

# ENGLISH 453

## CREATIVE WRITING: POETRY SEMINAR

### Toward Curiosity, Community, and Stakes in Contemporary Poetry

*Fall 2017*



*Above: from Layli Long Soldier's Whereas*

**Prof. Jane Wong**

**E-mail:** jane.wong@wwu.edu

**Office Hours:** M & W 11:30am-1:00pm and by appointment

**Office Location:** Humanities (HU) 267

**Class Meetings:** MWF, 1:00pm-2:20pm

**Class Location:** Miller Hall, Room 15

#### *Required Class Materials*

- Poems and additional readings will be available on Canvas to download and print
- *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry*, ed. Melissa Kwasny
- Notebook for poetry endeavors and folder/binder for readings

#### *Course Description*

*"Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then*

*into idea, then into more tangible action.” - Audre Lorde*

English 453 offers you an opportunity to hone in on your creative skills and spend dedicated time close reading the work of other poets – particularly your fellow poets in class. This course asks you to experiment with different craft moves through generative writing, delve deeper into the particularities of poet’s work, reflect on rigorous revision and feedback, and articulate your own poetics! You will be writing poems, offering feedback for your peers, exploring the work of single authors in-depth, and crafting a poetics essay or artist statement. Some questions we will wrestle with throughout the quarter include: how can we “enter” a poem? Where is the “heart” of the poem? What formal techniques do poets employ (or break) and why? What is the relationship between form and content? What are the stakes of poetry today? When someone asks you the question “what do you write about?” (and they always will), how will you respond? We will examine the craft of poetry (forms, lineation, rhythm, repetition, word play, image, metaphor, hybrid forms, etc.) in context of much larger discussions of poetics: why poems exist, how they create and resist meaning, how they create different experiences for readers and why. In addition to writing our own poems, we will engage critical essays on poetics as helpful frameworks (i.e. essays and letters from poets such as Emily Dickinson, Aimé Césaire, Federico Garcia Lorca, Audre Lorde, Ross Gay, and more), focus on the work of rising/prominent contemporary poets, and craft a chapbook collection as a culmination of our creative risk-taking. English 453 seeks to consider poetry not as a dusty old book, but as something alive, current, and full of potential today!

### **Main Course Goals**

1. Experiment with new elements of craft and take risks in your own creative work.
2. Explore poems closely and critically, explicating potential meanings and unraveling multiple levels of uncertainties and complexities.
3. Write insightful, productive, and constructive feedback in response to the work of your fellow poets.
4. Practice the habits of an engaged poet: writing and revising frequently, responding critically and meaningfully to your fellow writers, incorporating feedback into revisions, and evaluating and reflecting on your own writing and poetic voice.
5. Develop a reinvigorated appreciation for poetry and feel confident reading and writing poetry as a complex way of questioning and understanding the world around us.
6. Foster a strong poetry community, based on encouragement, reflection, and real-world stakes.

### **Course Assignments**

In a creative writing course, the focus is on writing your poems. As Audre Lorde writes, “[poetry] is a vital necessity of our existence.” Each week, you will be bringing a new poem to class. Of course, it is difficult to truly “grade” or evaluate creative work; instead, grading emphasizes your full engagement and commitment to the writing of poetry, which includes trying something new. Along with writing your poems, you will be writing feedback responses or “letters” for your peers. These letters offer you an opportunity to voice your

unique perspective and provide constructive feedback! You should also make marginal comments on the poems of your peers. Along with writing and workshop, you will be working toward two larger projects: 1) a critical introduction and presentation for a poet of your choice, 2) a chapbook, which will include a poetics statement. The first project asks you to spend a great deal of time with a poet you find stimulating, challenging, etc. The second project asks you to think deeply about the process of making a chapbook (including which poems to include, order, a title, etc.) as well as your unique approach to poetry. Additionally, we will have an end-of-the-quarter reading celebration and submit our work for publication!

