Course Description:
Students will be asked to develop their creative and critical resources through a counterpoint of close-reading and practice of the craft.

Course Objectives:
This course is premised on the notion that close-reading and a critical engagement in poetry can feed the creative process by expanding imaginative resources and sensitizing students to the possibilities of language and literary practice. Creative assignments and due dates may vary according to the population of the class. Critical assignments include weekly responses to readings in the anthology and peer review of student creative work. As an intermediate class, emphasis will be on covering some fundamental poetic issues regarding imagery, voice, music, point of view, and complication of feeling. The class will also encourage independent creative projects in a variety of individually determined thematic directions and formal sensibilities. A number of creative projects will be distributed for peer review and discussed in a workshop setting.

Reading Schedule: The Modern Tradition:

Week 1 (August 29): Introduction.
Week 2 (September 5): Whitman. Pgs. 1-22
Week 3 (September 12): Dickinson.
Week 4 (September 19): Yeats. Pgs. 100-124
Week 5 (September 26): Frost.
Week 10 (October 31): Langston Hughes.
Week 11 (November 7): Owen.
Week 12 (November 14): Auden. Pgs. 783-787, 797-808
Week 13 (November 21): McKay, Bogan.
Week 14 (November 28): work on revisions for final Portfolio.
Week 15 (December 5): Final week of class.

Portfolio due either on final day of class or in the fiberglass mail bin on the bookshelf outside my office on Monday, December 11. Portfolio includes peer reviews, weekly responses to reading, first drafts of creative work, and final revisions of creative work.
Work requirements:

1. Creative Work.
   Students will hand in poems (typed, single-spaced, no longer than two pages) for class critique at least a week before they are to be discussed. This work must be xeroxed by each author and distributed to the students in the class. The number and nature of creative assignments will be determined as the semester unfolds. You are encouraged to write constantly and hand in work that reflects your ongoing involvement in your art. I strongly recommend keeping a notebook in which you can freely improvise on a regular basis without a stifling sense of self-consciousness. You may find that this notebook will provide you with passages you can later “mine” for more finished work.

2. Criticism of each other's work.
   Students are expected to read each other's work with generous attention and be prepared to discuss the work in the spirit of genuine and discriminating helpfulness. The sooner we can build trust among us as invested in each other’s progress as artists, the sooner we can move into the kind of thoughtful, honest, and close critical engagement that distinguishes the best workshop communities. Always work toward a balance of affirming strengths and exploring possible opportunities for development. Also you are expected to make some written comments on the in-class contributions (either in the poem's margins or in paragraph form on a separate sheet of paper). Please come to class prepared with these comments since you will be expected to offer oral criticism on a regular basis. Written comments will then be distributed to the respective student-authors in the class. Those authors are then responsible for including all received student commentary in their final portfolio.

3. Reading.
   As I am sure most of us know by now, there is no possible way you can become a great writer without becoming a great reader. You are expected throughout the semester to read poems avidly and carefully with the aim of continuously evolving your sense of aesthetic possibilities. Please bring the anthology to each class.

4. Reading responses.
   You are expected to write each week a one half to one page, double-spaced, typed response to one poem from your reading for that week. These responses will comprise a kind of reading journal to be handed in at the end of the semester. You may respond to a poet (from our book or some other credible anthology) not on the reading list if you’d prefer, but in any case please do the assigned reading for each week. Try to read with an open and alert heart and mind, an eye for strengths and specifics, and an appetite for the unfamiliar. You will be developing more illuminating ways of discussing the intricate bodies of poems as the semester unfolds. Avoid discussing poems exclusively on the basis of theme (as disembodied from how those themes are rendered) or on the basis of your personal/biographical relation to subject matter—no doubt important issues, but relatively easy to surmise and defend and less true to the language-attentive, aesthetic spirit of this class.
   Avoid unfocused claims that hinge merely on the fact that you like or don’t like something or that settle for some vague superlative that has not been earned by attention to detail. Also avoid
the somewhat simplistic “argument” based exclusively on truth-value (such as “this poem is good simply because it’s so true”). Such claims are a bit generic and dismissive of language and originality. Try to expand your awareness of issues related to art and imagination (such as diction, tonal complication or shift, irony, silence, metaphor, metonymy, symbol, voice, syntax and/or its fragmentation, genre and defiance of genre, development of argument, connotative resonance and surprise, punning, satire, comic understatement or hyperbole, reversal of expectation, character, plot and the forms of tension that drive it, lineation, enjambment, verse form, point of view, ambiguity, nonsense, imagery, objective correlative, music, relation of sound to sense, form to content, etc.). Your expanding awareness of both word and world will feed your imagination, your love, your art.

