POETRY & POLITICS/POLITICS & POETRY

HON 3233 (CRN 16751, Section 901): Humanities
ENG 3423 (CRN 13122, Section 901): Special Topics in Creative Writing
ENG 4973 (CRN 17220, Section 901): Senior Seminar for English Majors

Downtown Campus
Buena Vista Building 3.306
Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:30 – 3:45 p.m.

Instructor: B. V. Olguín
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Course Description & Goals

This creative writing workshop is based upon the premise that all art is political. Poetry, like other art forms, is produced in the real world and is consumed in a multiplicity of ways, which give it complex meanings. That is, the poem exists within the artist’s intent, the context in which it was produced, and its various readings and consumptions in different times and places among different audiences. Our goal in this class is to develop as smart, politically-conscious, and responsible artists who are aware that anything we write has broader implications beyond our own experience at the moment we are producing the art. Moreover, the course is structured around a series of assignments that challenge and enable us to use our art to engage important issues in the world while exercising our aesthetic and research skills. This approach to poetry and politics/politics and poetry is sufficiently broad to allow for all ideological persuasions concerning any given topic, while still challenging us to be smart artists.

Students will write ten poems in a variety of genres and forms (along with one revision of each), as well as one ars poetica, or philosophy of art, that students develop after writing their required poems. Students also will keep a journal, which will be reviewed for a grade every week. Each poem will be constructively critiqued by the instructor. Students will be required to revise every poem at least once, and will have the opportunity for group workshopping of at least two poems. All students will write critiques of poems submitted for group review. Students will be required to turn in a final portfolio that includes all drafts of poems, critiques of other students’ poems and the final assignment, which will be due on the last week of class. In addition, students will be required to attend and produce written reviews of three public poetry readings and also make at least two public readings of their own work. Finally, pursuant to the corollary goal of exercising research skills and discursive abilities, students will produce a polemical research paper on a topic selected by the student and approved by the instructor.
Required Texts & Supplies

(Texts marked with an asterisk are on reserve, but students should buy copies for personal use.)


Recommended Texts


Required Supplies

Pocket-sized, hard cover journal (preferably Moleskine)

**Course Assignments & Workshop Protocol**

**Assignment Overview:** Students are required to write 10 poems, all of which must be revised at least once, along with a 3-5 page ars poetica in any genre. In addition, students are required to write critiques of all poems submitted for workshopping. (This will involve ½-page critiques of each poem submitted for class feedback on a given session, which generally will range from 1-2 student poems per session.) Students also must keep a journal, which will be reviewed weekly beginning the third class session. Each entry must be clearly dated. This course also incorporates a research paper. The written assignments will be augmented by required attendance at three live poetry readings (with 1-page reviews of each in accordance to the guidelines below) as well as two required readings of the student’s own poetry at public venues. Evaluation also includes student participation in class as well as the attendance record (see Attendance Policy below). Final grades will be submitted only after a portfolio of all original drafts of writing assignments (poems, critiques, ars poetica, poetry reviews, and research paper)
has been submitted. As indicated in the course schedule below, in some cases, students have been given alternative options for poem assignments. This in effect will allow students to have two weeks off from poetry assignments during the semester. This “free” time is to be used for revisions.

**Workshop Logistics:** The daily workshop regimen will follow standard workshop protocol, with two 7-10 minute breaks included in each class. Each session will begin with faculty discussion of the writing lesson, readings and topic at hand, proceed to sample poems, then continue with group workshopping of student poems submitted beforehand for review. After the workshop session, we will discuss the next assignment, engage in writing exercises for the upcoming assignment, then break for the next class.

**Blackboard Mechanics:** Blackboard can be accessed using student Banner IDs. Students assigned to submit their work for the following workshop session must email the draft to the instructor four days before the next class so it can be reviewed then posted to Blackboard for students to access. Students will work on their own poem assignments during the week and then write critiques of poems once the poems are posted on Blackboard for review. Students are to print out the student poems in the appropriate Blackboard assignment folder (e.g., Poem 1: Haiku & Sonnet; Poem 2: Elegy, etc.), then hand write comments on the hard copy. In addition, a summary of the student’s comments/critique must be typed and turned in with the marked up draft. The summary must also be turned in to the instructor for review and grading.

**Workshop Poem Submissions:** Students will sign up to workshop at least two poems in class. (The sign up sheet will be passed out on the first class session.) All poems and other writing (critiques and ars poetica) must be typed, single-spaced, in 12-point Times Font (exactly like this syllabus), except, of course, in the multimedia projects or other poems in which the visual component of the poem requires something else. Students should consult with the instructor before each poem is submitted for class critique. The poems must be submitted to the instructor four days before the workshop session so the instructor has sufficient time to review and post the poem to Blackboard for students to read and write critiques of the poems by the next class session. Students who miss a scheduled poem submission will be penalized up to one full letter grade per week for the poem in question.

