

## ENWR 412-01: Advanced Poetry Workshop

Montclair State University, Spring 2011

Instructor: Dr. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett  
Class information: DI 272, M 11:30-2  
Blackboard site: <https://blackboard.montclair.edu>

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Office hours: M 3-5:30pm and by appt.

### Description

This course offers advanced instruction in writing and revising poetry in a workshop setting. Our primary focus will be on students' own literary production—writing and critiquing poems, with occasional writing exercises as the class elects. We will read some contemporary poetry, using our discussions to think beyond the single poem and envision how poems work together in collections. We will also discuss editing and publishing, and students will give presentations on literary journals as part of the course. At the end of the semester, students will produce a chapbook-length collection of poetry and a statement of poetics as part of a capstone project. Concurrent registration in ENGL 364: Contemporary Poetry is suggested but not required. Regular attendance and participation is mandatory.

**Prerequisites:** ENWR 312 and departmental approval. **Satisfies:** 2 Writing, 3 Poetry, TE 3b Poetry.

### Texts (Available at campus bookstore)

*The Art of Description*, Mark Doty  
*Blood Dazzler*, Patricia Smith

### Grading Policy

60% Capstone project and statements of poetics  
20% Attendance, on-time weekly poems, and participation (written and spoken)  
10% Presentation on a literary journal  
10% Book arts project

### Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is defined by the university as “any attempt by a student to submit as his/her own work that which has not been completed by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment, i.e., plagiarism” (view the entire policy at: <http://www.montclair.edu/deanstudents/regulations1.html>).

### In-Class Workshop Etiquette

The purpose of our workshops is not to “fix” poems but rather to help the author discover his or her poem through process. In this regard, our comments in workshop should aim toward the neutral, descriptive, and interrogative—in the words of Janet Burroway, not *What I like* but *What this piece is like*. Only then can we critique whether or not the writing is successful in what it wants to achieve and offer constructive criticism to guide the poem in that direction. As members of a workshop, our goal should be to find a balance in the tenor of our comments; too much praise can be just as poisonous as too much criticism. Finding this balance is the most difficult part of a workshop, but it also can be the most rewarding.

As authors, it is our responsibility to not just to listen to but to *hear* how our readers describe our writing in a non-defensive way. This openness is part of the process of the poem, and entertaining the suggestions of others—even as they may seem to counter our own senses—may be just the thing that gives the writing flight.

In order to encourage this openness, we will for the most part follow the gag rule in workshop: While a piece of writing is being discussed in class, the author should remain silent. There are exceptions to this rule, however, which we will inevitably discover together. As poet Dean Young says, “Poems are birds, not birdcages,” and if they have strong enough wings they deserve to stretch them.

Of course, in all things you are expected to behave with maturity and respect for others. If you exhibit behavior that is threatening or that disrupts the learning experience, disciplinary action will be sought according to university policy.

### **Deadlines and Distribution of Poems**

These workshop drafts, as all assignments, **are due at class time on the date posted** (not that afternoon or evening). Because assignment deadlines are posted with ample advance notice, extensions for assignments will not be granted.

Please pay special attention to when poems are due, for you should not expect that your classmates (or instructor) can and will be available to pick up poems outside of class. If you miss a due date for a poem, you will receive no credit for your participation that week and you may, at the discretion of the instructor, miss your turn at workshop. **Please do not e-mail your poem to the instructor or the entire class after it is due.** This not only creates headaches for each of your class members, it is disrespectful and taxes your classmates' time and resources. Please also make sure you have made enough copies to distribute to everyone in class. Showing up with one copy of your work does not constitute meeting the deadline.

### **If you are absent on a day when an assignment is due, you are still responsible for meeting that deadline.**

You can accomplish this by having a classmate distribute copies of your poem for you. If non-workshop assignments are due (i.e., a paper or review) and you must be absent, you may e-mail it to the instructor. You are also responsible for picking up any handouts or poems that you missed before our next class meets. These will be available in a box outside my office located at Dickson Hall 316, or on Blackboard.

Remember that you should craft your responses to poems before each class meets, not during or after workshop. In the neighborhood of 2-5 sentences is appropriate. In your comments, remember to balance praise with criticism. Most important will be your suggestions on how the poem can move forward in revision and become more successful.