“All responses are not turned in each week but rather are to be saved and turned in as part of the final portfolio. Please stay on top of this element of the class throughout the semester, since it will better serve your process if your engagement in writing is ongoing. Also your responses will be more substantive and dynamic.

5. Final portfolio.
   Contains all your in-class contributions, revisions of these poems, your criticisms of other students’ work, and your reading responses. DUE: Final class day or first day of finals week.

Grading
   In the spirit of allowing for grades to motivate rather than discourage, you should know in advance that in order to get a C or better in this class, the already discussed requirements must first be met. A grade of D or F signifies a failure to meet these requirements. A grade of B or A signifies signs of excellence in the following:

1) the student’s poems themselves (especially your revisions: a high premium placed on willingness and ability to improve)
2) the careful critical engagement of writing by others
3) attendance/ participation
4) weekly reading responses

Please do not feel that a lively critical discussion of your work means that it is inferior or that your grade is in jeopardy as a result. In fact you may choose to bring in relatively unfinished poems with special problems which you would like the class to address.

As is the case in any English class, just what constitutes excellence in a given piece of writing is a question that will be begged throughout the semester. In an effort to make the workshop into something truly useful, something generously informative and intellectually challenging, you are encouraged as much as possible to make your critical criteria explicit and developed rather than simply asserting unsupported opinion, a mere declaration of taste. The process of attempting to account for the origin of our opinions, no matter what those opinions may be, will doubtlessly make us into more sensitive readers and writers.

More important even than your conclusions is your method in arriving at them—that is, the level of care and intimate participation reflected in your detail and rationale. Clearly the nature of our methods will affect our conclusions, often by way of nuancing or even radically overturning our former opinions. This is as much a class in the art of reading as it is in the art of writing, the two
obviously feeding one another. It is important that we maintain as much as possible a constructive and **process**-oriented approach, ever open to new possibilities and challenges, curious about our cultural context, committed to the livelihood of the poem at hand. Each poem is potentially a stepping stone to others, ever more ambitious, vibrant, imaginative, and fresh. Perhaps one of the greatest virtues of the workshop is that it makes immediate the challenges, rewards, and frustrations of having a readership. In so doing it confronts us continually with the paradox of language, and literature for that matter, as both private and public in nature. As such it is also both self-constructing and self-negating—a key paradox which characterizes all art. As a somewhat simplified rule, our role as poetry critics is to explore what a poem says, how it says it, and whether it is worth saying.

**Attendance**

Since this class is a workshop, your attendance is especially essential. Please note: more than two weeks of absences (2 long classes or 4 shorter ones) will result in a lowering of the student's grade by one grade point.

The more you are in class, the more you will know. This attendance policy reflects the fact that much of the work required for this class happens in the classroom. Also, since there is no final exam, the attendance policy serves a related function of holding students somewhat accountable for the breadth of material covered by the course.

**Contract**

My primary, if not exclusive, motive as your professor is to do whatever I can to help you to become a better writer. I fully dedicate myself to that. I am available to help you at arranged times if you just shoot me an email.

By staying in this course, I ask the students to consider the following.

1. You are free to do what you want with your poems. I in turn must be free to be honest. This, I have found, is what serious students crave.
2. I also want you to leave class eager to write. To this end I try to be supportive and yet challenging in accordance with each student’s needs and level of experience. The process matters deeply to me, but we all depend as well on the commitment of students in a workshop to create an atmosphere most conducive to growth.
3. I make mistakes. Moreover I am learning from my students constantly. Do not feel shy in challenging assumptions or asking questions.
4. In grading you, I am looking less at how great a writer you are than at how great a student of writing you are. I am looking less at one’s agreement or disagreement with me than at the depth of one’s engagement in the craft.
5. If you ever have any concerns or problems along the way, I hope you will talk to me about them, so I can do whatever is within my power to help you.