**Ten Sets of Workshop Critiques:** The good poet is a good reader and critic, and the required poetry critiques are part of the learning process. Students are to download and print the submitted poems scheduled for the week’s review. (Do not engage in a critique of the poems on email or Blackboard!) After reading the submitted poems and making handwritten comments on the page, students are required to write a ½-page critique of each poem submitted for review for a given workshop session. All students must turn in their typed ½-page critique of each poem to the instructor and the author. This must be attached to the poem and the author must clearly place their name on both the typed and handwritten critiques. Each poem critique should be on a separate page so it can be handed to the author. Remember, the faculty also must receive a copy of the critique in order to assign a grade for the reviewer. Be sure to use proper heading for the critique on the upper left hand corner with the following information: Critic Name, Assignment (e.g., Poem 3 Critiques), and Date. Also use a heading to identify the specific poem being critiqued: Critique of Poem 3, “Title,” by “Name of Student Poet.”

There usually will be 1-2 poems under review per session. The student reviewer will receive a grade for the critiques as a whole for the given workshop session (e.g., all poem critiques for Poem Assignment #5 will be graded as one critique). There will be a total of ten such critique sets. A critique batch is considered incomplete until all critiques of each poem submitted have been written. Students who fail
to turn in a typed critique for all the poems being workshopped in a session will receive a full letter grade penalty on the assignment per day late.

The critiques should consider the following: 1) unity of tone vis-a-vis the topic or theme; 2) poet’s voice and authorial strategy; 3) relative success of imagery, diction and other aesthetic devices; 4) enjambment and overall line construction; 5) what works well; 6) what does not work and may be cut; 7) what might work but should be revised, shortened or lengthened; 8) any other advice such as other poems or poets addressing similar writing issues or topics that might aid in the revision process.

Three Reviews of Live Poetry Readings: Students are required to attend at least three pre-approved live poetry readings or pre-approved cultural performances relevant to the course. The goal of this requirement is to enable students to experience poetry and art as dynamic and living forms of human expression as well as cultural and political agency. (Possible events will be announced throughout the semester.) Proof of attendance must be provided and also must be accompanied by a typed, one-page literary review in standard MLA format, margins and 12-pt Times font (like this syllabus) that adheres to these guidelines: 1) it must clearly identify the event (i.e., who, what, when, where); 2) it must provide a critical appraisal of a specific aspect of the event (e.g., critique of one poem read by an author that quotes or paraphrases the poem); and 3) it must provide a comparative critique of the event (i.e., rate the event or poet in relation to other such events or poets). Selected student reviews will be read in class.

Ars Poetica Assignment: The ars poetica, or philosophy of art, also is sometimes understood as an “ars politica,” or statement about the politics of art. This genre is crucial to evolving as a self-conscious and smart artist. That is, the ars poetica explores what you believe art in general, and your art in particular, to be. Rather than being a self-indulgent narcissistic enterprise, on the one hand, or an overly prescriptive “meaning of art” statement on the other, the ars poetica is an opportunity to meditate on the themes and issues that have emerged in your own writing throughout the semester pursuant towards a broader understanding of what you have been doing as an artist. Most poets write several ars poetica throughout their writing lives, and these exercises are important to their own meditation on what it means to be an artist in the world. We will review several models and this assignment can be written in any format provided in include a candid, self-conscious and constructively critical reflection.

Final Research Paper Assignment (15-17 pages): This course is designed to cultivate intelligent writers, which is a task best facilitated by the cultivation of precise and critical readers. Thus, students must produce a polemical research paper on a selected author, genre, or theme of their choice in consultation with the instructor. The research paper should focus on the manner and degree that politics and poetry interact. The research paper must clearly develop a thesis, state the stakes of the topic at hand, and take a clear argumentative position in evaluating a specific author (or authors) examined in relation to the topic. This research paper must include at least five secondary sources from approved academic scholarship relevant to the topic. (Appropriate secondary sources include academic books and articles available through the UTSA library and/or databases such as ProQuest, Project Muse, MLA, etc., and not general Internet biography cites such as Wikipedia.) At least two of the academic sources must argue a point contrary to the position you are arguing.

