

# The Poetry Chapbook: JTerm 2025 Syllabus

**Mondays** 10:30am-12:30pm

**Tuesdays** 10:30-12:30pm

**Wednesdays** 1-4pm

**Thursdays** 10:30am-12:30pm

**Instructor:** Margaret Ray

**Email:** mray@middlebury.edu

**Office Hours:** [scheduled TBA + by appointment]

## I. Course Description:

In this course we will consider the form of the poetry chapbook. At around 15-30 pages (shorter than a full-length single-author collection of poetry), the chapbook is its own delightful form which often allows a poet to bring together a small set of poems that might share formal elements or might orbit a specific topic, theme, or narrative arc. Some chapbooks are more playful or experimental than the same poet's full-length books. Some poets' chapbooks become the seeds of future full-length books. In this course we will read and discuss an eclectic set of chapbooks by diverse contemporary poets, and we will work toward completing chapbooks of your own by the end of January, workshopping drafts along the way.

## II. Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will:

- Have developed ideas (out loud in daily discussion and in weekly written papers) about the chapbook as a form in contemporary American poetry
- Be a reader of contemporary poetry attentive to poetic form, context, language, organization, point of view, structure, etc.
- Have written and arranged a chapbook of original poems
- Be able to situate (in a written author's statement) that chapbook in the context of our course readings and discussions
- Developed skills as a critical friend / poet-to-poet reader of and writer about poem drafts by peer poets
- Be a generous and collaborative contributor to workshops of poem-drafts by peer poets
- Have developed a near-daily writing practice for the duration of J Term, a practice that could be carried on well beyond January

### III. Course Materials:

\*Ordering chapbooks directly from their small presses is the best and most reliable way to acquire these texts (which are often small print run editions)

#### **These are the chapbooks you need your own copy of:**

*Salat* by Dujie Tahat (Tupelo Press, 2020)

*The Animal After Whom Other Animals are Named* by Nicole Sealey (Northwestern University Press, 2016)

*Lunch Poems* by Frank O'Hara (City Lights Books, 1964)

*The Trees Witness Everything* by Victoria Chang

*The Breakup* by Mag Gabbert (Cooper Dillon Books, 2024)

*Writing Your Name on the Glass* by Jim Whiteside (Bull City Press)

#### **For our book clubs, we're likely to draw from this list (you don't need your own copy):**

*The Book of Repulsive Women* by Djuna Barnes (originally Bruno's Chapbooks, now Carcanet, 1915)

*Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas (Tupelo Press, 2024)

*GESUNDHEIT!* By Chen Chen & Sam Herschel Wein (Glass Poetry Press, 2019)

*Relational* by Diana Cao (Sixth Finch Books, 2024)

*Lace & Pyrite* by Ross Gay and Aimee Nezhukumatathil (Get Fresh Books, 2014)

*Letters from the Interior* by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha (Diode Editions, 2019)

More TBD

- You should also have a **physical notebook** and **pens or pencils** in every class for our generative writing prompts

### IV. Course Structure:

Our course will have a significant, **daily discussion component** as well as regular **workshop discussions** of your original poetry. Come prepared to think out loud with us each day about our readings, and about your classmates' poetry.

#### **We'll do 4 types of writing in this class:**

- Original poems building towards your final chapbook (daily)
- Analytical papers (weekly)
- Descriptive letters to peer-poets (weekly)
- Author's statement (at the end of term)

## Grading Information:

Your final grade will be built from the following components:

Daily Discussion & Workshop Participation = **20%**

Weekly analytical papers (x3) = **20%**

Weekly Peer Reader letters (x3) = **20%**

Weekly submission of 5 poems (completion for effort and original work x3) = **20%**

Final Chapbook (end of term) + author's statement = **20%**

## V. Relevant Policies:

**Academic Integrity:** As an academic community devoted to the life of the mind, Middlebury requires that every student engage in complete intellectual honesty in the preparation and submission of all academic work. Details of our Academic Honesty, Honor Code, and Related Disciplinary Policies are available in [Middlebury's handbook](#).

