COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES: My objectives for this class are 1) to help you write the best poems you are capable of, 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 and about poems; 4) to assign a variety of poems as well as thinking, reading, writing, and talking about this complex activity. Therefore, I am talking MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS: American APPROACH: A combination of discussion, some informal lecture/illustration, small group work, individual conferences, and workshop.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS: American poetry 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 a minimum of 5 “finished” poems for your portfolio. (NOTE: you will turn in “good” typed drafts of poems at the end of weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10.)

A writer’s journal (more below), a course notebook, and e-mail exchanges (see DIALOGUE below). I will also arrange a variety of “finger exercises” regularly throughout the term and may also ask you to do a piece of analytic writing as well.

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 CAP 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. Although I will assign some specific poems in CAP for discussion in class, you are responsible for reading the rest of the book during the term, and the more you can read early on, the better. I will make regular assignments for The Poet’s Companion, and it is essential that you read the assignments carefully and come to class ready to discuss the reading.

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 such meetings with me if your goal is an A**)

WORKSHOP: During weeks 4, 6, 9, and 11 (this schedule is approximate and will depend partly on the size of the class) we will workshop your poems. At a later date, I will review with you the procedure for these workshops. 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 will ask 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 Memorial Union. 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 using it. To further facilitate this ongoing dialogue, I am planning to set up a class list, an electronic space for all of you regularly to exchange problems, continue dialogue about class poems, responses to and questions about photocopied
essays, etc. I will participate in this dialogue occasionally, but it will be up to all of you to keep this site active and useful. I will make note of all exchanges in order to accumulate an ongoing record of your individual contributions to the conversation for evaluation purposes at term’s end.

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 (these drafts are called worksheets) and give the full process of composing a chance. Save your worksheets and include them in your notebooks. I realize you will revise frequently on your computer, but you must print drafts regularly and provide a thorough record of your revision process at the end of the semester. **At term’s end no one should offer, as an excuse for this revision, the argument that he/she has been revising on the computer but deleting all versions but the final one.**

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. Date each entry. 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 should also write about poems in the anthology that move you, puzzle you, challenge you, trouble you. Etc. In writing about the poems in CAP, write from the point of view of a writer, examining the ways the poems are made, how they move, how they employ line breaks, image, metaphor, how they are paced, how they create tone, etc. You should do one of these “writerly eye” Journal entries at least once per week. Over time, this journal should become a comprehensive record of your intellectual and emotional and aesthetic experience during the next fifteen weeks. Take it seriously. Try to grow comfortable with it. Plan on keeping it for future work. **You cannot do well in this class unless your journal is seriously undertaken and complete.**

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 finger exercises, all draft work, any other assignments, and the final, carefully proofed portfolio of your five 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.

FINAL NOTE: I will regard this syllabus as a contract between you and me. If you decide to stay in this class, you should too. Put it in your notebook and refer to it regularly. If you have any questions about it, let me know ASAP.

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).