Weekly Journal Entries: Students are encouraged to purchase a small pocket-size journal that can easily be carried all day every day. Students are expected to write at least three entries per week. These must be clearly dated. Ideally, the entries should focus on observations or thoughts about the week’s topic. These freewriting and brainstorming entries generally should inform the assigned poem. The length of the entries is not as important as the regularity of the writing. The faculty will review the
entries on a weekly basis for grading. This review is for verification purposes only, and the instructor will respect the privacy of the specific writing as requested.

**Classroom Participation & Workshop Ethics:** Students will be given tips on workshopping poems on the first day of class, which will be complemented and reinforced throughout the semester. Above all else, students should remember that the workshops are designed as constructive criticism sessions where we identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the work under review, and make recommendations on how the poet might revise the piece into a more successful poem. The goal is for all students to be validated and encouraged as writers, which is accomplished as much by writing as by reading and critiquing and being critiqued. All students whose work is being critiqued will be afforded the full attention of the class and no student or work will be dismissed, disrespected or denigrated in any way. The class will strictly adhere to the Attendance Policy, Electronic Technology Policy, Golden Rule & Dispute Resolution Procedures, and Student Code of Conduct explicated below.

**Grading**

Standards for this course are high but always fair. The grading distribution is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Public Readings (@ 2% each)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Live Readings &amp; Required Written Reviews (@ 2% each)</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Weekly Journal Entries (w/3 entries/wk) @ 1% ea. week</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Sets of Poem Critiques (@ 1% each set)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ars Poetica</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Poem Assignments w/ 1 required revision each (@ 5% each)</td>
<td>50%</td>
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Grades will be withheld until a complete final portfolio that contains all drafts of poems, copies of all their critiques of student poems workshopped in class, the ars poetica project, and final research paper. Incomplete portfolios will have points taken off of the relevant distribution noted above. No Incompletes will be assigned for this class except in cases of documented emergency and if the student has completed over 2/3 of the class work with a passing grade. Students are reminded that they are responsible for dropping the course on their own. If a student fails to drop the course, they will not automatically be dropped, nor will they automatically receive an “Incomplete.” Instead, they will receive an automatic “F.” In cases were an “Incomplete” is assigned, the student has one full year to complete the remaining work. It is the responsibility of the student to complete the work and submit it to the professor for review and grading. If the work is not turned in within the one-year time frame, the “Incomplete automatically reverts to an “F” by the University of Texas System, and cannot be changed.

**Attendance Policy**

Creative writing seminars depend upon active student participation, thus students are required to attend every class session. No absences are permitted except for emergencies, which must be documented. A student can receive an excused absence only after submitting documentation clearly explaining the nature of the emergency along with typed one-page critiques of each poem being workshopped on the day missed and a one page summary of the assigned reading texts for the day missed. Excusable emergencies do not include transportation problems, sleeping in, or work scheduling problems. Any full
day unexcused absence will automatically drop the student’s grade one full letter grade. A student is considered tardy if they arrive more than 5 minutes after the scheduled start of class, and all tardies will be factored into the class participation component of the student’s final grade. Chronic tardies (three or more) will likely lower a student’s final grade. Students are permitted to bring visitors and dependants to class provided they receive prior approval from the instructor. The instructor reserves the right to deny entry to any proposed visitor. Students must be advised that neither the content of the poems, readings or films, nor the language in discussions, will be amended to accommodate any potential visitors.

Student Code of Conduct

Students have the right to learn in a safe environment and this right will be protected. Likewise, students have a responsibility to ensure they cultivate this safe space for all. Everyone must take special care to be constructive, especially in the discussions and peer grading exercises. Everyone also must be especially smart in their poetic engagements with the assigned topics. We all occupy unique subject positions that involve relative amounts of power in different contexts and it is our responsibility to be cognizant of this throughout the course. While the nature of this particular course invites polemical writing, it absolutely does not give license to students to insult, denigrate, threaten or otherwise demean any individual or group of individuals. This includes both overt or covert—as well as “unintentional”—insults, especially to women and minorities. The course, after all, is premised on a corollary to the operative premise stated above: that is, poetry can help us understand the complexities of disproportionate power relations pursuant to a more equitable and just future. The instructor reserves the right to refuse accept and distribute student poems at his own discretion.

The responsibility to conduct oneself in a fair and respectful manner also extends to evaluations of the course. Student evaluations are designed to be diagnostic and constructive. They are not the space to enact frustrations over the course material, perceived ideological positions of the instructor, dissatisfaction with grades or poor performance on the assignments. The instructor reserves the right to clarify any misinformation or inaccurate depictions of the course and instruction in written responses appended to student evaluations. Slander will not be tolerated.

