“Modern American Poetry. . . in its astonishing and endlessly energetic variety. . . is one of the major achievements of human culture” (Cary Nelson)

I dwell in Possibility—
A fairer house than Prose
More numerous of Windows—
Superior—for Doors
(Dickinson)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11 and 2-3. (Note: although I will usually be in my office during the scheduled office hours, I will occasionally have to attend meetings, graduate student defenses, etc. scheduled during those times. Please email me to confirm that I will be in my office or email me to arrange an appointment.)

Description of Course Content:
English 4399: SENIOR SEMINAR is a capstone course for English majors. It is a writing-intensive, seminar-style, in-depth study of a topic. The Prerequisites for this course are: ENGL 2350 and completion of 18 hours of required 3000 - 4000 level English courses. Because this is a capstone course the emphasis will be on independent research, thinking, writing, and learning, as well as on intense in-class discussions. Attending the Hermanns lectures will also be part of the capstone experience.

The topic of this particular section of the Senior Seminar is Modern American Poetry. We will discuss an exciting and diverse range of 20th-Century American poetry, including the following topics: American visions, the literary movements of modernism, the Harlem Renaissance, and postmodernism, labor poetry and other activist poetry, animal and nature poetry, war poetry, experimental poetry, poetry about identity politics, poetry about
love, sex, and desire, and other topics. We will examine poetry as an art form as well as discuss its cultural and political contexts and roles. Students may do their final projects on a 20th century American poet of their choice, and will have the option of working with music lyrics or performance poetry. We will take advantage of the extraordinarily rich and informative web site that accompanies the Modern American Poetry anthology.

**Required Textbooks and Other Course Materials**

You will need access to the web in order to prepare for each class period.  
A stapler.

**Recommended Books (to read on your own if you so wish)**

Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (if you are concerned about your ability to analyze and interpret poetry.)  
Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies* (if you did not gain a background in critical theory within 2350.)  
These books are available through online booksellers such as Amazon.com.

**Course Objectives**

1) To introduce students to a range of Modern American poetry, within its social, historical, and cultural contexts.
2) To provide students with the opportunity to create their own interpretations of the poetry and to conduct independent research.
3) To create a space for philosophical reflection on difficult questions and issues that emerge from the poetry.
4) To enhance students abilities to understand, analyze, and interpret poetry.
5) To improve students’ skills, more generally, in reading, writing, critical thinking, research, use of internet and library resources, and public speaking.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students should demonstrate an understanding of the poetry included in the course.
2. Students should be able to formulate original, illuminating, and persuasive analyses and interpretations of the poetry.
3. Students should demonstrate an understanding of how the poetry relates to its specific historical/cultural/political moment.
4. Students should be able to use the MAPS web site to discover biographical, historical, and cultural contexts as well as literary criticism. Students should be able to demonstrate how this information enhances their understanding of the poem.
5. Students should be able to conduct research and incorporate that research into a coherent paper.
6. Students should be able to express their ideas in clear, logical, organized, concise, and persuasive ways, in both written and oral forms.
Requirements/Grading
You must complete all the required work in order to pass the course.
Daily Participation and Presentation of final paper: 5%,
10 Index Cards: 15%
Short Paper (6 pages): 10%
Midterm Exam: 15%
Final Research Paper (15 pages): 30%
Final Exam: 25%
Attending one of the Hermanns Lectures on October 16th or 17th and writing a one-page response to the lecture is also required to pass the class (this will not be graded.)

Index Cards
Everyone will be required to hand in at least 10 index cards. The index cards are designed to help you prepare for the class discussions, both by generating your own readings of the poems and by encouraging you to take advantage of the MAPS web site as a resource. The index cards are “due” every day, on the readings for that day, though you may skip days, as long as you hand in at least 10, in the end. If you hand in more than 10 I’ll take the 10 highest grades. They will be graded check, check plus, and check minus, corresponding to a B, an A, and a C. The index cards should include the following:
1. A 1-3 sentence thesis about the poem—your own original reading or analysis.
2. A significant quote from one of the sources on the MAPS site. (A quote that you would like to talk about.)
3. A discussion question for the class.
Your work on these cards should help you study for exams and should help your participation grade.

Exams
The midterm and final exams will contain some short-answer questions, but most of the points will be from essay questions. The final exam will be comprehensive. Bring bluebooks and pens for the exams.

Papers
A short paper and a medium-length research paper are required, (6 and 15 pages, respectively.) You will be able to choose your own topic within Modern American Poetry for the research paper.
Mechanics: All papers must be “typed,” stapled, and have a significant title. Please do NOT use plastic folders for your paper—a staple is sufficient. All papers are due at the very beginning of the class. I will mark down papers one grade for every day that they are late. Please Note: plagiarism is a serious offense and will be punished to the full extent, according to university procedures.

Grade Grievance Policy: If you have a grade grievance first contact the instructor of the course. If you cannot resolve the issue with the instructor contact the English
Department’s Grievance committee (ask the office staff for the name of the person chairing that committee.)

