CRWR 211 Syllabus

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings… recollected in tranquility”

–Wordsworth

Welcome, poets! This semester we will read, write, discuss, and disrupt what poetry is and how it works. The focus will be on reading and writing as a process by learning what it means to experience the world of the poem on a tangible, visceral level. While we will use the old fathers and mothers of English Poetry –specifically American Poetry (think Whitman and Dickenson)–as touchstones, our focus will primarily shift to contemporary poets and how they are shaping and being shaped by this form of art. Your goal in this class should likewise be to affect and be affected by this art. You cannot do one successfully without doing the other. “Writing is 90% reading.”

My hope for this course is to give you a well-rounded introduction to the styles, forms, schools and traditions of American poetry, while liberating you to create and destroy and create again what poetry means and does for you. Discussion, workshop, and in-class writing will comprise the majority of our time, however, there will be days where we meet off-site in order to brush that dirt off our shoulders.

Ultimately, this class will be what you make it. If you show up on time, prepared and ready to engage one another in discussion, we should all get along just fine. I have no plans to push you into poetry, or to task you with it. If you don’t think you can muster some curiosity about the subject, and feel that writing and reading are burdens to you, I completely understand, and the door is somewhere in the room.

Required Texts:
- Sharon Olds “Stag’s Leap”
- One volume of poetry of your choice published after 1995 (I am happy to make recommendations)

Supplemental Material:
- Many of the poems, essays, etc. we read will be via handout & email, which I expect you to print out and bring to class, every time. Know that it is much easier for me to simply require that you buy ten books for my course, so please be understanding about the minimal printing costs you may accrue in the library or UC.

Moleskin & pen. You will also need to purchase one moleskin notebook, and keep one, solid ink pen with it. (We do not use pencils in my class.) The reason I require this particular journal is so
you have something distinctive from every other notepad used in your other classes. Consider it your journal for this class. It’s what I anticipate many of your first thoughts, lines, and snippets of poems will be written in, both inside my classroom and out. Keep it beside your bed. Take it camping or to the river. Record your thoughts just before sleep, your dreams, your shower epiphanies, your favorite lyrics, things you overheard in the UC or the grocery. I promise you: this is where poems come from, even if it isn’t.

**Weekly Assignments.** Unless I state otherwise, poems will be due exactly one week after they are assigned. Generally, I will provide you with a prompt or ask you to write a specific type of poem. What I expect you to do during the week is this: take the first few days to digest the prompt, roll it around between your fingers like a snail shell. This might be a good time to consider other poems we’re reading that might be similar or offer inspiration. Jot down notes in your moleskin as they arrive, without questioning or editing them. After two or three days, begin a draft. Form the phrases into lines, the lines into stanzas, etc. First drafts begin as toilet paper, but may have more potential than you realize. Take day 4 off. Don’t look at the poem, don’t dwell on it. Go to the river, play Skyrim, bake a pie. Consider this your writing Sabbath. On the last few days, return to the poem. Poke at it, tear it down, breathe new words into it. Remember: create, destroy, create. Once it’s how you want it to look for the time being, submit it. You will email me the poem and I’ll print them all off for the group.

I will only accept poems and written assignments that are typed out and carefully written. I do not accept late work and you will not receive credit for the assignment if these small steps are not followed. If you do not have the poem emailed/submitted to me on time, it will not be workshopped, and we will move on.

**Workshop.** Several weeks into the semester, we will incorporate formal workshops into our class time. A good workshop operates on two levels: first, it gives the writer the opportunity to receive feedback on a poem that he or she could not go any further on alone; second, it gives everyone an opportunity to learn about writing better poems by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the piece at hand. Everyone is expected to come to workshop with classmates’ poems thoroughly read (that means read multiple times) with written feedback already prepared (though you may add to your comments as we discuss in class). Before the first workshop, we’ll go over guidelines for critique and the best methods for reading and analyzing poems. You will be given a new prompt in class each week, and you’ll be expected to email me your poem no later than midnight exactly one week later. I’ll pass out packets with everyone’s poems which you’ll take with you, read carefully, and mark up. Give your peers’ work the attention you’d also like to receive. Don’t slack on workshopping—it weighs on your grade.

**The Portfolio.** Keep everything you write and everything passed out in this class. It is essential that you hold onto each draft of your poems, especially ones with written feedback from your classmates and myself. It shows process, and provides you with insights on how to revise and revamp your work. It may serve you best to have a few different folders: one for your work, one for your classmates’, and one with the course materials/printed-off poems and essays. The final portfolio will contain: 6-8 poems that showcase your best, most thoughtful work of the semester. Two of the poems should include each and every draft in order to illuminate your process and to highlight your developments as a writer. The remaining poems should be final draft only. Your portfolio should be like skin to you, something you embody and take pride in. We’ll take time at the end of the semester to do a class reading of 1-2 poems per person. Don’t worry, we’ll be friends by then.
**Book Review / Presentation.** Alongside the texts listed above, you’ll be expected to choose a *contemporary* book of poetry from the library* (or, and preferably, purchase one from a local bookseller) and read, review, and present it to the class near the end of the semester. You’ll write a 1-2 page review of the book, noting its strengths and weaknesses, the context in which it’s operating, and if the overarching themes or narratives are compelling. Use details and excerpts to highlight your points. Then you’ll give a 5-7 minute presentation in class reflecting your insights. I encourage you to choose a book early on and read through it several times. Once you think you’ve made a selection, run it by me for approval. You have until Monday, September 29th to decide.