Golden Rule & Dispute Resolution Procedures

This course is designed to stimulate and cultivate smart writing about topics that are oftentimes controversial. Therefore, everyone must take extra care to be cordial and tolerant of the views expressed by the authors and seminar participants. Absolutely no dismissive or disrespectful language will be tolerated. We must all respect the fact that many of us are sharing deep personal feelings about issues that are sometimes painful. We will address controversies and resolve conflicts first in class, then in private with the instructor, then with a third party as appropriate. The chain of command, as it were, goes from the faculty to the department chair to the Associate Dean of the college. Absolutely no faculty outside this chain will be allowed to interfere with course material, student assignments and activities or any disputes that may arise. No exceptions.

Electronic Technology Policy
Laptops are permitted but must be visible to the instructor at all times. No Web surfing or email is permitted during class unless the instructor gives explicit permission as part of the course instruction and discussion. The computer can only be used for note taking. No cell phones can be used. All cell phones must be completely turned off—no silent or vibration function is allowed. A cell phone ring or buzz will constitute a class disruption and will be factored into a student’s classroom participation grade. Recordings of class discussions are permitted provided a student inform the instructor before hand. The instructor reserves the right to deny recording permission based on the expression of student concern and his individual judgment. Absolutely no photographs can be taken of students during class. All electronic devices are subject to visual inspection at all times.

**Special Circumstances Clause**

The instructor reserves the right to amend the course assignments and schedule based on student progress, classroom exigencies and any other unforeseen circumstances. All care will be taken to ensure changes do not adversely affect students, but changes should be expected. It should be understood that changes oftentimes are inconvenient for students and instructors alike.
COURSE SCHEDULE

(The following schedule is a general outline for the course, but students should expect changes arising from class pace, special events opportunities and unforeseen exigencies as required.)

I.
All Poetry is Political:
Genre Exercises

AUG 26  Th  Introduction to Course Paradigm & Protocol
  Sign-up for Workshop Submissions
  Readings: Selected Haiku & Sonnets (Handout)
  Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Haiku

AUG 31  T  Readings for Day: Writing Poems, Ch 1 “Starting Out”
  Journal Review 1
  Poem 1 (Option A) Due: Haiku
  Workshop Poem 1 (Option A): Haiku
  Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Haiku

SEP 2   Th  Readings for Day: TBA
  Poem 1 (Option A) Due: Haiku
  Workshop Poem 1 (Option A): Haiku
  Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Sonnet

SEP 7   T  Readings for Day: Writing Poems, Ch 2 “Verse”
  Poem 1 (Option B) Due: Sonnet
  Workshop Poem 1 (Option B): Sonnet
  Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Sonnet

SEP 9   Th  Readings for Day: Sample poems TBA
  Poem 1 (Option B) Due: Sonnet
  Workshop Poem 1 (Option B): Sonnet
  Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Free Verse Elegy

SEP 14  T  Readings for Day: Writing Poems, Ch 3 “Making the Line (I)”; Against Forgetting, selections TBA
  Journal Review 2
  Workshop Poem 2: Elegy
  Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Free Verse Elegy

SEP 16  Th  Readings for Day: Sample poems TBA
  Workshop Poem 2: Elegy
  Poem 2 Due: Elegy
  Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Free Verse Love Poetry
SEP 21  T  **Readings for Day:** *Writing Poems*, Ch 4 “Making the Line (II)”; *Poetry Like Bread*, selections TBA  
**Journal Review 3**  
**Workshop Poem 3:** Love Poem  
**Exercises & Assignment for Next Class:** Free Verse Love Poetry

SEP 23  Th  **Readings for Day:** *Poetry Like Bread*, selections TBA  
**Poem 3 Due:** Love Poem  
**Workshop Poem 3:** Love Poem  
**Exercises & Assignment for Next Class:** Persona Poem Option A—Someone known  
**Special Literary Event:** Homage to Poet Gregg Barrios, 7 p.m. @ Krazy Vatos Emporium, 2342 S. Presa Street

II.  
**The Word, Work & the World:**  
**Writing About Power**

SEP 28  T  **Readings for Day:** *Writing Poems*, Ch 5 “Sound (& Look) of Sense”; *For a Living*, selections TBA; *Poetry Like Bread*, selections TBA  
**Journal Review 4**  
**Poem 4 (Option A) Due:** Persona Poem Option A—Someone you know  
**Workshop Poem 4A:** Persona Poem Option A—Someone you know  
**Exercises & Assignment for Next Class:** Persona Poem Option B—Someone unknown

SEP 30  Th  **Readings for Day:** *For a Living*, selections TBA; *Against Forgetting*, selections TBA  
**Poem 4B Due:** Persona Poem Option B—Someone unknown  
**Workshop Poem 4B:** Persona Poem Option B—Someone unknown  
**Exercises & Assignment for Next Class:** Writing the Domestic Sphere