### **Workshop, Feedback Letters, & Informal Homework Assignments**

Each week, you will be bringing a new poem to class. Each poet will be up for workshop twice this quarter. Note: even if you are not up for workshop, everyone is required to complete all writing assignments! Along with writing your poems, you will be writing feedback letters for your peers. When you hand back drafts for your peers, be sure to write comments in the margins, etc. You will need to bring to class: 1) their annotated piece of work, 2) one hard copy of your feedback letter, and 3) upload your feedback letter to me on Canvas at the end of the week. Workshop letters should be thoughtful, critical, analytical, and suggest revisions (please see our helpful handout). Occasionally, we might have informal homework assignments as well, to supplement our readings and further investigate our key craft points.

### **Participation**

As a seminar, this is a course that depends heavily on your participation! This is not a lecture class in which you will take notes and I will speak. Every writer must be an active member for the class to thrive. Participation comes in many forms. An effective student in this class will be (among other things) prepared, on time, constructive, respectful, vocal, attentive, and thoughtful. You will not only be part of the class with your voice, but also with your ears, your eyes, and your pen. You will take part in class discussions and workshops. Participation is essential. As such, your attendance is important. Missing more than one class is quite disruptive to your learning process and will affect your performance. If you miss class because of illness or other excused circumstances, it is your responsibility to come see me for make-up work. You must send me an e-mail letting me know you will be missing class beforehand.

### **Course Evaluation**

Participation and creative writing: 35%  
Workshop letters/responses: 15%  
Critical introduction and presentation: 20%  
Chapbook and poetics essay: 30%

### **Office Hours and Required Conferences**

If you plan on stopping by my office hours on Monday or Wednesday, it is useful to let me know ahead of time. I can also meet with you by appointment. If you have a question or want to set up an appointment, e-mail me. I respond pretty quickly. It is your responsibility

to come see me if you have any issues, questions, concerns, etc. with your development in the course. During the quarter, you will be required to meet with me twice for a brief conference (during the mid-point and end of the quarter). This conference is a great opportunity to speak with me on a more personal level. Come to your meeting on time and prepared with questions and thoughts.

### **Late Work**

I do not accept late poems or peer workshop letters as a class policy; your poem must be turned in on time (class time) to count as full credit. If you are running into trouble at the printer, make sure to e-mail me a copy before class time (for it to count as on time). For your major projects, late work will directly affect your grade (minus half a grade each day). As a matter of respect for our vibrant writing community, the bottom line: *turn your work in on time.*

### **Technology in the Classroom**

Cell phones must be put away and turned off/put on silent during the entire class. If you are on your phone, you will be penalized accordingly in your participation grade. This is a matter of respect for your colleagues and me. Likewise, iPads and laptops can not be used during class. Please print out materials to take notes along the margins/to actively read. On an exceptions basis, if you need to use technology to view a PDF file (i.e. longer poetics essay), let me know beforehand. For the purpose of our class, bring a notebook, your reading materials, and your curiosity and attention!

### **Respect and Inclusion**

It is my goal to create a vibrant classroom environment in which everyone feels comfortable sharing thoughts, discussion points, and writing so that we can learn from one another. It is incumbent upon every member of the class to help make it so by remaining mindful and respectful.

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### **Class or School Cancellation**

Please check your e-mail and Canvas for updates for unexpected class cancellations. In case of [inclement weather](#) or school closure emergency – please review status on the university website ([www.wvu.edu](http://www.wvu.edu)) and/or email notification from Western. You can also find more information on the [University's Emergency](#) page. You can also enroll in the University's "Western Alert" emergency notification system. The Western Alert emergency notification system gives Western the ability to share health and safety-related emergency information with members of the campus community quickly – by desktop notification, cell phone text messages and e-mail alerts. Students, faculty and staff are automatically "opted in" to receive Western Alert text messages if cell numbers are provided. (E-mail alerts will be sent to your official university account automatically). To update cell phone information, students, faculty, and staff can login to their myWestern account online at [www.wvu.edu](http://www.wvu.edu) and click on "Web4U." Select "Personal Information," then "Cell Phone – View/Update." Update your cell phone number, and finish by pressing the "Update" button. Text messaging will

only be used to communicate with you in two circumstances: during an emergency and during occasional tests of the Western Alert system.

