**READINGS IN POETRY – *OF LATE*: POETRY & SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University

**SPRING 2016**

Community-Based Learning

with Writers in Baltimore Schools

and the JHU Center for Social Concern

**Course Description:**

In this course, students will experience poetry as a tool to build communities, express personal truths, bear witness, advocate for change, and engage in social and political commentary. As a community-based learning course, students will explore socially engaged poetry in partnership with high-school age writers from Writers in Baltimore Schools. Participants will put learning into practice by organizing and engaging in community conversation, reflection, and collaboration. Participation in events outside of class time will be required.

Co-facilitators include JP Allen, JHU Writing Seminars graduate student; Jaida Griffin, WBS Teaching Fellow; Shangrila Willy, WBS board member and JHU Writing Program graduate.

**Learning Outcomes / Course Objectives:**

* To acquire a deeper understanding of the intersections of poetry and social justice in historical and contemporary contexts.
* To grow as a writer and member of literary communities, particularly the Baltimore community, by actively engaging with concerns of poetry and social justice in writing and in person.

**Required Texts:**

* Course readings will be provided through handouts and online.
* Instead of financially investing in textbooks for this course, students will invest in and engage with the “texts” of living, active communities of poetry and social justice. Students will be required to be present at live events throughout the semester. Students should be prepared to navigate to events independently, which will most likely mean purchasing a Maryland Transit Administration CharmCard and becoming familiar with public transportation like local bus, the Light Rail, and the MARC train to DC. The free Charm City Circulator is another resource for navigating Baltimore.
* Field trip participation is required at the Split This Rock Poetry Festival: Poems of Provocation & Witness in Washington, DC on April 16. Our group registration rate is $40; if you need a scholarship, you can apply here ASAP: <http://www.splitthisrock.org/programs/festival/2016-poetry-festival/scholarships/>

or sign up to volunteer at the festival in exchange for registration: <http://www.splitthisrock.org/programs/festival/2016-poetry-festival/volunteer/>

(Registration will allow you to attend the *entire* April 14-17 festival.)

Round trip MARC train fare to DC is $16. If you are absolutely unable to attend the field trip, you can attend two other events to make up the absence.

**Procedure / Assignments:**

Students will read assigned texts and complete writing assignments each week, in addition to frequent event attendance. Ongoing written reflection will build connections between community engagement and course materials. Please keep in mind that the schedule is subject to change based on the needs of the class. Preparedness is included in the course participation grade. Students should be prepared to discuss readings and share writing assignments, insights, and questions in class each week. Answering in-class reading questions and/or in-class written reflection is included in the participation grade, along with constructive participation in discussion. Assignments must be turned in on time and will drop a letter grade if they are late; they will drop additional letter grades for each additional day they are late. A number of assignments will be due in multiple forms (on Blackboard and as a hard copy; as a blog post and as a hard copy, etc). Students will complete a final project.

**Plagiarism Policy:**

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this

course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on

exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic

devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and

falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate

dean of student affairs and/or the chairman of the Ethics Board beforehand. See the

guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” and the Ethics Board Web site

(http://ethics.jhu.edu) for more information. A student who is found to have plagiarized an assignment in this course will receive an F for the course, and a notation will be made in departmental records.

**Attendance Policy:**

The Writing Seminars policy is to **fail** a student who misses **more than two weeks** of a course due to unexcused absences. Two unexcused tardy arrivals to class will result in the recording of an unexcused absence. Students who have flu symptoms should not attend class and should isolate themselves to the extent possible until they have been fever-free for 24 hours. Religious holidays are valid reasons to be excused from class. Students who must miss a class because of a religious holiday must inform the instructor as early in the semester as possible in order to be excused from class or to make up any work that is missed. Students earn participation points during each class, so *any* class missed will require a written reflection to make up those points. That written reflection must be submitted by email *before* the next class. Event reflections are due a calendar week after the event.

**Disability Services:**

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must

obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services: 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

**Evaluation:**

Grades will be based on careful completion and comprehension of course readings; active and constructive participation, leadership, and listening in discussions; completion of writing assignments and presentations that engage directly with course materials and outside texts/experiences through rigorous scholarship; high-level creative and academic thought and exploration; and active community engagement.