OCT 5  T  **Readings for Day:** *Writing Poems*, Ch 6 “Subject Matter”; *For a Living*, selections TBA  
**Journal Review 5**  
**Workshop Poem 5:** Domestic Sphere  
**Exercises & Assignment for Next Class:** Writing the Domestic Sphere  
**Required Poetry Reading:** Alurista @ 9:30 a.m. (1604) or 6:30 p.m. (Downtown)

OCT 7  Th  **Readings for Day:** *For a Living*, selections TBA  
**Poem 5 Due:** Writing the Domestic Sphere  
**Workshop Poem 5:** Domestic Sphere  
**Exercises & Assignment for Next Class:** Writing About Violence

OCT 12  T  **Readings for Day:** *Writing Poems*, Ch 7 “Metaphor”; *For a Living*, selections TBA; *Against Forgetting*, selections TBA  
**Journal Review 6**  
**Workshop Poem 6:** Violence  
**Exercises & Assignment for Next Class:** Writing About Violence

OCT 14  Th  **Readings for Day:** *For a Living*, selections TBA; *Against Forgetting*, selections TBA  
**Poem 6 Due:** Violence
Workshop Poem 6: Violence
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Animating the Object

III.
Beyond the Page:
The Visual & Sensual Resonance

OCT 9 T  Readings for Day: Writing Poems, Ch 8 “Tale, Teller, and Tone”; Sample poems TBA
Journal Review 7
Poem 7 (Option) A Due: Object Poem
Workshop Poem 7 (Option A): for those writing Object Poems
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Writing the Ethereal

OCT 21 Th  Readings for Day: Sample poems TBA
Poem 7 (Option B) Due: Ethereal Poem
Workshop Poem 7A: Ethereal Poem
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Dramatic Dialogues

IV.
Shout it Out!:
Spoken Word & Performance Poetry

OCT 26 T  Readings for Day: Writing Poems, Ch 9 “Mysteries of Language”; Spoken Word Revolution, selections TBA
Journal Review 8
Poem 8 Due: Dramatic Dialogue
Workshop Poem 8: Dramatic Dialogue
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Dramatic Dialogue

OCT 28 Th  Readings for Day: Spoken Word Revolution, selections TBA
Poem 8 Due: Dramatic Dialogue
Workshop Poem 8: Dramatic Dialogue
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Slam Poetry (Option A)—Gender Relations

NOV 2 T  Readings for Day: Writing Poems, Ch 10 “Finding the Poem”; Elegies in Blue, Pt. IV; Spoken Word Revolution, selections TBA
Journal Review 9
Poem 9 (Option A) Due: Slam Poem Option A—Gender Relations
Workshop Poem 9 (Option A): Slam Poem—Gender Relations
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Slam Poetry Option B—Race Relations

NOV 4 Th  Readings for Day: Spoken Word Revolution, selections TBA
Poem 9 (Option B) Due: Slam Poem Option B—Race Relations
Workshop Poem 9 (Option B): Slam Poem Option B—Race Relations
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Multimedia/Multidimensional Verse

NOV 9 T  Readings for Day: Writing Poems, Ch 11 “Devising and Revising”; Spoken Word Revolution, selections TBA; Democracy, Culture & the Voice of Poetry
Journal Review 10
Poem 10 (Option A) Due: Multimedia/Multidimensional Poem
Workshop Poem 10: Multimedia/Multidimensional Poem
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Multimedia/Multidimensional Verse

NOV 11  Th  Readings for Day: Spoken Word Revolution, selections TBA; Democracy, Culture & the Voice of Poetry
Poem 10 (Option B) Due: Multimedia/Multidimensional Poem
Workshop Poem 10: Multimedia/Multidimensional Poem
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Ars Poetica

NOV 16  T  Readings for the Day: Writing Poems, Ch 12 “Becoming a Poet”
Multimedia/Multidimensional Poetry Presentations

NOV 18  Th  NO CLASS—AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

NOV 23  T  Readings for Day: Sample Ars Poetica TBA
Poem Workshop: Ars Poetica
Exercises & Assignment for Next Class: Ars Poetica

NOV 25  Th  NO CLASS—HOLIDAY

NOV 30  T  Peer Ars Poetica Workshops

DEC 2  Th  Ars Poetica Presentations

DEC 7  T  NO CLASS—STUDY DAY

DEC 9  Th  Final Research Paper & Portfolios Due by 2:30 p.m. at BV 4.368