

Dr. Tina Barr

Creative Writing: Introductory Poetry Workshop, Course 200  
Office, 307 Palmer Hall, (901) 843-3979

You can also email me at: [TinaBarr@rhodes.edu](mailto:TinaBarr@rhodes.edu); I will be in the office for **office hours** on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:00 to 11:00 am. **If you need to reach me, I may be working at home (725-1443), so call both numbers. I don't have email at my house.**

**Course Content, Objectives and Goals:** This course is designed to introduce students to principles of good poetry, with readings in a manual of prosody, readings of work by outside writers and several brief essays from Hugo's *The Triggering Town*. Students are expected to *analyze and prepare to discuss the poems and essays they read, so that they will make significant contributions to class discussion*. Some assignments will be more difficult and require more effort than others. If you apply yourself and make a strong effort to work at the reading and writing, your experience of this course will be richer. **Please don't hesitate to share your own interests with the class, by bringing in work by writers whose poems you admire.** The more each member contributes in different ways to the workshop the more interesting it will be. If you are willing to be guided in your writing, experiment with exercises, and listen to suggestions for improving your work, you will gain important skills and your poetry will improve.

**Required Texts:** *The Poem's Heartbeat* by Alfred Corn, Story Line Press, 1997; *Coursepack*; *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo, Norton, 1979; *The Practice of Poetry*, edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell, Harper, 1992. Please note: *The Coursepack has more material than we can cover.*

**Course Requirements:** **1.** Students must attend carefully to the **reading requirements** and contribute significantly to class discussion. **2.** Students must turn in a **portfolio** of poems at midterm and at end of term; these should consist of a folder of *final* copies of all the poems you have worked on, even those you don't feel are as strong. Portfolios at end of term should consist of 10-14 poems. Excellence is more important than quantity, and usually comes after careful revision, but include all the poems you've written, since the professor will decide on a grade based on the strongest elements in the work. Midterm grades tend to be conservative, so grades can go up considerably, but may well remain the same for a final grade. **3.** Students will prepare **responses to and questions on the work of a particular poet** included in the syllabus; they will open up class discussion on that poet with reference to the assigned reading in the Alfred Corn manual on prosody and, if relevant, the Hugo chapters. Provide a bit of biographical information, but **take us through questions on an individual poem you have been assigned. Do not lecture.** You are, in effect, teaching the poem. Consider these **oral reports** seriously. You will be graded on them. If I feel the class needs to be prodded in terms of careful attention to the assigned reading, I may surprise the class with spontaneous quizzes, which will be graded.

**Absences:** You should not miss more than two classes per semester. If you must miss a class, you must contact the professor via email or by phone to explain your absence.

More than 3 absences results in a reduction in your final grade. You are expected to be on time for class.

**Grading:** Grades are based on talent as demonstrated in the poems, but achievement in poetry is usually the result of the *work* of editing and revising. It is a discipline. Careful reading of fellow students' work, careful reading of assigned texts, class participation, effort and attitude also count. The professor has been known to reduce a final grade based on attitude alone. Your portfolio counts for 70% of the grade, with 15% based on the oral report and 15% based on class contribution.

**Procedures:** Students will be responsible for turning in **two copies** of each poem they want discussed in class. **Students must turn in two copies.** One will go into the packet I prepare for discussion; the other will go to the excellent department secretary, Gail Stroud, for duplication. The poem will be returned to the student unless he or she turns in two copies. **When packets are handed out, students should go over them before the next class period, make written comments and notations, and be prepared to offer feedback.** I will spot check your written comments.

**Conferences:** Conferences are extremely important for developing your poems. Many students resist sharing more personal poems with the class, and these are the ones you may bring to conference. **You will meet with me two or three times during the semester.** Students should feel free to consult with me if they have difficulty with their writing, would like to share poems with me rather than the class, or have questions.

Please note: You should **prepare the weekend before**, for the coming week. For most of the sessions we will discuss the assigned readings on Tuesdays, and the student work on Thursdays; at other times we may begin discussion with student poems on Tuesdays.

**Week 1      1/11**

Introductions, paired interviews, class requirements, in-class exercises, sign up for conferences next week.

*Assignment for next week:* Work on revision of drafts done for in-class writing exercises. (self-portrait, aromatherapy) **Bring copies of both poems to your conference, as well as any other poems you'd like me to look at. I want to see you all individually at the start of the semester. If you were unable to sign up for a conference, call me and arrange a time.**

*Assignment for 1/23 & 1/25* Read in *Coursepack* poems by May Swenson, Ellen Bryan Voigt, and Lucille Clifton. Read in Hugo's *The Triggering Town* chapters 1 and 2. Do an exercise from Part 1 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Turn in **two copies** of the results of this effort, and any other poem(s) you would like discussed in class, Tuesday 1/23 during the class period.

**Week 2**      **1/16 & 1/18 Conference Week** (You will each meet with me in conference individually. Bring two copies of each of the exercises you have done in class, and don't worry about how good they are!) We'll discuss them together and I'll give you suggestions and responses.