### **Student Support Services**

To request disability accommodations, please contact [disAbility Resources for Students](#) office, 360-650-3844, or for student assistance related to required course procedures, please contact the Student Life office, 360-650-3706. Your success in this class is important to me and I assume all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. Students are encouraged to approach me with any other life circumstances that may affect their participation in the course. These may be personal, health-related, family-related issues, or other concerns. The sooner I know about these, the earlier we can discuss possible adjustments or alternative arrangements as needed for assignments and participation in class.

Western encourages students to seek assistance and support at the onset of an illness, difficulty, or crisis, and provides services through the [Office of Student Life](#), the [Health Center](#), the [Counseling Center](#), the [Prevention and Wellness Center](#), the [University Police](#), and the [Dean of Students](#).

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the [Dean of Students](#) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources that they may possess.

### **Student Conduct**

Students at Western are expected to conduct themselves in a responsible manner that reflects favorably on themselves and the Western community. The Student Conduct Officer is charged with administering Western's student conduct system, as set forth in the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Code](#). As a condition of enrollment at Western, all students are expected to assume responsibility for their actions, and for maintaining an environment conducive to the academic success, safety, and wellbeing of all members of the university community. The student conduct process is designed to be a learning experience, and to promote growth and understanding of one's rights and responsibilities as a Western student. Alleged violations of the Code may be reported to the Assistant Dean of Students at 360-650-3706 or [student.life@wwu.edu](mailto:student.life@wwu.edu). Copies of the Student Rights and Responsibilities Code can be found in Appendix C of [this catalog](#), in the Dean of Students Office, or online at [www.wwu.edu/dos/office/conduct/index.shtml](http://www.wwu.edu/dos/office/conduct/index.shtml). The Office of Student Life empowers student learning and development by helping students successfully navigate the university and ensuring compliance with campus-community standards. Please let me know immediately if, due to circumstances beyond your control, you may be unable to meet any of these expectations.

### **Academic Integrity**

The principle aim of your education is to develop your own capacity for reasoned and enlightened judgment about matters of importance to yourself and your world. We, the

faculty, students, administration, and staff of Western Washington University, are deeply committed to integrity as a fundamental principle of education. This can only be achieved when we commit to integrity throughout all our activities at the University, including our work, academics, and campus life. To this end, each of us has a responsibility to be fair and honest. As a community of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, we recognize that our actions reflect on each of us as individuals, and on Western as a whole. As such, we honor integrity as vital to our community and the ideals of liberal education. Thus, you should make yourself familiar with WWU's policies on academic honesty such as citation of sources and plagiarism, and understand the potential consequences. In this course, I uphold all aspects of Western's Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure, and Student Rights and Responsibilities Code. These are published in the [Western catalog under University Academic Policies](#). All Western Washington University students have an obligation to fulfill the responsibilities of their roles as members of an academic community. Upholding Academic Honesty is integral to the educational mission of Western Washington University (WWU), particularly in assessment and recognition of student performance. Recognizing the intention of WWU to promote and sustain a culture of integrity, this policy serves a key role as part of a comprehensive program to encourage behaviors of integrity and discourage violations of such behavior. All students and faculty of WWU are responsible for being familiar with this policy and the processes for reporting and appealing violations that it includes. For more information on plagiarism, please visit these sites:

[Plagiarism Policies & Guidelines](#)

[Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism](#)

[The Student's Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism](#)

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## Fall 2017 Quarter Course Calendar

- *Changes will most likely occur to the calendar throughout the course.*

### Week 1: Welcome! Exploring the Ars Poetica

Wed. 9/27	Welcome to 453! Syllabus and course goals Poems: Marilyn Chin
Fri. 9/29	Poems: Terrance Hayes, Marianne Moore, Ruth Forman

