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ENG 2011G-002: Poetry

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"Poetry is life to me," wrote the poet Frank O'Hara. But for many students, poetry has been reduced to bland themes and symbols that are seldom true to the real challenges and pleasures that poetry can offer. This course is an introduction to those real challenges and pleasures. We'll start with two assumptions: (1) that poets arrange words for the same reasons that painters arrange colors and composers arrange notes—to make works of art that are intellectually, aesthetically, and emotionally compelling and (2) that beginning to understand a poem takes time.

In our culture of "continuous partial attention" we'll give continuous full attention to what we're reading.

You should have access to a hardcover collegiate (college-level) dictionary when reading.

I'll record a blank for a missed quiz, not a zero.

"Most of my students do most of the reading. How do I know? Loath as I am to admit it, I have begun giving quizzes."

Teaching at the University of Chicago Law School, Barack Obama had the following sentence on his syllabus:

I know a quiz seems a bit demeaning, but everyone needs motivation once in awhile.

Quizzes are meant to be easy if you do the reading.

Be here, on time, every time. Students who miss class will find it very difficult to do the work of the course.

Missed quizzes and writing cannot be made up. Late writing is acceptable only if you have my approval in advance. If you have a properly verified absence for illness, emergency, or participation in an official University activity, I'll record a blank for a missed quiz, not a zero.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Talking to professors is one of the smartest things a college student can do. Please, come in to ask questions and talk about your work in the class.

If you feel uneasy about talking to your professors, read "How to talk to a professor," available from the URL in the left column.

Before you e-mail me, please read "How to e-mail a professor," available from the URL in the left column. One guideline you don't need to follow: no need to sign with your class number and meeting (I'll know your name).

The atmosphere in our class should be serious—not somber or pretentious, but genuinely intellectual. No eating, talking, sleeping, wandering, texting, drumming, wearing headphones, doing work for other classes, or other private business. Phones and other devices should be turned off and kept out of sight. Please show proper respect to your fellow learners.
DISCUSSION
Consider what the writer Thomas Merton says about a teacher he admired:

Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before. He had "educated" them from you by his question. His classes were literally "education"—they brought things out of you, they made your mind produce its own explicit ideas.

I like to ask questions that make people think. I also like it when people ask me such questions. If you say something and I then ask you a question, I'm doing so in the spirit of dialogue. You should be asking questions too, of me and of one another.

GRADING
Your grade will be based on your written work (30%), quizzes (40%), a final examination (20%), and participation (10%).

Writing assignments receive letter grades. Missing writing receives a zero. Quizzes receive numerical grades. A quiz average of, say, 108% counts as 108 and not as an A (95); a quiz average of, say, 40% counts as 40 and not as an F (55). Participation in the course receives one of five grades: 100 (consistent, relevant, informed), 85 (frequent, relevant, informed), 75 (less frequent or less informed), 50 (occasional), 0 (little or no participation). "Informed" participation is simply participation that comes from having done the reading. You may check on quizzes and participation at any time.

To calculate semester grades, I use numerical equivalents for letter grades:

- A 95
- A- 92
- B+ 87
- B 85
- B- 82
- C+ 77
- C 75
- C- 72
- D+ 67
- D 65
- D- 62
- F 55

Sometimes when I grade an essay I'll compromise—e.g., B+/A-, which falls between the two grades (89.5).

For semester grades, 90 or above is an A; 80 or above, a B; 70 or above, a C; 60 or above, a D; below 60, an F.

EWP
Please make sure that you understand the EWP requirements and fulfill them in a timely way. You can find more information about the EWP at http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
The English Department's statement on plagiarism:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

And my statement concerning academic integrity:

Any breach of academic integrity—from cheating on a quiz to lifting words or ideas without attribution to submitting a wholly unoriginal essay—is a serious matter and will get you a serious penalty. The Student Standards office recommends an F for the course. You will also be required to take a course in ethics administered by Student Standards, whose staff will keep your misconduct on record and notify your other professors that one of their students has violated academic integrity.

You should be familiar with Eastern's statement on academic integrity (posted in classrooms) and should ask if you have any questions about quoting from and/or documenting sources. But because the work of the course is to be an expression of your ideas in your words, questions of plagiarism and collusion should never arise. Do not "borrow" work or give your work to anyone (allowing someone else to make use of your work is also a breach of academic integrity and will also get you a serious penalty, up to and including an F for the course).

PROVISIONAL OUTLINE

1–5: Some elements of poetry
The idea of the "poetry language," music and form, metaphor and simile, other inclinations of the poetry language

6–14: Some poets
William Shakespeare, John Donne, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch

15: Last things