TEXTS:
1) Janet Burroway, *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, 2nd Ed. (Pearson Longman, 2007). You should spend some time right away paging through this book, reading the introductory remarks aimed at students, and noting some of the key features, including (in addition to chapters on a number of topics) writing prompts, play exercises, multiple samples of each genre, and a Prosody Glossary for those opting to work with poetry.

2) The appropriate book(s) below that matches your choice of genre (order all three now, or order one from Amazon once you have made your decision about genre):

*Best American Poetry of 2007*, Heather McHugh and David Lehman, Eds. (Houghton Mifflin)
*The Best American Essays*, David Foster Wallace and Robert Atwan, Eds. (Houghton Mifflin)
*The Best American Short Stories*, Stephen King, Ed. (Houghton Mifflin)

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** My objectives for this class are 1) to make you feel like a writer for 14 weeks; 2) to help you write the best creative work you are capable of writing; 3) to help you learn or re-learn fundamental principles, concepts, theories, etc. about one or more kinds of creative work; and 4) to help you experience the powerful ways in which serious creative writing can lead you to a greater understanding of your talents, interests, values, and life experiences.
APPROACH: A combination of informal lecture, discussion, collaborative work, individual conferences, and workshops. After about the first 6-7 weeks, some or much of your work will not take place in a classroom setting. I will ask you to work independently or collaboratively on your own. Such an approach puts special responsibility on students. If you don’t feel comfortable with this kind of arrangement or are not sure you are mature enough to handle it, you should probably drop the class now.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS: Regarding the apprenticeship that most young writers go through, American poet Mary Oliver has observed: “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 as well as thinking, reading, writing, and talking about this complex activity. Major assignments include: 1) Extensive work in a genre of your choosing (one substantial piece of creative nonfiction (12-20 typed, double-spaced pages), one short story (12-20 typed, double-spaced pages), or five to seven poems; 2) a writer’s journal (more below); 3) a variety of “finger exercises” (FE) assigned regularly throughout the term; 4) Some form of final public performance or exhibition of your end product (more about this later); 5) A retrospective Response (more later on this 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, you need to be a hungry reader. You should plan on writing (on average) one hour each day, and reading at least thirty minutes (preferably more) most days, exploring examples in our main text and in your supplemental text from the three options listed above. You can teach yourself a great deal about how to write from this kind of focused reading, that is, reading in order to learn about the style/voice/subject matter/angle of vision/form of various writers and their poems, essays, or stories. Occasionally, I will give you photocopies of essays focusing on various craft issues I want you to think about, experiment with in your own work, and discuss and respond to in your journal.

CONFERENCES: From roughly Week Three forward, conferencing with me will be an essential part of your writing process. These conferences will center on your work in progress. In most cases, I will need to have a typed copy of your draft at least 1-2 days prior to the conference. Typically, these conferences will last around 20-30 minutes. By Week 8, quite a bit of class time will be devoted to conferencing; we will also conference as needed outside of class as well. How often we conference together depends on how well your writing is going, but plan on meeting with me a number of times.

COLLABORATIVE WORK: In addition to conferences with me, I will expect you to work on a regular basis in pairs or small groups to give each other feedback on work as it evolves. We will use both class time and out-of-class time for this collaborative work. I will help get you started on this important form of exchange, and I will expect you to take this kind of collaboration seriously. As (or if) time allows, we will hold one or more full class workshops to share writing in process with the entire class. I will schedule these workshop sessions whenever I feel you are (or should be) ready. These sessions, too, are extremely important. I will regard absences during these sessions as a failure on your part to commit to the learning/writing community we are trying to create.

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 when we are meeting as an entire class. One or two unexcused misses for good reasons may be acceptable (you should inform me in advance if at all possible), 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. Missing workshop days and scheduled conferences will also dramatically affect your grade. The worst path you can take is to vanish, cut the lines of communication, then suddenly reappear, as if you had just returned from the dark side of the moon. Throughout the class—but especially during the second half of the class—staying in touch with me is extremely important. If you remain in the class, I will assume that you are agreeing to
the way I plan to parcel out our time and to work closely with me regularly for the entire term. Because we will divide our time together in a variety of ways, you are responsible for keeping track of when we are meeting as a whole class, as part of a class, in conferences, or in collaborative work. I will set up an electronic class list to facilitate communications among all of us. Please use it if you have any doubt about what you are supposed to be doing.

