

Poetry Writing Workshop Section 01

ENGL 240

Spring 2024 4 Unit(s) 01/24/2024 to 05/13/2024 Modified 01/30/2024

Course Information

Days and Times: Tu 4:00PM - 6:45PM

Location: Faculty Office 104

Meeting Dates: 01/24/2024 - 05/13/2024

Course Description and Requisites

Poetics and poetry writing as preparation for thesis. Includes theory and practice of major trends in contemporary poetry. Intensive workshop experience. May be repeatable for credit for up to 12 units.

Prerequisite: Graduate standing and admission via portfolio acceptance to the Writing Focus.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Behavior Policy.

At the center of the class' dynamic is grace and empathy. I want to foster a space of security and safety to respect and acknowledge the multiple and intersectional identities, marginalizations, and representations across gender preference, sexual orientation, ability, race, class, religion, and citizenship status, among others. I need everyone's cooperation to achieve this environment in which we explore conflicts with care, engage in active listening, recognize our individual privileges while understanding that one privilege does not invalidate an intersecting oppression, and understand the differences between intent and impact.

I welcome all styles of writing and am dedicated to making the writing workshop a place where all participants are respected, and where writers can take necessary (though not gratuitous) artistic risks, make mistakes, and learn from them in a supportive and forgiving environment.

Furthermore, to ensure the privacy and safety of our classroom spaces, please do not share class content on social media or elsewhere without the explicit consent of your classmates and instructor.

My expectations for how we conduct ourselves both in the classroom and in the larger MFA community:

Honestly. We are honest with ourselves and with each other—on and off the page.

Authentically. We bring our whole selves to the community—and create space for others to do the same.

Inclusively. We embrace people from all backgrounds and all walks of life—and aim to treat everyone fairly and equally.

Generously. We practice kindness, openness, and a willingness to share with others.

Compassionately. We are sensitive to the pain and suffering of others—and that much of someone's lived experience is below the surface.

Curiously. We are curious about the world and other people—and as artists, we sometimes behave curiously!

Here are some concrete tips for in-class discussion

- Focus on the writing, not the author.
- Feedback should address ways to improve the writing AT HAND (questions of language, tone, pacing, clarity, etc...).
- Avoid comments that focus on a character's actions or personal situation, and never pass judgment on a character.
- Be generous.
- Assume positive intent.
- Assume that a piece being workshopped was written and submitted in good faith.
- Assume that feedback is being offered in good faith.
- Practice giving praise as freely as constructive criticism.
- Speak up if feedback veers into personal territory, or if the discussion drifts away from the writing itself.
- An author being workshopped might not feel comfortable addressing improper feedback, so try to speak up on their behalf if you notice something.
- Use a simple word or phrase like "ouch" or "that's getting personal" to direct the conversation back toward the craft of writing.
- Receive any such comments about your feedback generously and avoid arguing the point.
- Acknowledge when you're uncertain how to phrase feedback by stating that you're "speaking in first draft" or "thinking out loud."
- Share your workshop/feedback expectations from the outset.
- What level of comment do you want for a piece?
- Be specific when requesting feedback in the prefatory notes of your submission.
- Is it constructive? Is it necessary? Is it kind?

Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and

punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or - (minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the MFA in Creative Writing, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a high level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
2. Demonstrate high level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
3. Demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
4. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to:
 - a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion;
 - b) formulate and defend original arguments;
 - c) employ effectively the language of their discipline;
 - d) write under time constraints.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Goals

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

- Complete a portfolio consisting of one finished original project (whose content will be discussed and approved by and with the professor).
- Explore varied modes and forms of contemporary poetry.

- Present early drafts of poems for feedback in workshop.
- Give feedback to peers' poems.
- Read essays on the craft of poetry, and on aesthetics.
- Read collections of poems by contemporary poets.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

*See section on "Program Information"

Course Materials

- *Look* by Solmaz Sharif, Graywolf Press 2016
- *Postcolonial Love Poem* by Natalie Diaz, Graywolf Press 2020
- *Whereas* by Layli Longsoldier, Graywolf Press 2017
- Individual poems and essays from Course Reader available on Canvas

Course Requirements and Assignments

Description

In his introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to 21st Century American Poetry*, Timothy Yu says that 21st century American poetry tends to “reject [sic] any notion of a neutral, universalizing poetics in favor of a poetics that is deeply implicated in the social and historical structures and conflicts that have characterized the early twenty-first-century.” Dorothy Wang also notes that there is a relationship “between all poetic utterances and the subjectivities and histories from which they spring.” And more so than a relationship, Matthew Salesses’ ideas of craft and the creative writing workshop posit that “craft does not separate the author from the real world.” Who you are, and the lived experiences you’ve encountered inform the choices you make on the page as much as the subject matter you decide to write about.

