Intermediate Poetry Writing

Professor Merrill Cole  
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http://faculty.wiu.edu/M-Cole/

Office: Simpkins 109  
Hours: MW, 1:00-3:00 p.m.  
TTh, 3:15-4:15 p.m.

English 385, Section 001  
Intermediate Poetry Writing  
Th, 5:30-8:00 p.m.  
Simpkins 308

Texts

Poems will be posted for class discussion on my website—NOT WesternOnline.

Course Objectives

This course offers poets the opportunity to refine and develop their skills, exploring a variety of poetic possibilities. Becoming a better poet means more than mastering technique, though we will spend a good deal of time experimenting with poetic form. Becoming a better poet also means developing critical awareness of ourselves and of the world around us. This seminar will explore poetic composition as the opportunity to live up to the potential of who we are and to explore who we might become.

The best writers are the best readers, for contrary to popular belief, writers must carefully study other writers in order to excel at their art. We will examine the productions of a variety of published poets, always with an eye to learning about technique. The poems will serve to increase the understanding of literary language, to widen the vocabulary, to cultivate the appreciation of diverse styles, and to inspire our own creations.

This course is a writing workshop, where participants are expected regularly to submit writing in progress. Writers need practice—and then more practice. We will also have routine classroom and homework exercises.

There will be focused writing assignments, but students will also have opportunities to write as they please. Discipline alone is the death of creativity. Freedom without
discipline leads nowhere interesting. In attempting to balance the two, the course is
designed to produce better poets.

Requirements

This is a portfolio course, meaning that each student will present a final portfolio of
twenty pages, or a little more, at the end of the course. The portfolio may consist of any
number of poems, including prose poems. As a general rule, two poems should not
appear on the same page. Along with the portfolio, students will turn in a three-page self-
reflective essay on how they have revised their workshop poems. Students will also keep
a journal with at least one entry every day.

I expect you always to bring to class the poems that I assign from my website, whether on
an electronic device, or in print. I welcome student reading suggestions, but I reserve the
right to make the ultimate decision on the readings. All homework exercises and all
workshop poems must be printed in enough copies for all class members, not including
me. All homework assignments and workshop poems must be emailed to me as Microsoft
Word attachments before the beginning of class.

After a poem is workshopped in class, you will email the student and me with a 100+
word critique, formatted as a Microsoft Word attachment. This counts as participation.
Critiques need to be emailed within 48 hours. The Poetry Critique Guidelines explain what
is expected and how the critiques are graded.

Everyone must actively participate. Lack of participation will damage and perhaps destroy
your grade. This means doing the homework, completing the readings, performing class
activities, and joining in workshop. Please see http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php
for student rights & responsibilities.

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(includes credit for workshop submissions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiques</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Reflective Essay</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>50%</td>
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Missing classes, or arriving late, will affect the participation grade. A student with more
than two unexcused absences automatically fails the course. I am lenient, though: if you
give me a valid reason to miss, or to have missed, a session, I will probably excuse you (I
may ask for documentation.). Poems are only graded in the portfolio, but you get credit
for workshopping them. Attendance at the readings of Case Writers-in-Residence is required. I will dock a student a letter grade for missing a Case reading.

Lazy students make lousy poets. You waste your time and mine if you don’t work hard.

Visiting My Office

Please take the opportunity to meet with me during my office hours, or by appointment, to talk about the readings, or your writing. I very much appreciate any kind of feedback about the course.

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I will make academic accommodations for any student who notifies me of the need. For me to provide the proper accommodation(s), you must provide me documentation from Disability Support Services. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention, as I am not legally permitted to ask. Students who require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e., fire, tornado, etc.) should tell me the most appropriate procedures to follow. Please contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512.

Schedule

I am open to make changes to keep the learning situation active and dynamic.

OG=Ordinary Genius. Please note that you are expected to have read the pages before you come to class. Poetry selections are not listed below.

January 19: Introduction to the course. Haiku.


February 16: OG, 61-76. Workshop on exercise poems.
February 23: Open workshop. In-Class exercises.
March 9: Workshop on exercise poems. Open workshop.

Spring Break

April 6: Open workshop.
April 14: OG, 135-46. Workshop on exercise poems. Open workshop.
May 5: Portfolio workshop. **Journal due.**

Portfolio due on Monday, May 8 at 1:00 p.m., or Friday, May 6, by midnight for comments.