*It being this is an intro course, I understand most of you won’t be versed in contemporary poetry. For that reason I will also provide a list of recommended and acceptable books for this assignment. We can meet and discuss what you like, don’t, and what would most interest you. I’m happy to help with your selection, but ultimately, it will be on you to choose.

**Recitations.** At the beginning of each class, one of you will recite a poem from memory. I’ll pass out a sign-up sheet early on, so it’s up to you whether you do it early or save it for later. The poem doesn’t need to be three pages long, but it must be more than half a page (one exception would be a sonnet, with my approval). More importantly, choose a poem that you *want to have with you at all times.* Being able to recall the words of the dead (and living, for that matter), is a powerful thing. Find the poem that you’ll remember this class for years later. I’m happy to offer suggestions.

**Attendance.** This class should be pretty darn hard to fail, but the easiest way to do so is to skip out. We cannot have a layered, multi-voiced discussion or workshop if your seat is empty. I follow the attendance policy set forth by the department and the university; writing courses, especially workshops, require that you be present.

**Participation.** As mentioned above in the introduction, this class will be what you make it. The art of poetry *is* participation. Not just by listening, reading, and writing (all quite important), but by participating in the world in which you exist. If you sat out during kickball as a kid and pouted because you had to be there, you probably didn’t enjoy recess very much. But, if you realized that this was a 30-minute break from multiplication tables and memorizing the presidents, you probably swung your leg pretty hard and took pride in the occasional scraped knee. Poetry is like that – you’ll learn just as much from the sidewalk as you will from the textbook. I implore you: show up on time, be prepared, and be vocal. Listen to each other, take notes, and speak up. This is where opinions matter most (albeit polite ones).

**Classroom Community.** Continuing the analogy by upending it, it’s important we all respect each other. Let’s not act like kids on the playground by name-calling, insulting, or (especially) depanting each other. We all come from different ethnic, social, economic, religious, sexual, and political backgrounds. This will provide us with a wonderful array of experiences in which we should all be so lucky to learn from each other. When the discussions show our differences, let’s find value in the diversity, not yelling matches.

Pet peeves and respect:
- *No cell phones.* In your bag, on silent and preferably in airplane mode. If you have trouble remembering to put your phone on silent, turn it off completely.
- Please don’t pack up your belongings before I’ve dismissed class, even if that’s “after the bell.” It’s a 50 minute class three times a week. That’s less than 3 of the 168 hours of your week that I require your attention --don’t try to shave off two minutes, its offensive.
• As a general rule, please don’t eat in my classroom. We meet from 2:10-3:00, so try to make lunch happen before then. I don’t mind you gulping the occasional banana before class, or enjoying your smoothie while listening, but please don’t bring your bucket of Halloween candy and unwrap it piece by piece while others try to listen over your static.
• No pets or children in class (exception service animals).
• I think this goes without saying, but please don’t pass notes or constantly whisper in my class. I don’t expect to have to address this aloud even once.
• If you need to use the restroom, go.

**Communication.** I am happy to talk with you via university email if you have questions about the course or an assignment. Please do not email me drafts or attachments unless invited to do so. I check my email every day and will respond to your queries within 48 hours, Monday – Friday. Conversely, I expect you to be similarly available. I will often send out updates with new poems and articles for you to print off, read, and bring to class. If I must cancel class unexpectedly, you’ll likely hear about it via email. In other words, make checking your university email a daily habit.

**Office Hours.** These provide us with an opportunity to talk one-on-one about your work or academic standing in the class. My office is 349 Corbin Hall, but I reserve the right to move that station elsewhere. If I do, I’ll let you know where, and I promise you it will be a more accessible place, not less. If you require a private space to speak with me, we can set up a time to meet in my office, or a mutually comfortable spot on campus.

**Students with Disabilities.** I am committed to accommodating students with disabilities as is necessary for each individual. Make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss the ways in which I can assist you, and please present a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

**Plagiarism.** Don’t. This isn’t anthropology and you don’t have to write a 10-page paper. If you have questions or concerns about whether you’re toeing the line, come talk with me and I’ll help clarify the situation.

**Grade Breakdown**

Final Portfolio: 40%
Class participation: 40%
Book review / presentation: 10%
Recitation: 10%

**This syllabus may be amended at my discretion at any time throughout the semester. If significant/mentionable changes occur, I will inform you ASAP.**
## University Academic Calendar, Fall 2014

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1 (Monday)</td>
<td>Labor Day Holiday - no classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 4 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Election Day - no classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 11 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Veterans Day - no classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 26, 27, 28</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1** (Monday)</td>
<td>Last Day of Classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2-5 (Tuesday-Friday)</td>
<td>Reading Period</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 6-19 (Saturday - Friday)</td>
<td>Final Examinations</td>
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**Note that Monday, December 1 will follow a Tuesday class schedule.**

**Building Hours:**
Weekdays, December 22 - January 26, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

**Law Library Hours:**
Weekdays, December 22 - January 26, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
(Closed at Noon on 12/24)

**Building Closed:**
Weekends and Holidays (December 20-January 27),