

Syllabus & Course Policies

Syllabus: Advance Creative Writing - Poetry UWSP English 353 sec 02 3 Credits Fall 2016
Tuesdays 6:30 - 9:00 PM 233 CCC Patricia R. Dyjak, Ph.D., M.F.A.

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Office Hours: MW 2:00 – 2:50 pm, R 3:30 – 4:30 pm & *by appointment*

The syllabus is subject to change.

“Important lines” and the “Exercises on the Readings” are due by 6:20 pm in D2L the day of class.

- Week 1** 9/6 Writing Questionnaire; Introductions; Pat on Poetry; Syllabus & Course Policies; Books & sample poems; basic terms for discussing poems; handouts, in-class exercises [ER 0?]
- Week 2** 9/13 Discuss Tom Lombardo, *The Name of This Game*; discuss Muriel Rukeyser *Life of Poetry* p 7-14 top & 15 – 18 middle. Important Lines (IL) due by 6:20 pm in D2L; in-class exercises [ER 0?]; Last names B through K bring poem and copies to class for workshop queue.
- Week 3** 9/20 Discuss Tom Lombardo, *The Name of This Game*; **Exercise on the Reading (ER) #1 due by 6:20 pm in D2L**; discuss Muriel Rukeyser *Life of Poetry* p173-180; 1st workshop; **sign-up for explication/recitation**; Last names M through W bring poem and copies for workshop queue.
- Week 4** 9/27 Discuss Joy Harjo *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*; IL due & **ER 0** due by 6:20 pm in D2L; workshop; Last names B through K bring poem and copies to class for workshop queue. DUE: sign-up for explication/recitation: You must have signed-up for a poet and day by today;
- Week 5** 10/4 Discuss Joy Harjo *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*; IL due; workshop; Last names M through W bring poem and copies for workshop queue.
- Week 6** 10/11 Discuss Joy Harjo *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*; **ER #2 due**; workshop; Last names B through K bring poem and copies to class for workshop queue.
- Week 7** 10/18 Discuss Brian Turner *Here, Bullet*; IL due; workshop; Last names M through W bring poem and copies for workshop queue.
- Week 8** 10/25 Discuss Brian Turner *Here, Bullet*; IL due; workshop; Last names B through K bring poem and copies to class for workshop queue.
- Week 9** 11/1 Discuss Brian Turner *Here, Bullet*; **ER #3 due**; workshop; Last names M through W bring poem and copies for workshop queue. ; **Mid-semester grades (approx.); Sign-up for portfolio conferences (optional).**
- Week 10** 11/8 Discuss Kim Addonizio *Tell Me*; IL due; workshop; Last names B through K bring poem and copies to class for workshop queue.
- Week 11** 11/15 Discuss Kim Addonizio *Tell Me*; IL due; workshop; Last names M through W bring poem and copies for workshop queue.

Week 12 11/22 Discuss Kim Addonizio *Tell Me*; **ER #4 due**; workshop; Last names B through K bring Poem and copies to class for workshop queue.

Thanksgiving on Thursday

Week 13 11/29 Discuss Christine Howey *If You Find yourself Submerged In a Pond Under Ice*; IL due; workshop; Last names M through W bring poem and copies for workshop queue.

Week 14 12/6 Discuss Christine Howey *If You Find yourself Submerged In a Pond Under Ice*; **ER#5 due**; workshop

Week 15 12/13 Discuss Muriel Rukeyser *Life of Poetry* p 192-3; 197-8; 202, 205-8; workshop

Finals Week: 12/20 Tuesday 7:15 - 9:15 pm Workshop?

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“The universe is made of stories,/ not of atoms” Muriel Rukeyser from “The Speed of Darkness” [poem]

Poetry is the exchange of energy. – (paraphrase) Muriel Rukeyser from *the Life of Poetry*

Poetry is like porn, difficult to describe, but I know what it is when I see it.

Poetry says the unsayable, the irreducible.