In this course, we will engage in critical discussions of craft, aesthetics, poetic traditions and styles in contemporary American poetry not in a vacuum but rather as they relate to broader and intersecting social ecologies of power. It is through this lens that we will begin to explore our ever-evolving understanding of the question: “what is a well-wrought, challenging, admirable poem, what makes it so, and more importantly, to whom?” We will challenge who decides what is “good,” how this impacts the literary landscape, and how poets respond to these assessments. All in all, this course will help you to better understand the ecology of the poetic landscape today and to learn to discern historical and/or stylistic trends, patterns, and disruptions of such trends.

In workshop, we will practice methods of critique that will challenge you to confront and define your own evolving and unique aesthetic sentiments. Hopefully you will discover or reaffirm through this process who is the reader that is meaningful to you. Hopefully you discover poems that create new junctures of meaning as you develop unique ways to articulate why you feel as you do and cite specific examples to strengthen your positions.

Commensurate with expectations and rigor of a graduate level seminar, you will discuss and interact with your peer's work to hone your editorial acumen by applying your thinking of others into your own work. All-in-all, I hope to encourage experimentation and innovation in your work and to extend your modes of expression into new territories in order to continue mapping your place and lineage within the literary landscape.

Assignments/ Requirements

The class format and grading requirements will be broken into three categories: Workshop, discussion on assigned readings, participation, and in-class writing exercises. In order to successfully pass this class, you must attend to each of these components in equal measure. The breakdown is as follows:

- Submit each of your workshop materials on time. You must turn in your poems to be workshopped 5 times in the semester in order to pass the class.
 - Please plan to submit your poems one week in advance of your scheduled workshop in the respective Canvas discussion thread for that week. To help us, the readers, make better use of our time and to focus on what would be most useful for you, the writer, please provide a few bullet points in your submission that briefly describe what you would like the class to focus on.
- Feedback:
 - You are responsible for turning in your feedback no later than midnight of the following day after our workshop to each of your peers. This is primarily because class discussion might compel you to revise or add to your feedback and you might want to use the time after class to make those changes.
 - Failure to do so or a late submission will affect your standing. Please talk to me if something comes up so that we can find a way to accommodate.
 - Missing any feedback responses to your peers may result in accepting an incomplete for the class until you turn them in and failure to do so will result in a failing grade.
- Writing Exercises:
 - There will be a total of 4 writing exercises due throughout the semester with roughly 2-3 weeks between them to be completed. The contents of these exercises will be determined by the direction of our conversations but will be mostly crafted in the style of aesthetic statements, ars-poeticas, and other short personal manifestos on your work.
 - All four must be turned in on the due date listed in the schedule.
- Assigned readings:
 - I want to enter into a contract with you. I hope you are able to read, re-read, and digest each week's readings. I know life gets in the way and sometimes all we have time for is a quick skim of the materials. Here is my proposal for when life gets in the way: I want to encourage an engagement with the texts in a way that balances your life, your academics, and your personal creative interest/growth. I want to allow you to choose a method of engaging with the work that best suits you and gives you back the time and the freedom to focus on your own creative endeavors and other responsibilities both academic and personal. I don't need you to have an encyclopedic rote knowledge of the text; in fact, quite the opposite. If push comes to shove, I would rather you read a selected excerpt carefully rather than the entire thing for a surface level reading. The bottom line is that you find a balance between reading

- the texts that will be most helpful while also not taking up too much time; whatever is the best use of your time while also being of use to the class discussion as a whole in a meaningful way. Find a small portion of the text that you can focus on deeply rather than for breadth.
- You will not be quizzed on the material or in any way prodded for rote assessment. You are graduate students and I will treat you with respect and trust; trust that you are attending to the work in a way that is meaningful to you and in a way that you can impart that meaning with the group.
 - However, if I do see a pattern of low participation which leads me to believe that this agreement is being taken advantage of, I will simply include an additional requirement of formally posting to a discussion thread and responding to your peers accordingly on canvas. (I don't like this and I know students don't like this so let's try to not let it come to this please!)
 - Final Packet
 - Your final packet is due May 17th by noon. I truly can't make exceptions because my grades are due shortly thereafter. If I do not receive a final packet by the deadline, you will have to take an "incomplete" for the class or risk not passing.
 - What to include?
 - First draft and last revised version of each of your 5 poems you submitted for workshop throughout the semester. I need to see both.
 - Revisions of each of your 4 writing exercises.
 - Two additional poems of your choosing (also include an early draft along with the final draft)

Workshop Format and Expectations:

The one steadfast rule and expectation for written feedback is that you find a method of documentation that best works for you which allows you contribute to the growth of your peer's work in a meaningful way. Simply stated, I want to allow you to choose a method of feedback that best suits you and gives you back the time and the freedom to focus on your own creative endeavors. The bottom line is that you find a balance between feedback that will be most helpful while also not taking up too much time. You may choose to bullet point your ideas, write out a letter, write marginalia, or even record an audio or video file (some have even done a chromecast session while speaking their suggestions into a mic which is creative!); whatever is the best use of your time while also being of use to your peers in a meaningful way. However you decide to format your feedback, I do need to see a copy of it so please upload your feedback into the respective discussion thread which is where I will look for grading.

