopped) when we meet for one-on-one conferences at least twice during the semester. These conferences provide an opportunity to check out themes that have come up in your work and to consider how you might structure your final chapbook.

Chapbook:
A chapbook is a short collection of poetry, compiled into a small book. Your final project is a chapbook of 12-15 revised poems, ordered thoughtfully and assembled elegantly, along with a 2-3 pg intro essay about the collection. You’ll want to be editing your drafts steadily over the course of the semester so the chapbook project doesn’t sneak up on you. Also, I find that my revisions go more smoothly when workshop comments are still fresh in my mind, so I try to revise right away. Your chapbook is due on the last day of class. I will give you an assignment sheet as the due date approaches. For now, know that evaluation of your work is not based on my tastes, but rather on ways in which your growth is evident and the techniques we’ve discussed are being put to use effectively.

I encourage you to talk with me at any time to better understand my comments or to discuss your poetry practice.

SCHEDULING NOTE: Class will not meet Tuesday Sept 23rd or Thursday Sept 25th. Additional office hours will be held to make up instructional time.

Common Policies and Procedures

General Class Expectations:
Do your work. (Reading will be completed by the assigned date and writing assignments, both creative and critical must be turned in on time. Late work receives no credit.)
Respect your work. (All poems and homework must be typed and printed in hard copy. Poets are responsible for bringing enough printed copies of their work for the class ONE WEEK before their scheduled workshop day.)
Come to class—absences are by far the easiest way to lower your grade for this course.
Bring your brain to class. Participation in class discussions will be active, vocal, and respectful. Cell phones will be silenced and put away before the beginning of class.

Failure to meet these expectations will lower your final grade.

Grading

Workshop Participation 33%
Written Assignments 33%
Final Chapbook** 33%

The last 1% is for having great, fitting, magnetic titles to your poems—something I personally fail at all the time.
Attendance
Because the poetry workshop is, at its core, a community of writers navigating our work together, class participation is an essential academic component of the class and thus the attendance policy is inflexible. More than two absences from a Tuesday/Thursday class will compromise your grade. 5 or more absences from a Tues/Thurs class will result in a failing grade. The procedure is as follows:

- 3rd absence: final grade drops one letter grade
- 4th absence: final grade drops one letter grade
- 5th absence: final grade is an F

There is reasoning behind the attendance policy-- without attending class, you cannot perform your role as a student involved in discussing techniques, interrogating craft, considering the work of others, offering revision strategies, or collaborating with your instructor and classmates. Personal situations inevitably arise that make it impossible for you to make it to class. Remember, however, that’s why two absences are allowed; please reserve those for emergencies. If you must miss class you are responsible for asking a classmate what you missed or coming to office hours to clarify assignments for the class. Even if you “had a reason” for your absence it still counts toward your cumulative number of absences.

Participation
Participation includes coming to class prepared and on time, taking part in class discussions, asking questions, contributing your knowledge and insights in whatever form is appropriate, and striving to make all your contributions excellent. It also includes doing the required reading and writing for each class. This is particularly crucial on workshop days, when the poet whose work you were to read will be sitting beside you. Hint: They’ll know if you haven’t spent time with their poems in advance and might very well take that inattention personally.

Lateness will hurt your grade because it is an unnecessary interruption and because latecomers are likely to miss valuable information. Additionally, the community-based nature of our class requires you to be present to engage intellectually with your classmates. Your thoughts are vital to your peers; therefore your presence is vital as well. If your cell phone or other distracting device makes an appearance during class, your participation grade drops.

(Un)acceptable Work.

- Your work needs to be typed, printed, stapled and in class with you to be considered "on time."
- Late or handwritten homework (except handwritten drafting materials) does not receive credit.
- Emailed assignments are considered late.
- Late poems for workshop are particularly unacceptable. Readers expect a full week to consider your work.
- If you miss class, the homework is due the next class period.
- You are encouraged to complete assignments early if you will be missing class.

Students with Disabilities
Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please meet with me. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. DSS website: http://www.umt.edu/dss/

Academic Conduct
Plagiarism Policy (from the Mansfield Library):
The University of Montana Student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as "representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own". This, and other specified forms of academic misconduct, are "subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University." Penalty for academic dishonesty can vary depending on the severity of the action. Students are subject to both faculty-specific repercussions as well as those imposed by the university. Plagiarism isn't just a student conduct offence, it also shows a lack of respect for the coursework and can have serious repercussions in later academic endeavors.

That being said, if your work is in dialog with other poetry, literature, or cultural texts we can work together to figure out elegant attribution of quoted passages and ways in which appropriation comes into play. On the other hand, if you turn in someone else’s poems as your own… I can’t begin to describe the bad things that will follow.
Communication

Office hours: Office hours provide us with an opportunity to talk one on one. You may drop in during these times or make an appointment with me to talk about any questions you have about your progress in the course. I’ll be holding office hours in the Poetry Corner on Level 5 of the Mansfield Library. Let’s decide as a class what time works best.

Asking questions after class: If you have a brief question or comment after class, feel free to ask/share. 

Emails: I will respond to emails Monday-Friday within 48 hours of you sending one. Avoid using email for detailed questions/comments. As per UM policy, I will only respond to emails sent from your @umontana.edu address.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Student Advocacy Resource Center (SARC)
24-hour Support Line: 406-243-6559
General office line: 406-243-4429
Regular office hours: Monday- Friday 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
Located in Curry Health Center (East Entrance, Upstairs) in Room 108

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action/Title IX Coordinator
Eric M. Gutiérrez
eric.gutierrez@umontana.edu
406.243.5710
University Hall 020

Curry Health Center Counseling
406-243-4711
http://life.umt.edu/curry-health-center/Counseling/
West Entrance, Downstairs and to the Left: Room 076

Financial Aid Office
(406) 243-5373
faid@mso.umt.edu

UM Public Safety: (406) 243-4000

- Discrimination is exclusionary conduct that is based upon an individual’s race, color, religion, national origin, creed, service in the uniformed services (as defined in state and federal law), veteran status, sex, age, political ideas, marital or family status, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

- Harassment may take various forms, including, name-calling, graphic or written statements (including the use of cell phones or the Internet), or other conduct that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating. Harassment does not have to include intent to harm, be directed at a specific target, or involve repeated incidents. Sex-based harassment includes sexual harassment and non-sexual harassment based on stereotypical notions of what is female/feminine v. male/masculine or a failure to conform to those gender stereotypes.

- Sexual Harassment can include unwelcome: sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, including sexual assault. Sexual harassment, including sexual assault, can involve persons of the same or opposite sex.