Course Policies

Advance Creative Writing - Poetry

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Buy: Addonizio, Kim. *Tell Me*. BOA Editions, Ltd. 2000. ISBN: 978-1-880238-91-2
Harjo, Joy. *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*. W.W. Norton & Co. 2015.
ISBN: 978-0-393-24850-0 (This ISBN is for hardcover; if the paperback is now out, it's fine to get that.)
Howey, Christine. *If You Find Yourself Submerged In a Pond Under Ice*. Kattywompus Press 2011. ISBN: 1936715058
Lombardo, Tom. *The Name of This Game*. Kattywompus Press 2014. ISBN: 1936715678
Turner, Brian. *Here, Bullet*. Alice James Books. 2005. ISBN: 978-1-882295-55-5

Text Rental: Rukeyser, Muriel. *The Life of Poetry*. Ashfield, MA: Paris Press. 1996.
ISBN: 978-0-9638183-3-1

Hand outs: I will distribute handouts in class, from time to time. You are required to provide copies of your poem for workshop to the other students and me.

Please see the syllabus (attached) for the order in which we will read these poets/collections.

Prerequisite: English 253 Intro to Creative Writing here at UWSP or the equivalent *as determined by me*.

Course Description:

I am serious about poetry as an art form, as a form of ritual/shamanism, as an expression of the human, as a manifestation of ideas, as an exultation of a love of language, as fun. A poem is, as Muriel Rukeyser says, “an exchange of energy.” Emily Dickinson, in her Second Master Letter, says “Have you a little chest to keep the alive in?” – which is just *sooo* creepy and disturbing and real that I know it is poetry about poetry. This is why poetry workshops tend to be energetic places. Poetry is energy.

Poetry is a community, of both present and absent poets. We will build a community of folks serious about poetry, both reading it and writing it. We will, as a community, look at poems by contemporary poets in order to understand how they work and what we can learn from them. Artists know their field and take energy from it.

Serious consideration of each other's work is a sign of respect. We will workshop students' poems and give the authors feedback on how the poem is working. Our goal is to help each poet make their poem stronger. We are not here to tell each other how wonderful we are: that is not useful literary criticism/workshop comments. We are not here to ridicule anyone's work or self: that is not useful literary criticism/workshop comments. *Again, our goal is to help each poet make their poem stronger, in accordance with their style and what they are trying to achieve in the poem.*

I get excited by poetry. I love words. Emily Dickinson said “If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?” (approx. 1870, Letter

to Thomas Higginson). Fall in love with language, line breaks, with images, with poems. Be passionate about reading and writing poetry. You have my permission to be madly in love with language.

This is not a beginning course, not an introduction. I expect the students in this class to be familiar already with basic poetic techniques, terms, and workshop procedures. This course will include reading and discussing individual collections by poets, exercises/assignments written in class and out, an informal response to the reading “important lines,” a recitation and explication assignment, and workshop. As this course only meets once a week, attendance is critical, as is preparation and participation.

We will all read the four books of poems and the handouts assigned for the class, and consider them as collections. The standard in the field of poetry is for authors to publish small books. Reading individual collections is the only way to really get to know a poet's voice. It is important that you are familiar with contemporary poetry. You have many options as to how you want your poetry to be; reading collections will help model your options. It will help you know in your bones what a poem is.

The Life of Poetry

We will be using our Text Rental book Muriel Rukeyser's *The Life of Poetry* as a writing prompt, and as a discussion tool. For the first two class, I have assigned some pages for you to read. These can be included in your Important Lines. We'll discuss the reading in class. Later in the semester, at the end (see the syllabus), we'll look some more short assigned readings. Rukeyser can prompt your writing at any time. She is brilliant: she is a multi-talented writer (poet, playwright, biographer, reporter, essayist), and fierce social-justice activist.

Poems by students

Students will produce at least 12 poems by the end of the semester. All poems must be written this semester, and not for another class. The poems you do as Exercises on the Reading count towards this total, as does a poem from the exercises the first two classes. Poems submitted for workshop also count. These all will be collected by students in their end of semester Poetry Portfolio.

Explication and Recitation

When we consider the collections, part of the class time will be spent on students' **explication and recitation** of a poem. “Recitation” means you memorize the poem, or at least 25 lines of it, and recite it from memory. “Explication” is a literary term meaning to describe or explain how the piece of literature is building meaning. This includes form as well as ideas and images and word choice and allusions. This is NOT theme. This is NOT the key points or main ideas. This is the tiny bits and pieces that meld together to create the poem. You will want to study each line, line break, stanza break, and word choice when considering what to point out to the class. Students will select which class book they want to focus on, and everyone signed-up for that book that week will perform their recitation and explication of a poem of their choice at the start of class.

