CRWR 211A—Introduction to Poetry Writing

Course Syllabus
Section 01, Fall 2015

Class Logistics
MWF, 11:10—12:00, LA 307

Instructor Info
Name = Charlie Decker; Office, COR 257; Cell Phone = 405-684-3347; Office Hours = Mon. 12—1:00, Wed. 12—1:00, and by appointment, of course.

Required Texts
- Contemporary American Poetry, 8th ed.
- All other readings will either be emailed to you or given to you in class.

Course Overview
Our goal for this section of 211A is to develop a reading style and a vocabulary that will help us apprehend and critique your own work and work by established poets. To “apprehend” and “critique” work basically means probing your diverse reactions to poems, essays, and stories then voicing your thoughts for the rest of the class to interact with. We will borrow certain terms from prosody, not necessarily in an effort to bore one another with jargon, but in order to have an easier time climbing into the difficult world of utterance.

Though we will spend some days reading poets who lived and worked before the 20th Century, our main area of focus will be American and English poetry from 1915 to the mid-to-late 1970s. By the end of the semester you should, at the very least, have an acceptable knowledge of 20th Century poetical happenings.

Class Format
CRWR 211A is a discussion-based course, not a lecture course where the instructor orates from a podium and imparts knowledge to you. Try to think of this class as an ongoing conversation, in which most of what you learn will stem from the enthusiasm you bring to each reading.

Writing Assignments
- You will be required to write a poem, of at least twenty lines, each week for the duration of the semester unless I tell you otherwise. The subject matter of these poems will be mostly up to you, though if I notice people having a hard time coming up with the “about,” I might offer writing prompts. Disclaimer: we will not workshop every poem; in fact, we will probably only make it through three to four poems a week. Why, then, should I require you to submit a poem weekly?
  This is a good question. Writing poetry, like all other forms of art, requires an understanding of craft. The process of writing at least nine poems in conjunction

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with the large amount of reading and hardcore analysis we will do, will, without question, aid your education in the craft-side of poetry. These poems will be due in hard-copy form at the beginning of class each Monday. Your poem should have your name at the bottom right-hand corner of the page. I will disseminate a Xerox packet containing all the poems of that week on Wednesdays.

- Each week, with the exception of this week and the following one, we will read one of the Paris Review’s “The Art of Poetry” interviews (all of which are available online, for free). You’ll look into some of the interviewed poet’s remarks and write a one-page response describing why you found it/them helpful in your maturation as a poet. I will not be so presumptuous to think that each interview will offer some invaluable wisdom, so you should also feel free to express detestation, confusion, quirky forms of joy, etc. Response papers will not receive extensive commentary, but you are expected to write coherently, adhering to college-level rules of grammar, punctuation, and sentence-style. If a response paper appears half-assed, you’ll be asked to redo it. *These will also be due each Monday at the beginning of class. The format for these papers is as follows—1.5 spacing, 11 point font, 1” margins, and your name in the top right-hand corner of the page. The title of these papers should simply be the interviewee’s name.

- The last four days of class—December 4th, 7th, 9th, and 11th— will be allotted solely to presentations. Each person must give a presentation. In November we will go over in more detail what exactly these “presentations” entail. For now, though, let me offer some brief elucidation, in the case that this final “assignment” might be cause for someone not to wish to remain in this section of 211A. Basically, you’ll select a poet we read during the semester, find a poem we did not read, and give a 7-10 minute exegesis of the poem. (*There may also be a recitation element.) On Friday, September 4th I will distribute a sign-up sheet and you will assign yourself to one of the aforementioned days. Also: if, for some reason, we run out of time during the final day of presentations, we will, collectively, agree on a meeting time, either later in the day on December 11th or sometime during that Saturday or Sunday (December 12-13th), to hear from the remaining presenters.

- If things start to go awry, in a bad way—people stop doing the reading, persistent absenteeism, somnolence—I may implement in-class writing assignments, quizzes, character sketches (I will explain, if we end up doing this), and/or other activities.

Course Rules and Procedures

1. It is imperative that we have everyone in each period, contributing to the full potential of conversation. You are required to attend each class period. There is technically not an excused absence, unless you are proven to be at a truly depressing juncture. You are, though, permitted one “free” absence to do with what you wish. Each subsequent absence will result in an overall reduction of one whole letter grade—that means, if you miss two classes, the highest grade you can receive is a B; if you miss three classes, the highest grade you can receive is a C and so on.

2. Students who are habitually late are bothersome. Being tardy disjoints the ensuing rhythm of a period. If a student develops a pattern of lateness, he or she will be asked to return to whatever they were doing before class, and will be marked absent.

3. Obviously, you are to do each reading, in its entirety, before the beginning of class. Failure to do so will result in grade penalization.

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4. You are to bring all relevant materials to class. If I ask you to read a handout between classes, you must bring it to the next class period ready to discuss it.

5. Each Monday you will have your response paper and poem at the beginning of class. If your response exceeds one page, you are to staple it. If your poem exceeds one page, do not staple it and do not double-side it. (I have to Xerox these and if the poem is double-sided, it’s very cumbersome for me to take apart, flip over, copy, etc.)

6. In-class writing assignments and exercises cannot be made up if you are absent.

7. Participation. Participation is very important, as I’ve said. However students who are crippling shy should not be apprehensive about staying in this course. Instead, students who fall into this category should be available to meet with me outside of class to come up with a plan to compensate for in-class quietness. If there is a collective shyness then we will devise clever schemes to clip fragility. There is a difference between shyness and an anxiety that comes from not doing the reading.

