POETRY WRITING
Spring 2014   U11 EComp 316
Tuesday 6:30-8:30p

Instructor: Colin Bassett
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Reading Materials
Poems and essays available on Blackboard.

Course Overview
First of all, this course is designed as a creative writing workshop. That means our main focus, all semester, will be to write and share original work. Our primary goal will be to produce poems and have them discussed by the class. Beyond that, it’s my hope that this class will be an open, accessible, and enjoyable semester of immersion in contemporary poetry. As we go, you are free (and encouraged) to pursue your own poetic interests—whatever they might be—but in general the class won’t be overly concerned with conventional styles of verse (in terms of form, meter, rhyme, et cetera). Most of the published poetry we will read and discuss will be both open form and free verse. Along with our readings, we will work on a variety of craft exercises and discussions. All this will be in the hopes of demystifying the process and creation of contemporary poetry without losing any of its complexity or power. Overall, the class will be what we make of it together—so please bring all your own thoughts, interests, and ideas.

Attendance & Participation
As a workshop, this class will rely heavily on student discussion and participation. Our weekly class discussions are intended to benefit and thrive from your own knowledge and contributions. As such, attendance at every class meeting is expected. Excessive absences (generally defined as more than two) will count against your final grade. Multiple tardies will count as an absence. Class will begin between 6:30 and 6:40 and end whenever we finish for the night.

Grades
As this is a creative class, I’m not particularly interested in grades or grading. And, with poetry, I find the concept of grading particularly problematic—or just simply impossible. I will be giving feedback on your writing but I won’t be giving grades on individual poems. Instead, your creative work will be graded in terms of participation and completion. That is, as long as you keep up with your poem assignments and, in particular, turn them in on time, then this component of your grade will be satisfied. The same will go for much of the rest of the class as well—exercises, revisions, workshop responses, etc. As long as you keep up with your work, put effort into it, and generally show interest and commitment to the class, then grade considerations, as outlined below (out of 100 points for the class), will be satisfied.

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Workshops
Our workshops will consist of open and casual discussions of student poems. In addition to the in-class discussions, you will write a short one-page response to the author of each workshop poem. Your response and other written comments are due to return to the authors on the night of each workshop. Workshop comments and discussions should consist of honest, charitable, and constructive feedback.
During workshop authors will be asked to listen and take notes, but not participate in the discussion. Before the conclusion of each workshop, authors will join in with the discussion. Questions or concerns about your writing can be expressed at this time.

Poem Assignments
You will have seven “official” poems submitted for workshop, though the number of poems you write and work on this semester may likely be higher. The first two of these seven will be open poem assignments, meaning you can submit whatever you like—a poem of any kind on any sort of subject matter. Of course, you should submit something that you are interested in sharing and receiving feedback on (and that hasn’t previously been workshopped). After these first two poems, the remaining five workshop poems will follow some general guidelines in terms of form or style. As a class we will look at, discuss, and work within some alternative poetic forms and approaches as a means of producing new and original content.

A Note About Our Weekly Classes
In addition to our readings and workshops, we will also be covering various exercises and craft topics as we go. This work will fluctuate week to week but should be relatively self-contained to our class time. Most of your work outside of class will revolve around work on your own poems and reading and responding to the poems of others. In our classes, though, I’m hoping to maintain an open and interactive environment. If you have a poem you would like to share (yours or someone else’s), bring copies to pass around—we can read and talk about it together. If you come across an interesting exercise you think would be fun, tell us about it—we can maybe even do it in class. If you have problems with a draft or something you are trying to accomplish with a poem, let the class know and we can talk about it together.

Weekly Poem to Share
To start off our classes, I’d like to have one student bring in a published poem each week to share with the class. We’ll alternate through the class but try to have someone designated each week to bring something in. You can share old favorites or new finds—anything you think may be striking or relevant for the class. Given the focus of our class, I encourage you to bring in examples of contemporary poems, as well as poems that are relatively easy to share and discuss briefly at the beginning of class. Part of the idea here, of course, is that through the semester you should be browsing new poetry for what you like and what you don’t like and for new techniques and approaches to try. Later in the semester, everyone will select a poet to read from more thoroughly—you will then discuss your thoughts on the poet and bring in a few representative poems to share with the class.

Revisions & Final Project
At the end of the semester we will focus on revising drafts and fine-tuning your poems. Of course, revision will likely be a part of your regular work as you produce and tweak your poems for workshop. As we go, always feel free to discuss revision questions or share new drafts with the class. For final projects, everyone will revise a selection of your workshop poems from the semester—to be handed in two weeks after our last class. This last project will constitute completion of the class (in place of a final exam).