

## SYLLABUS

ENGL 3714 – Creative Writing: Poetry - Spring 2008  
Section 12686 • Mon. & Wed., 4:00-5:15pm • MCB 318

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Office hours: Mondays, 11am-1pm • Wednesdays, 11am-12pm • by appointment

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Welcome to poetry workshop. The core of this class is the craft of poetry; your active attendance and participation are **crucial** to the dynamic, community-building process of the writing workshop. (Translation: attendance is mandatory. Perpetual latecomers and no-shows will not be looked upon kindly. Participation is also mandatory. You will be expected to share your erudite thoughts and opinions in each and every class.) You will also be expected to write and read a great deal. We will plumb the heights and depths of contemporary American poetry in a variety of fun-filled ways. Students will be required to write *and revise* at least eight poems over the course of the semester, converging in a final portfolio. (Please note: revision is absolutely critical to the writing process—if you believe your work is perfect as-is, and refuse to change it, this is not the class for you.) All of this reaches towards our primary goal: to develop your individual poetic voice and style. This class is a journey—be prepared to forge ahead into the inner regions of yourself, and the outer regions of poetic vastness. Please note: if you are not interested in facilitatively interacting with members of your peer group while keeping an open mind, this class might not be for you—a writing workshop is a community with no place for intolerance or meanness.<sup>1</sup>

### Required Texts at the Virginia Tech Bookstore

- *In The Palm of Your Hand: The Poet's Portable Workshop*, Steve Kowitz (\$13.45 new, \$10.10 used)
- *My Alexandria*, Mary Doty (\$14.95 new, \$11.20 used)

### Recommended Text at the Virginia Tech Bookstore

- *American Poetry: The Next Generation*, Gerald Costanzo & Jim Daniels. This is an anthology of new American poets, all born since 1960. I will be listing additional optional readings for each theme we cover from this book. (\$24.95 new, \$18.70 used)

### Required Text at Kopy Korner

(101 McDonald St. at the Corner of Progress & Main; 951-8600; open M-Th 8:30-5:30 & F 8:30-5; they accept **cash or checks only!**)

- Course Reader - please bring this to class every day! (\$25-30)

### Additional Required Fee:

Each student is personally responsible for the cost of printing and/or copying work for workshop.

### Materials:

- a portable notebook that you can use as a journal (dedicated to this class only)
- a folder for your classmates' poems
- a folder for poems of yours that have been workshopped
- a folder for your final portfolio

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the Virginia Tech "Principles of Community" for more information on this: [www.vt.edu/principles.php](http://www.vt.edu/principles.php)

## POETRY READINGS

(<http://www.english.vt.edu/graduate/MFA/07vwsindex.html>)

- Philip Nikolayev (poetry) Wed Feb. 6, 7pm, Volume II Bookstore in the University Mall (<http://www.myspace.com/nikolayev>)
- Carolyn Krieter-Foronda (Poet Laureate of Virginia), Mon Feb. 11, 7pm, Shanks 370/380 (<http://www.carolynforonda.com/>)
- Mark Doty (poetry), Thurs April 10, 7pm, Volume II Bookstore in the University Mall, (<http://markdoty.org/>)
- Final MFA Poetry Reading, April 18, 7pm, Shanks 370/380

## REQUIREMENTS:

1) **Keep a Journal:** *Write regularly*, preferably on some kind of schedule (e.g. from 10-11 pm each evening). I will not collect or read your journals—these are for you and I consider them private places where you can collect material for poems. I might, on an as-needed basis, merely come around and check to make sure you are writing in them.

2) **Write a Poem Every Week (to hand in to me on Mondays); Hand In A Poem for Workshop on Your Assigned Day:** You should be writing at least a poem a week, which you will hand in to me on MONDAYS. Some weeks I will give you a writing assignment to help you in the pursuit of the perfect poem. For weeks with specific writing assignments, you are welcome to bend or change the assignment, but not disregard it entirely. I will comment on all the poems you hand in, but not grade them. The amount of work you put into these poems, however, will figure heavily into your grade. Due to class size, each student will have 3-4 poems workshopped by the entire class (though at some point in the semester, I might decide to break us into smaller workshop groups). That means you will be responsible for making 22 copies of your poem, and bringing them to class the week before you are scheduled to be workshopped (unless we decide to use Blackboard for distribution). Your poem for workshop can be an entirely new poem, or one that I have seen already and commented on. If you choose to hand in a new poem for workshop, you do not have to bring me a Monday poem for that week. PLEASE NOTE: I will not accept any work via email. In addition, I WILL NOT ACCEPT WORK THAT IS MORE THAN A WEEK LATE. Any assignment that comes in more than a week after its original deadline will be handed back unread, and you will receive a zero for that particular assignment.