**Please save all drafts of your writing for this class.**

### **Attendance and Participation**

Attendance and participation are required in this course, and both will affect your grade. Missing **more than two classes** constitutes missing a significant part of the course and will affect your final grade. Should you miss class, you are responsible for meeting all assignment deadlines, contacting a member of class in order to keep up with readings and assignments, and notifying the instructor in advance of your absence if possible.

### **Information for Students with Disabilities**

Both the university and I are committed to keeping this classroom and course material accessible. If you have a learning or physical disability, please inform me at the beginning of the course either after class or in office hours. In the rare case where a class assignment is not accessible, an alternative assignment requiring the exercise of equal skill and knowledge can be arranged.

### **Grading Policies**

The purpose of having a full range of grades (A through F) is to represent true levels of academic achievement. Although I'm sure everyone would like to make As or Bs on their class assignments, chances are that not everyone will receive them. When receiving graded assignments, it may help to keep in mind these descriptions of different levels of student achievement:

- F – Represents failure (or no credit) and means that work was either completed at a level not worthy of credit, or not completed at all.
- D – Achievement worthy of credit, but which does not meet assignment/course requirements fully.
- C – Achievement that meets the assignment/course requirements in every respect and shows adequate understanding and application of the course material.
- B – Achievement *significantly above* the level necessary to meet assignment/course requirements. Such work demonstrates good application of instructional material and makes some successful and original connections beyond it.

A – achievement that is *outstanding and unique* relative to the assignment/course requirements. Such work demonstrates clear and accurate independent thought and goes well beyond the application of instructional material to make new scholarly connections and understandings. The student's voice is polished and clearly original.

Please remember that a "C" is not a bad grade, merely an average one; that Bs represent good, above-average work; and As represent excellent work that achieves the very best in undergraduate or graduate thinking and writing. Also remember that in paper-writing assignments, length is independent of quality; a long paper does not necessarily indicate a good paper.

I will occasionally retain copies of student writing or exercises to serve as samples in the future. Please be assured that if I choose your paper as a sample, I will remove any identifying information from it and use it for instructional purposes only. If you prefer that your writing not be used for this purpose, simply let me know.

## SYLLABUS (subject to change)

### WEEK 1: Introduction

Mon. 1/24      Class intro and discussion of policies  
Book analysis (oral) & Poetics statement (written) assigned

### WEEK 2: *The Art of Description*

Mon. 1/31      Discuss Doty's *The Art of Description* (read entire book for class); in-class writing exercises  
**Poem 1 due**

### WEEK 3: Workshop 1

Mon. 2/7      **Poem 2 due; Poetics statement due**  
Workshop Poem 1

### WEEK 4: Workshop 2

Mon. 2/14      **Poem 3 due; Book analyses (oral presentations)**  
Workshop Poem 2

### WEEK 5: Workshop 3

Mon. 2/21      **Poem 4 due; Literary journal presentation assigned**  
Workshop Poem 3

### WEEK 6: Workshop 4

Mon. 2/28      **Poem 5 due**  
Workshop Poem 4

### WEEK 7: Patricia Smith & The Dramatic Monologue

Mon. 3/7      Read: Patricia Smith, Blood Dazzler (BB); Howe, "Chapter 1: Overview" (BB), Browning, "My Last Duchess" (BB)

Tues 3/8      **Patricia Smith Reading, Cohen Lounge, Dickson Hall, 1PM**

3/14- 3/18 SPRING BREAK

### WEEK 8: Workshop 5

Mon. 3/21      **Presentation of literary journals**  
Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
   \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
**Poem 6 due, Workshop Poem 5**  
**Capstone project and poetics statement assigned**

**WEEK 9: Workshop 6**

Mon. 3/28

**Presentation of literary journals**Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_**Poem 7 due**, Workshop Poem 6**WEEK 10: Workshop 7**

Mon. 4/4

**Presentation of literary journals**Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_**Poem 8 due**, Workshop Poem 7**WEEK 11: Book Arts**

Mon. 4/11

Read: P&amp;W Templates (BB)

**Poem 9 due**, Workshop Poem 8**Conference sign-up****WEEK 12: Conferences**

Mon. 4/18

Individual Conferences—meet during your time slot

**WEEK 13: Workshop 9**

Mon. 4/25

**Presentation of books arts projects**

Workshop Poem 9

**WEEK 14: Course Wrap-up**

Mon. 5/2

**Capstone Projects due**