A (95-100%): Exemplary

A- (90-94%): Excellent

B+ (87-89%): Strong

B (85-87%): Good/Proficient

B- (80-84%)/C+ (77-79%): Satisfactory

C (75-77%): Fair

C- (70-74%): Needs Improvement

D or below: Unsatisfactory/Failure

**Estimated breakdown of course evaluation:**

In-class engagement: 130 pts (10 pts per class)

Community engagement and reflection: 90 pts; (3 Monday evening performances, 10 pts each; 1 field trip, 20 pts; 2 class performances, 10 pts each; 2 independent events, 10 pts each)

Weekly written reflection/connection: 65 (ungraded; 5 pts for timely completion)

Poet/activist interview collaboration: 50 pts

Blog posts: 50 pts (2 posts, 20 pts each)

Final project and reflection: 50 pts

Mid-term and end-of-term reading evaluation: 50 pts (25 pts each)

Additional assignments may be required throughout the course.

**SCHEDULE:**

(Readings and assignments are listed under their due date. Unless otherwise noted, assignments are due by the start of class at 4 pm. Reading assignments may adapt to the needs of the class.)

Monday, January 25: *Cross that line:* Setting Intentions

Community-Based Learning with Writers in Baltimore Schools:

*Who, What, Where, Why, When*: Introductions

Monday, February 1: *Where I’m From*: Beginnings

Readings: (1753 – 1906) “The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America: Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Wheatley,” June Jordan; Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Frances Watkins Harper, Paul Laurence Dunbar; Robert Hayden, Erica Dawson

CBL with WBS: *I am from:* Origins

Monday, February 8: *I came to live out loud*: Oral Traditions

Readings: (1920s – Harlem Renaissance, 1950s – Beat Poets, 1965-75 – Black

Arts Movement, present – BreakBeat Poets)

CBL with WBS: Visiting Editors, Writers, Activists: The BreakBeat Poets –

Quraysh Ali Lansana, Tony Medina, Safia Elhillo

\*\*Evening Performance: The BreakBeat Poets\*\*

Monday, February 15: *What happens to a people*: Poetry of Witness, People’s Poetry

Readings: from *Against Forgetting*, ed. Carolyn Forché

CBL with WBS: *Weaving Our WE*: Collective/Communal Speech

Monday, February 22: *Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori*: War, Poetry, Protest

Readings: from *Against Forgetting*, ed. Carolyn Forché

CBL with WBS: *“You, Robert McNamara”*: Calling Out, Calling In

[First Public Reading: TBD]

Monday, February 29: *Poetry is not a luxury*: Feminism, Gender, Sexuality

Interview Rough Draft Due

Readings: Excerpts from *Nepantla*, Adrienne Rich, Mark Doty, Danez Smith, Loma, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”

CBL with WBS: *All that we see or seem*: Expectations of Self/Others

Monday, March 7: *They don’t tell you this when you migrate*: Poetry Without Borders

Readings: Warsan Shire, Fatimah Asghar, Rich Villar

CBL with WBS: Visiting Writer, Editor, Activist: Christopher Soto (aka Loma)

\*\*Evening Performance: Loma\*\*

No class, Monday, March 14 (JHU Spring Break)

Monday, March 21: Poetry of Conscience, Poetry of Dissent

Reading: “Poetry and History: Polish Poetry after the End of the World,” Edward Hirsch; excerpt from *Against Forgetting*; poems of the Black Arts Movement

CBL with WBS: Visiting Writers, Musicians, Editors, Activists:

Thomas Sayers Ellis, Ailish Hopper, Randall Horton

\*\*Evening Performance: Heroes Are Gang Leaders\*\*

Monday, March 28: *Who Am I, Without Exile?*: Writing What Shapes Us

Reading: “Tell It Slant: How to write a wise poem,” Camille T. Dungy; Darwish

Interview Final Draft Due

CBL with WBS: *maybe we can go back to then*: Counterfactual Encounters

Monday, April 4: Looking Around, Looking Forward

Reading: Adrienne Rich Essays: “Defy The Space That Separates,” “Why I Refused The National Medal For the Arts”

*Sí Se Puede* (*Yes, It Is Possible*): Creating Alternate Realities

Monday, April 11: Making Histories Our Own

Reading: “For the Sake of People’s Poetry: Walt Whitman and the Rest of Us,” Jordan

CBL with WBS: *In this version*: Retelling and Re-Vision

\*\*Saturday, April 16: Split This Rock Festival Field Trip\*\*

Monday, April 18, 5:00 – 6:20 pm: At Present

CBL with WBS: *How to*: Taking “Authority,” Taking Action

Monday, April 25, 5:00 – 6:20 pm: Celebrate

Rehearse for Final Performance, Discuss Next Steps (Personal and Communal)

[Second Public Reading: TBD]

Final Projects Due: Monday, May 2 (Engaged Fellow Event)