**Note:** You must hand in new work! Please don't recycle old poems from high school or past workshops. You may, however, hand in a substantial revision as your poem. If you choose to hand in a revision, please make copies of the original as well, and attach it to the revised version. Keep in mind that you need to have written at least TEN new poems by the end of the course for your final portfolio.

3) **Do All Assigned Class Reading:** When I assign you poems to read for class, read them closely and come prepared with opinions and questions. It can help if you scrawl notes on them, much as you would with a workshop poem. For extra help on this, see "How to Read a Poem." I will be asking for volunteers each week to lead discussion on particular poems. If you agree to be in charge of a poem, please be prepared to: read the poem aloud, give a narrative synopsis of the poem, relate the poem to the theme of the class ('imagery,' 'emotion,' etc.), and prepare at least one question for the class about the poem.

4) **Critical Writing:** In addition to reading the assigned pieces for each class, and handing in the aforementioned poems each week, you will be required to do **four** very short pieces of critical writing over the course of the semester:

- a. attending *at least* two poetry readings and writing a 1-2 page response for each (due as they occur)
- b. writing a 2-3 page "close reading" paper on a poem of your choice from class (due 2/27)
- c. writing a 2-3 page review of *My Alexandria*, by Mark Doty (due 4/2)

## MORE ON CRITICAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

- a. **Readings:** There are a few visiting poets coming to campus this semester, and I have included the schedule above. There is also a link to the schedule on the "Announcements" page on Blackboard. I will also keep you informed of any other upcoming readings that I hear about. If you attend extra readings and write responses for them, I will give you extra credit. *A 1-2 page response for each reading you attend should be turned in to class no later than one week after the reading. Please include the writer's name, date, and time of reading, as well as titles of*

*some of the poems or stories read, or the title of the book the author read from.* If you can't make it to two readings due to unavoidable work or family commitments, or other evening classes, please see me so we can devise alternative assignments for you. Please see the sheet in your Course Reader (the last page of the "Essentials" section) for more information on how to write up a reading.

- b. **Close Reading Paper** (of a poem of your choice from the Course Reader, or from *American Poetry: The Next Generation*): Your paper should include the poem's title and author at the top. Write about your opinions of the poem, what you noticed about craft, your visceral reactions, what you thought of the poet's subject material, and some of your favorite or least favorite lines from the work. Find what is striking, unique or particular to the poem you've just read (language, stylistic devices, poetic obsessions, etc.). For further ideas, consult the page in the Course Reader entitled "How to Read a Poem," and also the assignment sheet (which will be available on Blackboard).
- c. **Review of *My Alexandria*, by Mark Doty**: I will be explaining this assignment in more detail later on in the semester. The assignment sheet will also be available on Blackboard. Don't panic if you have never read a book of poems the whole way through. Books of poetry aren't like the theoretical tomes you read for your other classes—they're slim and can be digested in a few hours. Every poet reads other poets. In order to write well, you must read copiously. It will bring you hours of fun-filled enjoyment, and help jump-start your own writing. Your response should include the book's title, author, and publishing information at the top. Write about your opinions of the work, what you noticed about craft, your visceral reactions, what you thought of the poet's subject material, and some of your favorite or least favorite lines/poems from the collection. Find what is striking, unique or particular to the work of the poet you've just read (language, stylistic devices, poetic obsessions, etc.). For further ideas, go over the examples I've enclosed in the Course Reader.
- 7) **Conferences**: *I would like to meet with you at least once during the semester.* I will pass around a sign-up sheet when the time arrives for the first conference, which is required. Other than this conference, it is up to you to come see me on your own during my office hours or by making an appointment with me. (I'd love to see you more often than once, of course, so see my Office Hours information at the top of the syllabus if you have any other questions or concerns or just want to chat.) Take advantage of the fact that I'm available as a reader for any of your work that we don't get to in class.
- 8) **Workshop**: Over the course of the semester, each student will have about 3-4 poems workshopped by the entire class. We will be setting up some sort of rotating order regarding who will be workshopped each week once class begins that we will use for the duration of the semester. When it's your turn to be workshopped, you may select any poem you've been working on to submit to the class. *Bring enough copies of the poem for the class to class the week before the week you are scheduled so that we have time to read it and comment on it. Copies must be typed, and have your name on them. When you receive copies of other students' poems, you are expected to take time to read them and comment on them carefully* (for more information on this, see the "Workshop Guidelines" sheet in the Reader). I will be collecting your comments on your classmates' poems at random. Please Note: if you are absent on a day where you are due to be workshopped, we will skip you and move on to the next student. There will be no make-up workshop. If you are absent on a day when work is circulated for workshop, it is your responsibility to get the poems you need from your fellow students.
- 9) **Final Portfolio**: At the end of the semester you'll submit a portfolio (folder) of at least *eight* poems (revised) along with the original version/version(s) that have my comments on them. This is your semester's volume of finished work, so make it look pretty. I will give you more details on this later in the semester. Most importantly, please hang on to the drafts of your poems that I've commented on over the course of the semester, as you will be required to include these in your portfolio.
- 10) **Attendance**: You will be allowed one absence during the semester before your grade begins to drop. Beyond that, each absence will drop your grade by a half-letter (e.g. an A will drop to an A-, an A- to a B+, etc.). If you miss a class for any reason, you still must:
- do the readings and assignments for the missed day
  - deliver your comments on workshopped poems to the author at the next class meeting
  - deliver any written work due to me at the next class meeting