***Participation/Attendance/Punctuality***
Your active, informed participation is crucial to the success of the course. Carefully prepare for each class period by doing the reading in a rigorous and inquisitive manner. Every day that you come to class you should have something valuable to say. I will grade on actual participation, rather than on mere attendance. However, if you miss class four times, I will lower your course grade and if you miss five classes you will fail the course. Everyone gets three absences; use them wisely. You do not need to tell me why you were absent—that is your own private business—just don’t miss more than three classes. If you come in after I have marked the rolls, that will count as an absence—so come to class on time.

**Drops and Withdrawals:** It is your responsibility to follow university procedures for dropping or withdrawing. If you just disappear from the class you will get an “F.”

**RESOURCES:**

**Librarian:** Rafia Mirza is the librarian for the English Department. You can contact her at (817) 272-7428 or at rafia@uta.edu. She also has a web page at: http://libguides.uta.edu/profile.php?uid=5641.

**Library Data Bases:** Use the MLA International Bibliography for most of your research; it is the essential bibliographic tool for English Studies. You may find full text essays on Project Muse and other library resources.

**On the web:** The most important web site for this class is the Modern American Poetry website at University of Illinois: http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/. Get thoroughly acquainted with this excellent resource! Also check out these fabulous sites, Poets.org: http://www.poets.org/ and the Poetry Foundation: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/, the Electronic Poetry Center: http://epc.buffalo.edu/e-poetry/, and Penn Sound: http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/authors.html. Please let everyone know if you find some more good sites!

**The Writing Center:** The Writing Center offers free help with your papers at any stage of the writing process. They are located in the Central Library, room 411. You can just walk in with your paper or you can make an appointment: http://www.uta.edu/owl/appointments.htm. They even offer an online lab: http://www.uta.edu/owl/. They also offer a helpful list of online resources: http://www.uta.edu/owl/resources.htm.

**The English Department’s web pages:**
http://www.uta.edu/english/undergrad/index.html
Respect your fellow students, respect the classroom:

1. **TURN OFF** all pagers, beepers, cell phones and other electronic devices! You may not have these devices turned on while in class. You may not text message or read email or engage in any other electronic activities during class. You may not use laptops in class.

2. Arrive to class **ON TIME**. It is distracting to both the professor and the students to have someone come in late. If you come in late, you will be marked absent.

3. Always arrive **PREPARED** to work. Every day we will have work to do in class. Some days we will work in small groups. If you are not prepared then you will not be able to contribute to the class or to your small group. You may be asked to leave class if you are not prepared. Also, remember that for English classes you **MUST BRING** whatever **TEXTS** we are discussing that day to class.

4. Treat your classmates with **RESPECT**. Learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We will often discuss controversial, volatile topics, so everyone needs to learn how to disagree with someone’s views, beliefs, or perspectives while maintaining a sense of civility. This is a rare skill in our culture, but a skill that is necessary for an educated, humane, democratic society.

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Official UTA Policies:

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw/ It is the student’s responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.**

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Academic Integrity:** It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. According to the UT System Regents' Rule 50101, §2.2, "Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for
credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts."

**Student Support Services Available:** The University of Texas at Arlington has established a variety of programs to help students meet the challenges of college life. Support to students includes advising, counseling, mentoring, tutoring, supplemental instruction, and writing assistance. For a complete list of academic support services, visit the Academic Assistance resource page of the Office of Student Success Programs, [www.uta.edu/uac/studentsuccess/academic-assistance](http://www.uta.edu/uac/studentsuccess/academic-assistance). To help students address personal, academic and career concerns, individual counseling is also available. For more information, students are encouraged to contact Counseling Services [www.counseling.uta.edu](http://www.counseling.uta.edu) at (817) 272-3671 or visit a counselor in 216 Davis Hall.

**Electronic Communication Policy:** The University of Texas at Arlington has adopted the University “MavMail” address as the sole official means of communication with students. MavMail is used to remind students of important deadlines, advertise events and activities, and permit the University to conduct official transactions exclusively by electronic means. *Students are responsible for checking their MavMail regularly.* Information about activating and using MavMail is available at [http://www.uta.edu/oit/email/](http://www.uta.edu/oit/email/).

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**Syllabus**

MAP = *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, ed. Cary Nelson

MAPWEB = Modern American Poetry, Online Journal and Multimedia Companion

HO = Hand out

**Introductions**

**Week One. August 25 & 27.**

Tuesday: Introductions: Help Create the Class, Discuss Poetry about Poetry (HO)

Explore the MAP web site and other poetry web sites in class.

Thursday: Emily Dickinson, all poems in MAP 9-17; “Dickinson’s Life” (MAPWEB), read criticism of at least one poem on MAPWEB

**Part I. First Half of the Century**

**American Visions**

**Week Two. September 1 & 3.**

Tuesday: Walt Whitman, p. 1-4; Edwin Markham, “The Man with the Hoe,” 18 & 1224.