What you can expect from me:

As like you, I, too, have certain models of feedback that best allow me to balance my time and contribute to your growth as a writer in a meaningful way. Always with your interests in mind, you will receive written feedback from me in one form or another; whether that be bullet points, a letter, or

marginalia within one week of your workshop. However, I see the written feedback as a starting point in a larger conversation about your work and my office hours is where that larger conversation can take place. One on one office hour discussions are an integral part of your progress in the MFA program and is where we can collaborate to help focus your efforts on aspects of your writing that hold the most potential for growth. Office hours are a place where we can continue to build, grow, and synthesize the feedback you have received. Please plan to meet with me at least three times over the course of the semester, ideally during the week you are being workshopped.

✓ Grading Information

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus. Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments.

At the midterm period, all students will receive an update on their academic progress for the course, indicating whether or not they are on a trajectory to pass the class.

When and wherever I see that the utmost intellectual and academic engagement is not on par with the rigor expected of a graduate seminar I will individually address the matter with you. If I begin to see a pattern of minimal effort or that a student cannot keep up with the pace of the class, I will discuss the matter with said student privately and if necessary, with the director of the program to see what we can do to improve academic performance and avoid not passing the class. What exactly does this mean? I understand that life will get in the way at times. If there are any emergencies or special circumstances that will keep you from attending a class, or from turning in an assignment on time, please let me know as soon as you can. However, you are still responsible to turn in your assignments as soon as you can reasonably attend to them given any circumstances that arise.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

Weekly Tentative Schedule

(All readings unless otherwise noted are accessible in Course Reader on Canvas)

- **Week 1:**

- **Week 2 : January 30th**
 - Discussing:
 - Course Reader available on Canvas: Selections from *Craft in the Real World* by Matthew Salesses.
 - “Poetry is not a luxury” by Audrey Lorde

- **Week 3: February 6th**
 - Discussing
 - “Expressive Language” by Amiri Baraka
 - From *Mutiny* by Phillip B. Williams: “Final First Poem,” “Mastery,” “January 28th, 1918,” and “Final Poem for Amiri Baraka”
 - Workshop

- **Week 4: February 13th**
 - Discussing
 - “New Black Aesthetics: Post–Civil Rights African American Poetry” by Keith D. Leonard
 - “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden
 - “Soil Horizon” by Tiana Clark
 - “my dad asks, “how come black folk can't just write about flowers?” by Aziza Barnes
 - Workshop
 - Writing Exercise # 1 Due

- **Week 5: February 20th**
 - Discussing:
 - “Blackacre” by Monica Youn
 - “Immigration as a Second Language,” and “Poem to be read from right to left” by Marwa Helal
 - Workshop

- **Week 6: February 27th**
 - Discussing:
 - “Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde” by Cathy Park Hong

- *Thinking its Presence*, Introduction: “Aesthetics Contra “Identity” in Contemporary Poetry Studies” by Dorothy Wang
 - “Risk Management,” “How I Got Here,” “Reality TV,” and “Managed Diversity” by Daniel Borzutzky
 - Workshop

- **Week 7: March 5th**
 - Discussing:
 - “Sovereign Poetics and Possibilities in Indigenous Poetry” by Mishuana Goeman
 - Excerpt from “Nature Poem” by Tommy Pico
 - Workshop
 - Writing Exercise #2 Due

- **Week 8: March 12th**
 - Discussing
 - “Of Poetry and Permanent War in the Twenty-First-Century” by Stephen Voyce
 - “Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying” by Noor Hindi
 - “We Lived Happily During the War” by Ilya Kaminsky
 - Workshop

- **Week 9: March 19th**
 - Discussing:
 - “The poetics and politics of refraction” by Jennifer S. Cheng
 - Select translations of Pablo Neruda
 - “Task of the Translator” by Walter Benjamin
 - Workshop

- **Week 10: March 26th**
 - Discussing:
 - “Multiplicity from the Margins: The Expansive Truth of Intersectional Form” by Jen Soriano
 - Selections from “A Bestiary” by Lily Hoang
 - Workshop
 - Writing Exercise #3 Due

- **Week 11: Spring Break No Class**

- **Week 12: April 9th (Meeting might be held on zoom TBD)**
 - Discussing
 - *Whereas* by Layli Longsoldier (Full length physical copy)
 - Workshop

- **Week 13: April 16th**
 - Discussing
 - *Look* by Solmaz Sharif (Full length physical copy)
 - "The Near Transitive Properties of the Political and Poetical: Erasure" by Solmaz Sharif
 - "The Race Within Erasure" audio lecture by Robin Coste Lewis
 - Workshop
 - Writing Exercise #4 Due

- **Week 14: April 23rd**
 - Discussing
 - *Postcolonial Love Poem* by Natalie Diaz (Fully length physical copy)
 - "If What I Mean Is Hummingbird, If What I Mean Is Fall Into My Mouth" by Natalie Diaz
 - Workshop:

- **Week 15: April 30th**
 - Discussing
 - "Letters to a Young Poet" by Rainer Maria Rilke
 - Workshop:

- **Week 16: May 7th**
 - Workshop

- **Week 17: May 14th**
 - Workshop
 - Final Packet Due May 17th by 12pm