More than any other kind of class, a workshop demands attendance. Your voice adds immeasurably to the group, while your absence is a loss. If you have any sort of emergency (medical, family), or religious observance, that forces you to miss a class, PLEASE absolutely come see me, call me, or email me about it—I'm tough, but not inflexible.

**Regarding lateness:** two latenesses count as one absence.

**Regarding excessive absences:** FIVE absences lead to automatic failure of the class.

### 11) Grades:

- 30% CLASS PARTICIPATION (response to workshop poem, discussion and analysis of assigned texts, attendance in class). In a workshop it is vital that everyone involved participate and contribute their efforts, so please don't hide in the corner! If your insights are grounded in the text and thoughtfully presented, you can't go wrong. I will be looking at both the level of your participation, and the quality of your comments.
- 20% CRITICAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (worth 5% each).
- 50% FINAL PORTFOLIO (creative writing and revisions). This grade will not be drawn from the "greatness" of your poems, but from the amount of work you've put into your pieces over the course of the semester—has your work improved and changed? I will be looking for sincere attempts to utilize craft concepts introduced in class, as well as the willingness to experiment with new forms, subjects, and voices, your quality of revision, and your overall investment in your work. Were you open to suggestions about your work from both me and the class? Did your work change considerably from the first draft form? The point of this class is to make everyone a better writer. On that end, grades become an annoying marker. Sweat counts. Love counts. If you care about your writing, and dedicate time to it, it will show.
- *Please note*—any of the following will get you a failing grade: more than five unexcused absences, failure to hand in two or more critical writing assignments, failure to hand in four or more creative assignments.

### SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS:

- Come to class
- Participate in Discussion & Workshops (verbally and via written comments)
- Write One Poem Per Week, as assigned (keep a journal & hand in your final portfolio)
- Write Four Critical Pieces (& go to two readings)
- Have one conference with me

### HOW I ANALYZE YOUR WORK:

- ATTENDANCE (I am looking for excellent, near-perfect attendance. Don't arrive late or duck out early.)
- CLASS PARTICIPATION in discussion of assigned texts, and in workshop (I am looking for both your level of participation, and the quality of your comments in class.)
- WRITTEN WORK—your critical work, and your written comments on classmates' poems (Was your work handed in on time? Did it include strong analyses of subject material?)
- PROGRESSION AS A POET (Has your work improved and changed over the course of the semester? Were you willing to experiment with different styles, forms, and subject material?)
- REVISIONS (Were you open to suggestions about your work from both me and the class? Did your poems change considerably from the first draft form?)