James Weldon Johnson, “O Black and Unknown Bards,” 31; Paul Lawrence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask” 37; “The Haunted Oak.”

Modernisms

Week Three. September 8 & 10.


Week Four. September 15 & 17.


Harlem Renaissance

Thursday: Jean Toomer, all poems from Cane, 352-354. Claude McKay, “The Harlem Dancer,” “The Lynching,” “America,” 315-18; Gwendolyn Bennet, all poems, 528. Angelina Weld Grimke poems and blues women’s lyrics (HO).

Week Six. September 29 and October 1.
Tuesday: Tuesday: Langston Hughes, all poems.
Thursday: **First Essay Due at the start of class. Bring two copies of your essay, one to share with your classmates.**

**War Poems**

*Week Seven. October 6 & 8.*


Discuss Exam.

Thursday: **Mid-Term Exam**

**Part II. Second Half of the Century**

**Ginsberg and other Social Protests**

*Week Eight. October 13 & 15.*

*Tuesday:* Alan Ginsberg, all readings, 847-874.

Thursday: Time off to attend one talk at the Hermanns Lecture series on Friday, October 16 or Saturday October 17. One page comment on the talk due on Tuesday, Oct. 20th.

*Week Nine. October 20 & 22.*


**Interior Landscapes**

Identity Politics

Week Ten October 27 and 29.

Tuesday: Muriel Ruykeyser, “To be a Jew” 688; Margaret Walker, “For My People,” 735; Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Boy Died in my Alley,” 777, and “To Those of My Sisters Who” 778; Wendy Rose, “Truganinny,” 1156; Sesshu Foster, all poems, 1205.

Thursday: Adrian C. Louis, “A Colossal American Copulation,” “Petroglyphs of Serena,” 1131; Sherman Alexie, all poems, 1217; Martin Espada, “Imagine the Angels of Bread,” 1214; Marilyn Chin, “How I Got that Name” 1202.

Gender, Sex, Love, and Desire

Week Eleven, November 3 & 5.
(Dr. Alaimo will be at the University of Minnesota. Christy Tidwell will teach the class). 


Nature, Animals, Environment

Week Twelve, November 10 & 12.


Thursday: More nature, animal, and environment poetry on handouts (HO).
Revised Schedule for English 4399: 20th Century American Poetry

CONCLUSIONS

Week Thirteen. November 17 & 19.
Tuesday: Day off to write final papers.
(I will be in my office during our class and during my office hours. Please come see me if you would like some help!)

Thursday: Day off to revise final papers.
(I will be at the Sustainability Director interviews all day.)

Tuesday: Final Papers Due at the very start of class.
Presentations of Final Papers

Thursday: No class. Thanksgiving Holiday.

Week Fifteen. December 1 and 3: Dead Week.
Tuesday: Presentations of Final Papers

Thursday: Discuss Final Exam. Course Evaluations.
Closing poem: bring about 5-15 lines of your favorite poem to read in class.

Final Exam: Thursday, December 10, 11:00-1:30.
PREPARING FOR CLASS
---Before each class, prepare by carefully reading all the assigned poems and any other assigned texts.
---Then, choose one of the poems, reread it, and create your own analysis or interpretation. (Write 1-3 sentences on your index card.)
---Next, read additional background materials or criticism on the poem you have chosen. These materials are available on the MAPS web site. Explore cultural and historical backgrounds, biographical information about the poet, and various criticisms, readings, and interpretations of the poem.
---Prepare to briefly discuss, in class, your most significant findings. What did you think was particularly intriguing? What information helped you understand the poem? Which readings did you disagree with and why? How do the visual texts, if available, add to our understanding of the poem? Depending on whether the technology works, you may be able to show particular web pages to the class.
---Finally, prepare one or more discussion questions for the class about the poem.

--Hand in an index card with the following:
1. A 1-3 sentence thesis about the poem—your own original reading.
2. A significant quote from one of the sources on the MAPS site. (A quote that you would like to talk about.)
3. A discussion question for the class.
Your index cards will be graded with a check, check plus, or check minus, corresponding to B, A, or C.
[You must hand in at least 10 index cards over the course of the semester.]

APPROACHES TO POETRY
1. Artistic aspects of the poem itself: form, structure, style, imagery, sound, etc. How does the poem, as a poem, embody its meaning? “Close reading.”
2. Cultural/Political/Historical context of the poem. What aspects of culture, politics, and history inform the poem? How does the poem try to intervene in its political moment? What change does it seek?
3. Biography of the Poet—what is the relation between the life of the poet and the ideas or perspectives or philosophies of the poem?
4. Reception and criticism of the poem—key ideas, questions, debates. What do various critics think the poem means? Why? Do you agree or disagree?
5. Literary history. How does the poem comment upon or reflect or depart from previous poems? Is the poem part of a particular movement? If so, explore further.
6. Relation of the poem to... visual arts, music, dance, performance, science, place, environment, .......
7. Analyze the poem considering gender, race, class, sexual orientation, colonialism, religion, capitalism, and other potent social categories, ideologies, and forms of power.