JOURNAL: Most writers keep a writing journal, some religiously and some sporadically. In either case, journals are a rich resource, and I want you to keep one this term. Note that Burroway assumes you will keep a journal in which to record various experiments with her prompts (please read her comments from pp. xxiv-xxvi). That is certainly a good option for you to consider from time to time, but basically I have no particular formula for your journal or preconceptions about its contents or the length of a typical entry. I DO expect you to take this assignment seriously and to give it a chance, which means you try to write in it on almost a daily basis. Some entries may be quite brief, others more extensive. But your goal in keeping this journal is to force yourself to think like a serious writer for the next fourteen weeks. Get in the habit early of making entries, and make a regular space in your day to spend time there. Date and number each entry. Think of this journal also as 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 new work, to tape clipped articles from magazines or newspapers that seem to have potential as raw material for future writing. Other uses include your own memories and your concrete observations—about people, about nature, about places, flora, fauna, ice patterns, cloudscapes, sounds, smells: IMAGES, in other words, that may find their way into a poem, essay, or story. 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, stories, and essays in your two texts that move you, puzzle you, challenge you, trouble you. Let me repeat: Take the journal seriously. Try to grow comfortable with it. Plan on keeping it for future work. You will submit this journal with your portfolio, and I will use it as one criterion for your final grade.

PORTFOLIO: Your portfolio 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 Retrospective Response, your writer’s journal, all finger exercises, all draft work, any other assignments, and the final, carefully proofed version of your poems, story, or essay. NB: I realize most of you will revise frequently on your computer, but you must get in the habit of printing drafts regularly in order to 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 zero or thin revision, that 1) you have been revising on the computer but deleting all versions but the final one, or 2) you had a computer meltdown and lost all of your draft work.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE: Since I have not taught this class in this particular way before, here is at least a rough approximation of how we will spend our time this term (I may have to make changes to this schedule as we go):

- **Weeks 1-2:** Quick introduction to the three genres and time for you to decide which form you want to choose (decision due by end of second week); read and discuss some examples of each genre; read and discuss chapters 1 through 5 in Burroway; finger exercises.

- **Weeks 3-7:** More detailed class time on genres. Depending on class size and how many want to do which genre, we MAY divide into sub-groups for much of this discussion (E.G., poets, creative nonfiction writers, and short story writers meeting on separate days); Burroway, Chapters 7 and 8; first draft of your work due in week 4 or 5; first conference with me.

- **Weeks 8-12:** Conferences; collaborative work; continued drafting and revising; workshopping.

- **Weeks 13-14:** Polishing and Performance; portfolio due.
GRADE: as far as I am concerned, grades in a creative writing class are not very helpful. In a very real sense, serious creative work is never “finished,” and grades have the effect of signaling an end to what really is an ongoing process. Therefore, the only grade you will receive is the final one, and I would just as soon not assign one at that point either but will, for obvious reasons. I will not grade drafts or other assignments. I will, however, give you a good deal of oral feedback along the way. If at any time you are worried about where you stand in the class, ask me and I will give you my best estimate at that time. Basically, if you take this class and your writing seriously and if you attend regularly and address responsibly other assignments described above, you should do very well.

Caveat: In an advanced course there is also the matter of quality. Quality is less of an issue in an introductory creative writing course, but in an advanced course, I think it important to discriminate between solid, very competent work and work that takes that next step and “rises” or resonates and displays obvious talent. I need to be clear here: the quality of your final product matters to me, and it is my obligation to judge that quality as best as I can. Unfortunately, in terms of talent, not all writers are born equal. However, hard work and commitment can go a long way toward narrowing the talent gap, and may well, over time, be the ultimate marker of the talented writer. Let’s make a deal: You work very hard on your writing, and I’ll work very hard to assign you a grade that fairly represents both effort and talent.

*** If you want to know more about my credentials to make such judgments, you can go to my somewhat out-of-date web site (http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~rfreisi/index.htm) to get a reasonable sense of my publishing credits.

A WORD ABOUT AUDIENCE: The audience you should be imagining as you write is the readership of quality American literary magazines and those mags that publish serious literary work. The three books in the Houghton Mifflin series listed above have drawn their selections from such sources and should serve as a guide for you. Sci Fi and Fantasy do not typically meet my criterion, but there is always the possibility of exceptions that cross over, using these genres but in an obvious literary manner. If you have any doubts, please ask me, and also bring me examples you find in your reading that you think do this cross-over work.

A WORD ABOUT MECHANICS: If you took an intro creative writing class with me, you may recall that I was pretty relaxed about mechanics. That will not be the case in this advanced class. As writers, your medium is language. I expect you to care about issues of correctness: usage, spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and syntax. In your journals, in finger exercises, and in drafts, I am less bothered by these kinds of “static” and will tend to overlook them unless they are posing problems with clarity. In final drafts I will be very concerned that you demonstrate your appreciation of respect for your chosen medium. Mechanical sloppiness erects barriers between you and your readers, and it is an immediate and convenient excuse for editors to reject your work. If you are unsure about your command of mechanics, buy a copy of Strunk and White’s Elements of Style or some other good handbook. Also have a good dictionary by you when you write. If you are grade-conscious, you will want to make certain that you edit and proofread diligently.

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, Dean of Students, (487-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).