### SOME LAST NOTES

- Grammar: Grammar and Mechanics should be correct in imaginative writing as they are in formal reports and essays. If you know you have trouble, see me, or get help at the Writing Center on the third floor of Shanks ([http://www.composition.english.vt.edu/wc/WC\\_Home.html](http://www.composition.english.vt.edu/wc/WC_Home.html)).
- Plagiarism: The Virginia Tech Honor System Constitution sets forth the vital principle that "Every student has the right to live in an academic environment that is free from the injustices caused by any form of intellectual dishonesty." Therefore, the Virginia Tech Honor Code will be upheld in this course for all work submitted. See the Honor System website at [www.honorsystem.vt.edu](http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu).
- Disability Statement: Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a disability. Students should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), 150 Henderson Hall, 231-3788 (V), 231-1740 (TTY); Susan P. Angle, [spangle@vt.edu](mailto:spangle@vt.edu), [www.ssd.vt.edu](http://www.ssd.vt.edu). "Students with disabilities are responsible for self-identification....To be eligible for services, documentation of the disability from a qualified professional must be presented to SSD upon request."
- Illness: to excuse an absence due to illness, I will need a note from Schiffert Health Center or a doctor.

ENGL 3714  
Basic Calendar, Spring 2008

**Week 1**

(1/14, M) First Class Meeting  
(1/16, W) Introduction & Catching Words (HW: Memory)

**Week 2**

(1/21, M) NO CLASS – MLK Day  
(1/23, W) Memory (HW: Image & Sense)

**Week 3**

(1/28, M) Image & Sense (HW: Ekphrasis Assignment reading), **Kitchen Poems Due**  
(1/30, W) NO CLASS IN CLASS - Class outing to the Perspective Art Gallery in the University Union (<http://www.uusa.vt.edu/artGallery/index.php>) to see the American Black Farmers Project (photos) by John Francis Ficara (<http://www.americanblackfarmersproject.com/index.html>) (HW: Simile)

**Week 4**

(2/4, M) Simile (HW: Metaphor), **Ekphrasis Poems Due** (& Workshop Begins!)  
(2/6, W) Metaphor (HW: Emotion - Love/Longing/Desire)

**Week 5**

(2/11, M) Emotion - Love/Longing/Desire (HW: Emotion - Loss/Anger/Despair), **New Poem Due**  
(2/13, W) Emotion - Loss/Anger/Despair (HW: Narrative)

**Week 6**

(2/18, M) Narrative (HW: Lyric), **New Poem Due**  
(2/20, W) Lyric (HW: Place & Landscape)

**Week 7**

(2/25, M) Place & Landscape (HW: Sound & Language), **Narrative Poem Due**  
(2/27, W) Sound & Language (HW: Formal Forms – Meter)  
**Close-Reading Paper Due**

**Week 8**

(3/3, M) NO CLASS – Spring Break  
(3/5, W) NO CLASS – Spring Break

**Week 9**

(3/10, M) Formal Forms – Meter & Blank Verse, **Poem Revision Due**  
(HW: Formal Forms – Sonnet)  
(3/12, W) Formal Forms – Sonnet  
(HW: Received Forms: Sestina, Villanelle, Pantoum, Ghazal)

**Week 10**

(3/17, M) Received Forms: Sestina, Villanelle, Pantoum, Ghazal, **Poem in Form Due**  
(HW: Exploring the line)  
(3/19, W) Exploring the Line (HW: “On the Function of the Line” by Denise Levertov)

**Week 11**

(3/24, M) Exploring the Line (HW: *My Alexandria*, by Mark Doty), **New Poem Lineated Two Ways Due**  
(3/26, W) *My Alexandria*, by Mark Doty (HW: Voice & Tone)

**Week 12**

(3/31, M) Voice & Tone (HW: Persona Poems), **New Poem Due**  
(4/2, W) Persona Poems (HW: Prose Poems)  
**Book Reviews of *My Alexandria* due**

**Week 13**

(4/7, M)

(4/9, W)

Prose Poems (HW: Political Poems) (HW: Advice Poems), **Persona Poem Due**  
Political Poems (HW: Experimental Poems)

**Week 14**

(4/14, M)

(4/16, W)

Experimental Poems, **Prose Poem Due**  
NO CLASS - memorial

**Week 15**

(4/21, M)

(4/23, W)

Intensive Workshop, **Poem Revision Due**  
Intensive Workshop

**Week 16**

(4/28, M)

(4/30, W)

Intensive Workshop  
Class Reading & **Final Portfolios Due**