COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES: My objectives for this class are 1) to help you write the best poems you are all capable of writing, given the proper environment and support; 2) to help you learn or re-learn fundamental principles, concepts, theories, etc. about the writing of poetry; 3) to develop your creative capacities, even if the poetic products themselves by term's end still have not quite "arrived"; and 4) to help you experience the powerful ways in which writing and thinking about poems can lead you to a greater understanding of your talents, interests, values, and life experiences.

APPROACH: A combination of discussion, some informal lecture/illustration, small group work, individual conferences, and workshop.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS: American poet Mary Oliver has observed that "one learns by thinking about writing, and by talking about writing--but primarily through writing." In keeping with that conviction, I have focused the class on writing poems as well as thinking, reading, writing, and talking about this complex activity. Therefore, I am requiring 4 "finished" poems (NOTE: you will turn in "good" typed drafts of poems at the end of weeks 2, 4, 6, and 8), a writer's journal (more below), a course notebook, and e-mail exchanges (see DIALOGUE below). I will also make other, smaller assignments from time to time, assignments which I call "finger exercises." These may in some cases lead to serious poems, or they may only result in a form of linguistic/aesthetic "play." But they are important, so respond to these assignments seriously.

WRITING/READING: Ideally, a writer (which I will consider you to be this term and which you need to think of yourself as) must write daily. Furthermore, he/she needs to be a hungry reader. You should plan on writing (on average) one hour each day, and reading (in Poulin and elsewhere) from 1/2 to 1 hour most days. You can teach yourself a great deal about how to write a poem from this kind of focused reading, that is, reading in order to learn about the style/voice of various poets and the architecture of their poems. I recommend that, if you find a poet in the anthology you truly like, you try to find a full book of his/her work. I can help in some cases; just let me know.

CONFERENCES: Once we are under way, I will set up some options for one-on-one conferences of at least 30 minutes per visit. These conferences are extremely important; I will expect you to take advantage of them on a regular basis (a minimum of three meetings; don't wait until term's end to conference with me).

WORKSHOP: During weeks 3/4, 6, and 9, we will workshop your poems. At a later date, I will review with you the procedure for these classes. It is important for you to be in class during the workshop sessions, and to participate.

ATTENDANCE: Because this is an advanced class and because a sense of community is important, I will expect you to be in class almost all of the time. One or two misses for good reasons may be acceptable, but anything beyond that number is not and will have a major effect on your course grade. If you don't feel you can meet this expectation, you should not continue in the class.

DIALOGUE: In addition to the talk about your work in the workshop itself, I want to encourage other forms of dialogue. One opportunity will be in the small groups we will establish soon. You will work in these groups often in class. In addition, I expect your group to meet outside of class from time to time, perhaps at someone's dorm room or house, perhaps at The Library or in the Union or Campus Cafe or The Motherlode. The point of the groups (and much of the course) is to create spaces/opportunities for regular, ongoing discussion of your work and related matters. Each of you should plan on being active in the various opportunities to take part in this "conversation." I know that each of you has a voice. Plan on

TEXTS:


using it. To further facilitate this ongoing dialogue, I am planning to set up a class list, an electronic space for all of you to exchange regularly problems, ideas, insights, etc. I will participate in this dialogue periodically, and I will save all exchanges in order to accumulate an ongoing record of your individual contributions to the conversation.

**FEEDBACK & REVISION:** You should receive feedback on your work in a variety of ways--group work, e-mail, workshops, and conferences. Most of my feedback will be oral, in class or in conference. Your job is to listen to these various kinds of feedback, stay open, and be willing to explore alternative ways of handling your poem's subject matter. Revision is the result of feedback, and you need to push your work through various drafts (I call these drafts "worksheets") and give the full process of composing a chance. Save your worksheets and include all of them in your notebooks.

**JOURNAL:** You are to write more or less daily in this journal. Get in the habit early, and make a regular space in your day to spend time there. Most writers keep journals, some sporadically, some slavishly. This journal is a place for you to talk to yourself about your own writing--how it is going (or not going), how/why it is frustrating, etc. It's also a place to record ideas for poems, to tape clipped articles from magazines or newspapers that seem to have potential as raw material for poems. Other uses include your own concrete observations--about people, about nature, about places, flora, fauna, ice patterns, sounds, smells: IMAGES, in other words, that may find their way into a poem. You can also respond to questions/problems you find in the course reading material, including the craft essays I'll make available from time to time, and you can write about poems in the anthology that move you, puzzle you, challenge you, trouble you, etc. Over time, this journal should become a comprehensive record of your intellectual and emotional and aesthetic experience during the next ten weeks. Take it seriously. Try to grow comfortable with it. Plan on keeping it for future work.

**NOTEBOOK:** Your notebook will consist of a complete collection of all your written work this term. It is the primary document upon which I will base your grade. In it you should file the following: your writer's journal, all draft work, and the final, carefully proofed portfolio of your four poems.

**GRADE:** I will not grade poems. It's not that I couldn't; I simply will not. I don't think a letter grade is an appropriate response to creative work. I can and will, however, grade your overall response to the expectations I have outlined in this syllabus. If you meet all of these expectations and if your poems show good faith effort and engagement, you will receive an A. Anything less than an A will be based on one or more failed or compromised expectations. **NB:** the window of opportunity for any form or Bs or Cs will be fairly small. If you do the work and commit yourself to the spirit and intentions of the class, you will do well.

**REMINDER:** MTU's Affirmative Action Officer has asked that all faculty include the following statement on each course syllabus:

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students, (2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (3310).