**Honor Code Pledge:** The Honor Code pledge reads as follows: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment." It is the responsibility of the student to write out in full, adhere to, and sign the Honor Code pledge on all examinations, research papers, and laboratory reports. Faculty members reserve the right to require the signed Honor Code pledge on other kinds of academic work.

**\*NB: In our class, "authorized aid" comes from the fellow poets in this class, as well as other (appropriately credited) humans in your life who might be your existing trusted "first readers" of the poems you write. AI is not "authorized aid" for any of the writing we will do this term.**

**Disability access/accommodation:** Students who have Letters of Accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact me as early in the semester as possible to ensure that I can implement relevant accommodations in a timely fashion.

For those without Letters of Accommodation, assistance is available to eligible students through the [Disability Resource Center](#) (formerly called Student Accessibility Services). All discussions will remain confidential.

Please contact one of the ADA Coordinators at [ada@middlebury.edu](mailto:ada@middlebury.edu) for more information.

## VI. Expectations of Students

### **Participation & Classroom Environment:**

This class seeks to build a community of writers and thinkers together, in which we regularly hear from all voices.

Writers get better in community and in conversation; accordingly, we will think of our class as a publishing house or a team, in which the goal is to help each poet write the best versions of the poems they're working to write.

Years from now, when you see each other's work out in the world, you should be able to joyfully shout (as the writer Kaveh Akbar does about his friends' publishing success) "that's my teammate!"

#### **Good daily participation looks like:**

- Coming to class having **annotated & marked up the readings** with ideas, reactions, and questions to draw from in discussion
- A willingness to **think out loud**, to voice thoughts you're not sure about, to try out ideas that aren't yet fully formed (you don't need to speak in thesis statements or fully-formed thoughts!)
- A willingness to raise **questions** of all kinds
- A habit of **attentive listening** to others as they think out loud or try out ideas or questions
- A way of **making visible/audible** (both in body language and in speech) **curiosity** about both what we read and what others are saying and writing

More on the specifics of [\*\*Workshop Norms elsewhere\*\*](#), but here are the most important points about any discussions of student work:

- ★ We will always default to talking about the **speaker** of the poem as separate from the **author** of the poem (even if there are some overlaps in identity markers).
- ★ Workshop discussions of student work will be supportive, collaborative, and generous in spirit. Any comments or behaviors that undermine the shared project of mutual care, dignity, and growth will be addressed if they come up (though I don't expect them to).

### **Attendance:**

Because your active, vocal, daily participation is an important component of how this class will work and be useful to each of you, class attendance is also important. **Because every case is different (people get sick in different ways, family emergencies happen), I don't have a hard and fast rule about what number of missed classes will trigger a lower participation grade, but if you miss too many classes without well-communicated and reasonable extenuating circumstances, it will affect your participation grade.** This is because, of course, you haven't been present to participate!

Our class is a brief, rare gathering of friendly people who are working on a shared project of human creativity. We're working together to make meaning of our lives through poetry, and doing so in community. There are hundreds of intangible things you will miss if you aren't in class that can't be "made up" in a meaningful way without the class community all together.

**If you need to miss a class because of illness or other personal reasons, please email me as soon as you know that, especially if you are up for workshop on a day you need to miss, so that I can rearrange the workshop schedule.**

If you must miss class for illness or personal reasons, we will work together to make an adjusted schedule for you to hand in written work on a reasonable timeline.

### **Late work & Extensions:**

If you need to hand in something late due to unforeseen circumstances (illness etc), **please email me to ask for an extension as soon as you know you need one.** I will always say yes, but it's helpful to be able to plan workshops and feedback schedules accordingly.

Because of the fast pace of J-Term, I'll want to work with you to set a reasonable deadline to help you get that work in as soon as possible, so you don't get too backed up by the end of the month...AND because pacing out the written work (rather than doing it all at once) will help you get the most out of this course.