8. When I hand out the workshop packet, I will have a list of the three to four students we will workshop during Friday’s class. It is your job to familiarize yourself with each poem; this means, in short, arriving with annotations, ideas for edits, and other organizational props that will help focus your critiques. Being unfamiliar with a poem up for workshop—i.e. having an unmarked packet—is unacceptable, insulting.

9. ***(9) You are to keep every poem you write for the final portfolio assignment. At the end of the semester, you will select four to five poems you think represent your best work. You’ll submit them to me via hardcopy, in-class handoff. You will schedule a time to meet with me, individually, to consider further edits. You’ll then put these revised poems in a folder and turn in the selection as your “final” for this class.

10. No laptops. No cell phones.

   a. Breakdown of Final Grade Participation, presentation, class preparedness, alertness, attendance, timeliness, etc. = 40%; Weekly-poems = 20%; Response papers = 20%; “Final” = 20%.

**Schedule of Assignments**

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Week 1
M., 31 Aug. (a) Introduction (b) name-game (c) Q & A
W., 2 Sept. (a) Edward Hirsch “Message in a Bottle” (b) Rilke “On the Young Poet” (c) handouts
F., 4 Sept. (a) Keith Douglas “Two Statements on Poetry” (b) Louise Glück “Against Sincerity” (c) handouts

Week 2
M., 7 Sept. no school
W., 9 Sept. (a) Franz Wright (handouts)
F., 11 Sept. (b) Denis Johnson (handouts)

Week 3
M., 14 Sept. (a) Henri Cole (handouts) (b) The Art of Poetry— Stanley Kunitz (c) first response paper due
W., 16 Sept. (a) Jon Anderson (handouts)
F., 18 Sept. workshop

Week 4
M., 21 Sept. (a) Louise Glück (handouts or textbook) (b) Louise Glück “The Dreamer and the Watcher” (c) The Art of Poetry—Marianne Moore (d) 2nd response paper due
W., 23 Sept. (a) Louise Glück “On Hugh Seidman” (b) Hugh Seidman (handouts)
F., 25 Sept. workshop

Week 5
M., 28 Sept. (a) Robert Hayden (handout or textbook) (b) The Art of Poetry— Jorge Louis Borges (c) 3rd response paper due.
W., 30 Sept. (a) Frank Bidart (handouts or textbook)
F., 2 Oct. workshop

Week 6
M., 5 Oct. (a) Robert Lowell (handout or textbook) (b) The Art of Poetry— Robert Lowell (c) excerpts from Ian Hamilton’s Biography of Robert Lowell (d) excerpts from Robert Lowell Selected Letters (e) 4th response paper due
W., 7 Oct. (a) Elizabeth Bishop (handouts or textbook)
F., 9 Oct. workshop

Week 7
M., 12 Oct. (a) John Berryman (handouts or textbook) (b) The Art of Poetry—John Berryman (c) excerpt(s) from Eileen Simpson’s Poets in Their Youth
W., 14 Oct. (a) Olga Broumas (handouts or textbook)
F., 16 Oct. workshop

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Week 8

M., 19 Oct. (a) Gwendolyn Brooks (handouts or textbook) (b) *Gwendolyn Brooks interview [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVZ6KTLN708](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVZ6KTLN708) (c) 6th response paper due

W., 21 Oct. (a) Theodore Roethke (handouts or textbook) (b) excerpts from Allan Seger’s The Glass House (c) “On Theodore Roethke” from Richard Hugo’s Triggering Town

F., 23 Oct. workshop

Week 9

M., 26 Oct. (a) John Ashbery “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (b) (handouts or textbook) (c) The Art of Poetry—John Ashbery (d) 7th response paper due.

W., 28 Oct. Frank O’Hara (handouts or textbook); “Oral History Initiative: On Frank O’Hara” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oacw2wX5nac](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oacw2wX5nac)

F., 30 Oct. workshop

Week 10

M., 2 Nov. (a) Ted Hughes (handouts) (b) The Art of Poetry—Ted Hughes (c) 8th response paper due

W., 4 Nov. (a) Keith Douglas (handouts)

F., 6 Nov. workshop

Week 11

M., 9 Nov. (a) George Oppen (handouts) (b) Louise Glück “On George Oppen” (c) The Art of Poetry—Elizabeth Bishop (d) 9th response paper due

W., 11 Nov. no school

F., 13 Nov. workshop

Week 12

M., 16 Nov. (a) Yusef Komunyakaa (handouts or textbook) (b) interview—Yusef Komunyakaa [http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/181387](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/181387)

W., 18 Nov. Amiri Baraka (handouts or textbook)

F., 20 Nov. Titus (poem assignment)

Week 13

M., 22 Nov. Titus (poem assignment)

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

M., 30 Nov. (a) prose poems & other variations of verse (handouts) (b) The Art of Poetry—James Tate (c) 10th response paper due

W., 2 Dec. Paul Celan (handouts)

F., 4 Dec. Presentations

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Week 15

* F., 7 Dec. Presentations
* W., 9 Dec. Presentations
* F., 11 Dec. Presentations

Week 16

* Portfolios due by 5pm Friday, December 18th

Students with Disabilities
Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me after class or in my office hours. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator, so I can do my best to support you.

Scholastic Dishonesty:
Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty—in as much as they keep the individual student as well as the collective community from learning—will result in an automatic F and may entail a variety of other sanctions up to and including expulsion from the University. FOR A DEFINITION OF PLAGIARISM SEE http://www.lib.umt.edu/services/plagiarism/index.htm IF YOU ARE UNSURE ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO CONSULT THE STUDENT CONDUCT CODE ON THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA’S WEB SITE.

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