*Assignment for 1/23 & 1/25* Read in *Coursepack* poems by May Swenson, Ellen Bryan Voigt, & Lucille Clifton. Read in Hugo's *The Triggering Town* chapters 1 and 2. Do an exercise from Part 1 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Turn in **two copies** of the results of this effort, and any other poem(s) you would like discussed in class, next Tuesday during the class period.

**Week 3**      **1/23 & 1/25**

Discussion of "Movie" poems on Tuesday, and excerpts from *The Triggering Town*. Barr drafts and revision recommendations handout. (In-class exercises if time permits)

*Assignment for next week* Read in *Coursepack* poems by Knight, Lux and Frost, the introduction and chapters 1 and 2 in *The Poem's Heartbeat* in conjunction with the Frost poems, and another exercise from Part 1 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Turn in **2 copies** of your exercise and/or any other poem(s) on Tuesday at the opening of the class period. Read handout "To Show or Not to Show."

**Week 4**      **1/30 & 2/1**

Discuss "To Show or Not to Show." Discussion of Knight, (video) Lux and Frost (stanza, blank verse) and Corn chapters, student poems.

*Assignment for next week* Read in *Coursepack* poems by Robert Hass: "Happiness," "Our Lady of the Snows," and "Forty Something" as well as the Gluck poem "Dedication to Hunger." Complete an exercise from Part 2 of *The Practice of Poetry*.

**Week 5**      **2/6 & 2/8**

Discussion of Hass and Gluck poems, as well as student poems. Discussion of poems and grading, including examples of poems.

*Assignment for next week* Read the poems by Sterling Brown in the coursepack. Complete another exercise from Part 2 in *The Practice of Poetry*. Read chapter 3 on "Metrical Variation" in *The Poem's Heartbeat*. **Midterm portfolios due on 2/20.**

**Week 6**      **2/13 No class on 2/13. Dr. Barr will be in the office for conferences. We will have class on 2/15 (Dr. Barr will be reading her poetry at Burke's Book Store on Thursday evening. )**

On Thursday: discussion of poems by Brown and chapter 3 of Corn, student poems. Turn in poems.

*Assignment for next week* **Midterm portfolios due on 2/20.** Read in *Coursepack* Olds' "The Swimming Race," and "May, 1968," "The Hand," and "First Formal." Read chapters 4 & 5 in *The Poem's Heartbeat*. Complete an exercise in *The Practice of Poetry*, part 3A. Turn in **2 copies** next Tuesday.

**Week 7        2/20 & 2/22 Midterm Portfolios due.**

Discussion of Olds poems and chapters 4 & 5 of Corn. Turn in exercise. **Midterm portfolios due on 2/20, no exceptions.**

*Assignment for next week* Read in *Coursepack* Yeats's poems "When You are Old," "The Second Coming," and Auden's "Lullaby," and Roethke's "The Waking." Read in Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town*, chapters 4 and 5. Read in Alfred Corn's *The Poem's Heartbeat* chapters 6 and 7. (You have now completed all required reading on prosody and in the Hugo text!!) Complete exercise from Part 4 of *The Practice of Poetry*. **I'm giving you a heavy assignment, so you need not work over Fall Break.**

**Week 8        2/27 & 3/1**

Discussion of Yeats, Auden and Roethke poems. Discussion of Hugo and Corn's essays, student poems

***Spring Break: No Assignment.***

**Week 9        3/13 & 3/15**

Complete discussion from before the break, in-class exercises. Type up in-class exercises and hand in next Tuesday.

*Assignment for next week* Type up revisions of in-class exercises and hand in next Tuesday. Complete one of the exercises in Part 5 of *The Practice of Poetry*.

**Week 10       3/20 & 3/22**

Discussion of student poems

*Assignment for next week* I'd like you to read Larkin's "High Windows," Bishop's "The Fish," Lowell's "Skunk Hour" in your coursepack. Complete a writing exercise from Part 6 of *The Practice of Poetry*.

**Week 11       3/27 & 3/29 Visiting Fiction Writer Jayne Anne Phillips in Blount at 7:30 pm on 3/29. Be There; you'll love her and her work!**

Discussion of work by Larkin, Bishop and Lowell, student poems. Turn in your writing exercise.

*Assignment for next week:* Read poems by Sylvia Plath.

**Week 12      4/3 & 4/5**

Discussion of work by Plath, video of “Ariel,” student work.

*Assignment for next week:*. Read in coursepack poems by Yusef Komunyakaa (end of coursepack) “Salt,” and “Work.” Do exercise from Part 7 of *The Practice of Poetry*.

**Week 13      4/10**

Discussion of work by Komunyakaa on Tuesday (video?) and student poems.

***Easter Break: No assignment for next week:*** *Work on revisions of poems in preparation for turning in your portfolio on 4/24*

**Week 14      4/17**

**No class: Dr. Barr will be available during class period on 4/17 in her office for conferences. She will be attending the Associated Writing Programs Conference on 4/19.**

**Week 15      4/24 & 4/26**

Turn in portfolios, Evaluations, student poems, exercises. Class party, bring in a favorite poem by yourself or outside author.