Work that comes in late without any prior communication may be subject to a departmental late penalty.

**FYI:** When handing back feedback on written work, I'll prioritize handing back work that came in on time. Work that comes in late (either with or without an extension) will end up at the back of my queue of turning around feedback as I work through student work in the order I receive it.

### **Screens in class:**

Because our class is a small, workshop and discussion-based class, computers and other screens would interfere with our collective connection, concentration, and attention to one another and the work under discussion.

When screens are open, we tend to look at them instead of at each other. That's what the screens are designed to get us to do! Open laptops are a temptation to even the *most* focused among us, who all have normal, human lulls in attention during discussions. **I'd rather we have a good old-fashioned Gaze-Out-the-Window or doodle on paper during those moments of mind-wandering, instead of having to spend energy from the finite store of self-control in our brain trying to resist checking our email, opening a new tab, etc.**

There is now also [lots of research](#) that [suggests](#) that we actually *think and learn* better when taking notes by hand rather than typing. ([Read here for a kind of overview.](#))

Since we're a writing class, I'm going to ask us to lean into something lots of published writers do: **drafting poems by hand**, journaling and notebooking by hand...and extend that into also taking some notes by hand when possible.

**For the above reasons, I will ask that we keep our computers and screen devices closed during class unless you have a processing difference that is greatly aided by typing notes during discussion.** If such a learning accommodation applies to you, I ask that you look up from your computer as much as possible to make eye contact with us in the room, and to slide your computer back from you (or shut it) when you're not actively taking notes.

The goal here is to be in friendly community in the room.

**Sharing poetry you've written can be vulnerable. A room feels friendlier when no one looks distracted behind a screen.**

## VII. Relevant Campus Resources:

**Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research:** The CTR provides academic support for students in many specific content areas and in writing across the curriculum through both professional tutors and peer tutors. The Center is also the place where students can find assistance in time- management and study skills. These services are free to all students. For more information on how to get the help you need, go to the [CTR's student resource page](#).

*The Writing Center* is an academic hub for students on campus. It encourages meaningful, exploratory writing. The trained professional and peer tutors (many of whom are embedded in FYS and CW intensive writing courses) are available to work with students on many different types of writing, as well as on the emotional

(motivation, confidence, engagement) and cognitive (process, genre, metacognitive) elements of writing. Students are encouraged to schedule appointments wherever they are in their writing process (pre-writing/brainstorming, synthesizing information, revising, etc.)

**Disability Resource Center:** The DRC provides support for students with disabilities and facilitates the accommodations process by helping students understand the resources and options available and by helping faculty understand how to increase access and full participation in courses. The DRC can also provide referrals for students who would like to undergo diagnostic testing. Students who are on financial aid and have never undergone diagnostic testing can apply to the CTLR for support to cover the cost of off-campus testing. DRC services are free to all students.

## VIII. Course Calendar:

### Dates for assignments:

#### Week 1

- Short Paper 1 - **Thurs, Jan 8th**
- 5 new poems due - also **Thurs, Jan 8th**

#### Week 2

- Reader letter 1 due - **Mon, Jan 12th**
- Short Paper 2 due - **Wed, Jan 14th**
- 5 new poems due - **Thursday, Jan 15th**

#### Week 3

- Reader letter 2 due - **Tues, Jan 20th**
- Short Paper 3 due - **Wed, Jan 21st**
- 5 new poems due - **Thurs, Jan 22nd**

#### Week 4

- Reader letter 3 due - **Mon, Jan 26th**
- **Final Chapbook + Author's Statement due - Thurs, Jan 29th**

**Daily / Weekly schedule for class (includes readings, writings, etc)**

*\*NOTE: Expect revisions along the way, usually to workshop schedule b/c of unforeseen absences, sometimes to reading schedule. If we change the date of a major assignment listed above, I will email the class, but that is less likely.*

*(Do not print & rely on hard copy - refresh Canvas each day to guarantee you're looking at the most updated version)*

 Daily Schedule The Poetry Chapbook Jterm 26