This seminar will seek to create a community of writers willing to take on the challenge of spending a year writing original poetry and insightful, analytical prose. This course will neither be a traditional literary seminar nor a standard creative writing workshop, but will be based on the belief that creative activity and theoretical inquiry complement each other and can open up new ways to think about writing and reading. We will read poetry from a diverse group of writers complemented by theory in cultural studies.

The most important thing students must bring to this seminar is not expertise in cultural studies or experience in creative writing classes, but a strong desire to commit to a year of serious writing and reading. The crucial element for you to be successful in this class is a commitment to develop your critical and creative voice, and a willingness to be open-minded that many of the ideals and standards we hold dear about beautiful language, the necessity of universal meaning, and the elements that constitute an important piece of literature do not exist outside their cultural construction.

The course will begin with exploring traditional forms in English, move to a focus on the Persona poem, and conclude with an examination of Spoken Word. Our poems shall negotiate some of the same territory as the diverse writers we read, and our analytical prose will build on the work of new historicist and critical race theorists. We shall vigorously interrogate the methods of consideration of poetry in the university, and examine the divorce between the lively world of poetry outside the academy and what constitutes the study of poetry in most colleges.

Some of the questions we might ask. How does form reflect the cultural realities of power and influence? Why are some types of verse privileged as important and valuable while others are ignored? How do we as writers engage our own cultural moments with an intellectual level of risk that can make us better poets? We will explore a variety of poets (most of them woman, many of them individuals of color) texts about craft and cultural studies, and numerous videos and documentaries about poetry, aesthetics, and culture.

All English Majors Welcome
(Please scroll down for a full course description)
“it is possible to have an epistemology that sees creative writing, composition, and literature as false distinctions, that sees all text making and text interpretation as a single process within which exists only illusory boundaries.”

(Hans Ostrom)

Seminar Objectives

- Experience a diverse group of contemporary poets
- Understand the basic concepts of new historicism and critical race theory
- Create a manuscript combining original poetry and insightful theoretical prose

Introduction

This seminar will mesh two activities that are usually separate in English departments: creative writing and cultural studies, and in the process create a community of writers willing to take on the challenge of spending a year writing original poetry and writing insightful analytical prose. In the article *Teaching Creative Writing if the Shoe Fits*, Katharine Haake observes that, “Since the first writing classes were developed at Iowa, teaching creative writing has largely conformed to the model of a text-centered workshop where apprentice writers come together to craft poetry, prose and drama and offer it for criticism to peers and the master writer.” We will disregard this format, and instead base our time together on the belief that creative activity and theoretical inquiry complement each other and can open up new ways to think about writing and reading. The master apprentice hierarchy will be replaced with a seminar model that considers all of us as members of a discourse community in which each person has a responsibility to participate in a meaningful way. This will be the core value of the seminar, and students will have a major role in constructing the intellectual shape of the seminar. I will provide some general guidelines and the intellectual material, but it is up to us as a discourse community to determine the way we shall reach our final goals.

Methodology

This seminar does not expect participants to have experience in either cultural studies or creative writing: we will spend the first semester and one/half honing our "rhetorical chops" with a variety of exercises and assignments that will evolve into the final project. One of the ways we will break from the Eurocentric model of the modern creative writing workshop is by reading a diverse group of poets in tandem with theorists that practice the variants of cultural criticism labeled new historicism and critical race theory. We will read poetry from a diverse group of writers complemented by theory in cultural studies and prose focused on helping us become better creative writers. This
The seminar will be a process of learning for all of us, and it will be designed to accommodate writers with a range of experiences (including those with no experience with cultural studies or creative writing). The only requirement is that you be prepared to spend a year engaged in serious writing, both creatively and critically, and that you be open to trying new things in order to improve.

**Organization**

The seminar will be separated into three distinct parts; final projects can focus on one particular area or combine two or more to address a particular student interest:

1. English Prosody and Traditional Rhyme and Meter
2. Dramatic Monologue and the Contemporary Persona Poem

**Final Product**

The goal of the seminar will be to produce a mixed manuscript of original poetry and insightful cultural criticism, along with an oral presentation that effectively conveys the intellectual heft of your project. The final text will be about thirty pages (fifteen pages of poems and fifteen to twenty pages of theoretical prose). Of course the specific subject of the final project will be conceived and developed by the student with input from the rest of the seminar, but all projects will center around one of the three categories of poetry we have studied in class.

**Books and Films**

*(This list is tentative and will not be finalized until 8/15/2013 because some texts might be out of print)*

We will use a variety of texts about craft and cultural studies, along with numerous videos and documentaries about poetry, aesthetics, and culture. Many of the texts will be provided to you via PDF files or will be reserved in the library. However, you will be expected to purchase the books of poetry and the text *Poetry and Cultural Studies*.

We will read selections from these texts, and they will be placed on reserve in the library.

**Craft**

- Baer, William *Writing Metrical Poetry: Contemporary Lessons for Mastering Traditional Forms*
- Oliver, Mary *Rules for the Dance*
- From Totems to Hip-Hop: *A Multicultural Anthology of Poetry Across the Americas 1900-2002* ed, by I. Reed

**Culture**

- Barker, Chris *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*
- bell hooks *Remembered Rapture: the Writer at Work*
- Anzaldúa, Gloria *Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman*
You are expected to purchase these texts, and they will be 30 to 40 per cent cheaper if you make arrangements to purchase them online or straight from the publisher.

**Poetry**
- Smith, Patricia *Shoulda Have Been Jimi Savannah*
- Boland, Evan *In A Time of Violence*
- Levine Philip *New Selected Poems*
- Clifton, Lucille *Collected Poems*
- Hays, Terrence *Wind in a Box*
- Dawes, Kwame *Wheels*
- Muske-Dukes, *Twin Cities*
- Pollitt, Katha *The Mind Body Problem*
- Rosal Patrick *American Kundiman*
- Jess, Tyhembia *Leadbelly*