Students **MUST** meet with me the week before they are to present with their poem already selected and be prepared to tell me what they have noticed about the poems. I will help you draw out all that is in the poem. Poets often memorize poems they particularly admire. It is a great way to really *know* and understand the poem and the choices the poet made in writing it. You will get tripped up at many word choices and phrases, as did the poet when writing the poem. Learning the poem by heart means you get to understand its silences, its rhythm, and the pace at which to read or recite it. You may not do a poem you have already recited for a previous course.

“Important Lines” (IL)—a Response to the Reading:

For the 1st and 2nd week we do a major collection by a poet, and the 1st week we do a chapbook, I want you to quote 3-5 lines of poetry from the assigned reading that you found provocative, exciting, important, moving, etc., and provide a short response/reaction to these lines (two sentences minimum to a maximum of a

paragraph). These lines can be all from one poem, or from a number of poems. Be sure to write out the lines, following their format, and indicate the poem from which they came. This is NOT a literary analysis; this is reader response. This is identifying what you like, dislike, puzzles you, provokes you, etc., and meditating on paper. You will need to submit these in D2L by 6:20 pm the day of class that they are due. See the syllabus for due dates. These are process-graded, meaning that you get credit for trying.

Exercises on the Reading (ER):

The second week we consider a chapbook, and the 3rd week we consider a full collection by a poet, each student will create a poem of their own based on some quality they see in the poet's work. **These qualities can be on theme or style.** This poem must be typed. The quality must be identified on the page with the poem. You must write three to five sentences explaining how you are trying to achieve what you identify. See the syllabus for due dates. These can be used for workshop. You will need to submit these in D2L by 6:20 pm the day of class that they are due. See the syllabus for due dates. These are given numbers from 0 to 5. These are process-graded, meaning that you get credit for trying. Exercise on the Reading 0 is a poem that you are to develop from the in-class writing exercises we do the first two class meetings. This ER0 will be due the 4th week of class.

Reading others work, reading collections of poems, will make your writing stronger. It will increase your concrete details and images, suggest forms for you to try, energize you to write more, stimulate you to write on similar or strange topics. It may make you jealous. As a Professor of Creative Writing, I can tell which students are doing the reading and which students are not. I can see it in your poems. By having this standing assignment I hope to provide you with a concrete reason to read and a concrete result of reading each of the poets assigned.

Workshop

Poems brought to workshop will be critiqued; they will change. If you love your poem, as is, do NOT bring it to workshop. If the subject is sensitive and you don't feel comfortable bringing it to class, bring a different poem. When we workshop it will be particularly important that you offer, in writing and verbally, comments on other students' work. Inappropriate comments, or not making any comments, will affect your grade. Written comments need to be clear and specific. You should indicate both what you think is working, and what confuses you, and any other associations brought up in the text. Oral and written comments need to be focused on the poem or story, never the person who made it. Sign your name at the bottom of your comments on others poems. **I will collect these first to assess your contribution, then pass the sheet on to the poet.** I am not here to tell you that your poem is wonderful. Your fellow students are not here to tell you that your poem is wonderful. That is not helpful literary criticism. We have a responsibility to each other as artists to give serious consideration to each other's poems, and give a thoughtful and respectful assessment. You will want to tell each other where you are confused in the poem, and what associations you get from it. Certainly, if you like what a poet is doing, tell the poet what you like. People need to hear the positive as well as the negative. Always have a reason why.

On alternant weeks half the class will be bring their poem (plus copies for me and the rest of the class) for the workshop queue. The queue is set alphabetically. Please see the syllabus. There is no guarantee that we will workshop ten poems each workshop; different poems require different amounts of discussion. We distribute poems at the end of class. If you do not have your poem for your scheduled distribution week, you must wait until your next scheduled distribution week; you can only submit one poem at a time.

Comments on poems, written and verbal

The workshop is a forum that employs a dialectic or discussion involving the workshop community. The poet whose poem is being discussed is the "fly on the wall" who gains by hearing what the audience/reader/witness reaction to their work is. We are NOT a group of editors. We consider what we believe the poem is trying to achieve, and what kind of style it is (imagistic, meditative, rant, persona, etc.) and offer suggestions on how to

make the poem stronger, and give our observations as to allusions and associations, etc. Take a leap. You need to tell/write the poet about the associations you bring to their poem. (There is no wrong answer for this.) If you had an association the poet did not intend, then they won't know that unless you indicate it. This is one of the things poets find out in workshop. Write/indicate anything in the poem that confuses you. Suggest line breaks and changes in form: do you think the poem would be more effective if broken up into stanzas rather than presented as a brick or column? The basic unit in a poem is the line (not the sentence). The word at the end of the line on the right hand side, in English, receives the MOST attention from the reader. We linger on it. It often is surrounded by white space that helps emphasize it. Is it a word worth emphasizing? Does the rhythm pause on it (end-stopped) or do you rush over it (enjambéd)? What images come to your mind when reading the poem? What images are there present in the poem? These all matter. The workshop community is the voice the poet eavesdrops on to know where his/her poem is "working" i.e., doing what s/he intended, and where it is not.