### Week 2: The Role of the Poet in the World

Mon. 10/2	Poetics: "The Poet," Ralph Waldo Emerson, from "Letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson," Emily Dickinson Poems: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Galway Kinnell
Wed. 10/4	Poetics: "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Audre Lorde Poems: Lucille Clifton, Gwendolyn Brooks

Fri. 10/6 Poetics: "A Poetry of Proximity," Solmaz Sharif  
Poems: Solmaz Sharif, Javier Zamora, Cathy Linh Che

**Week 3: Imagery and Description: From Metaphor to "Deep Image"**

Mon. 10/9 Poetics: "Poetry and Knowledge," Aimé Césaire and from "The  
Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Wolfgang Iser  
Poems: Lucille Clifton, Kaveh Akbar

Wed. 10/11 Mini workshop  
Poems: Rick Barot, Jamal May

Fri. 10/13 Mini workshop  
Poems: Robert Bly, Emily Yoon

**Week 4: Imagery and Description: Litany and Beyond**

Mon. 10/16 Poetics: "Some Thoughts On Mercy," Ross Gay  
Poems: Ross Gay, Elizabeth Bishop

Wed. 10/18 Proposal for critical introduction project due  
Mini workshop

Fri. 10/20I Mini workshop  
Poems: Chelsea Minnis, Chen Chen

**Week 5: Emotive Weight**

Mon. 10/23 "Theory and Function of the Duende," Federico Garcia Lorca  
Poems/Music: Sylvia Plath, Billie Holiday, Anastacia Tolbert

Wed. 10/25 Mini workshop  
Poems: Rachel McKibbens, Jack Gilbert

Fri. 10/27 No class: required mid-term conferences!

**Week 6: Line Breaks and the Space of the Page**

Mon. 10/30 Poetics: Charles Olson, "Projective Verse"  
Poems: Layli Long Soldier, Harryette Mullen

Wed. 11/1 Mini workshop  
Poems: Lorine Niedecker, Anne Carson, Tim Seibles

Fri. 11/3 Critical introduction midterm project due  
Mini workshop  
Presentations

**Week 7: Musicality, Meter, and Form**

**Mon. 11/6** Presentations continued  
 Poems: Gerard Manly Hopkins, Douglas Kearney  
**Wed. 11/8** Poetics: "Feeling and Precision," Marianne Moore  
 Poems: Hannah Sanghee Park, Terrance Hayes  
 Mini workshop  
**Fri. 11/10** No Class: Veterans Day

**Week 8: Memoir and Narrative in Poetry**

**Mon. 11/13** Mini workshop  
 Poetics (musicality continued): from *The Grey Album*, Kevin Young  
 Poems: Kevin Young, Danez Smith, Lo Kwa Mei-en  
**Wed. 11/15** Poems (on memoir and narrative): Kimiko Hahn, Natalie Diaz  
**Fri. 11/17** Mini workshop  
 Guest Poet TBA!

**Week 9: Conferences and Thanksgiving Break**

**Mon. 11/20** No class: required final conferences!  
**Break** No class: Thanksgiving holiday

**Week 10: Experimenting with Hybrid Forms**

**Mon. 11/27** Poetics: from "Bewilderment," Fanny Howe  
 Hybrid pieces: Monica Ong, Maggie Nelson, Elissa Washuta, CA  
 Conrad  
 Draft of Poetics Statement Due  
**Wed. 11/29** Mini workshop  
**Fri. 12/1** Class cancelled

**Week 11: Revision, Ending a Poem, Gathering Community**

**Mon. 12/4** Mini workshop  
 Poems: Eduardo C. Corral, Jean Valentine, Monica Sok  
**Wed. 12/6** Mini workshop and radical revision  
**Fri. 12/8** Last day of class: celebration and submission party  
 Poetry chapbook due  
 Community poetry reading TBA

\*Note: no exam/no class during exam week