Portfolio and Portfolio Conferences:

At the end of the class I will collect from each student the poems they have produced for this course. These will be the workshopped copies or a clean one. Put all your workshop poems on the right-hand side of a pocket folder. Put all your exercise poems on the left-hand side of your pocket folder. Put any additional poems behind these on the left. Staple the most recent revision on top of the original poem. Write your name, my name, the course and semester on the outside of your pocket folder. It is my evidence that you have created at least 12 poems for the class. This is a reminder for me of your work, and/or progress in the class when I calculate your grade. *I will NOT make comments on these at the end of the semester; my comments on your poems will be given in workshop. If you want my comments on your portfolio, then you must contact me the next semester or in the Summer and make an appointment. I will make additional comments on your portfolio and we will meet to discuss it.* I have this policy because, usually, no one picks-up their portfolio the next semester.

If you want, you may sign-up for an "in-progress portfolio" conference with me for *after* the eighth week of classes. I will bring a sign-up sheet for conferences to our class. *You need to have your portfolio to date (6 poems) to me at least five days (or a weekend) before we meet.* Put your poems in a pocket folder with your name on the outside. You may give this to me or leave it in the basket on my office door 429 CCC. Our meetings will be about 20 minutes.

Please note: Writing Minors may take Engl 353 for a total of three times, and twice in one genre. Therefore, you may take Engl 353 – Adv Poetry twice. (You can take it even more, but you won't get Minor credit for it.)

Grades:	10%	Important Lines [process graded]
	10%	Class discussion & Written comments on others poems
	20%	Explication of poem (and recitation) [graded A- F]
	30%	Exercises (i.e., poems) on the Reading (5% each for 6 – includes first class) [process]
	30%	Poetry Portfolio: this includes poems for workshop, and Exercises on the Readings. You will need 12 poems total for your portfolio; anything written this semester. [Graded in a combination of progress and product; it will get a letter grade A – F.]
	&	attendance

Because students in this class are in four different categories (fiction writers taking this for their minor, poetry writers taking it for their minor the first time, poetry writers taking it for their minor the second time, and non-minors taking it because they met the prerequisite) I find it difficult to have a set standard for grading. Therefore, I use a combination of process, how you are progressing individually, and product. Your participation in workshop is of particular importance, as is the reading of the collections of poets assigned. I can tell, I can see in your poems over the course of the semester who has done the reading. I will give an *unofficial* sheet out to students on Week 9 to indicate how I assess their performance thus far and what their

possible grade is. Often, how a student does in the course is largely indicated by their recitation and explication, and their verbal workshop comments, since students who take the class seriously, who are actively involved in reading poems and writing poems, usually do very well on these assignments.

Attendance:

Your participation in class is important; it is work; we are a community. Therefore, you must come to class well-prepared. I expect you to have done the assigned readings, looked-up in a dictionary (not spell check) any unfamiliar words, and thought about the assigned reading. You must read your classmate's poems before we meet, and make your comments on their work before the class meets. You will like some of the poets we read better than others. In any case, you can notice styles and word choices, etc. and learn from these poets. Please come to me if you are distressed about any of the readings. Literature, poetry, does not censor the world. It is important that you find some poets/poems that reflect who you are back to you; it is important that you find some poets/poems who afford you the opportunity to experience the world from other people's lives and experiences. I will contextualize difficult and sensational material for the class. Please come talk to me first if you are startled.

This class meets only once a week; therefore, you cannot be absent. That being said, this is not a perfect world. One absence will not affect your grade. I do **not** want to hear excuses, see doctor's notes, etc. Anything over one absence is excessive and will lower your grade half a letter-grade for each absence (B to B-). If a student has total of four (4) absences, s/he will have missed a month and so will automatically fail the course. Our community is key, so if you cannot be here, you should drop the course.

end