

INFORMATION SHEET

Professor Kevin Clark

English 511: MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

Taught in the seminar style, English 511 is a graduate level survey of the most important American poems since EA Robinson. We will be considering broad trends in the poetry of the last 100 hundred years, and we will be engaging in close readings of key poems, including many of those by writers on the MA exam. The course will also provide critical background as well as practice in explication. Students are encouraged to participate in discussion every class meeting.

We will be reading poems from the *Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* (third edition). Page numbers indicate the page in the Norton Anthology on which the assigned poem begins. If more than one poem begins on the page noted, please read the poem signified by the key word in parentheses. Poems and essays in quotation marks can be found in the supplemental booklet. While we will not concentrate on the poets in brackets, you are responsible for reading them and for being ready to respond to questions about them. Note dates for presentations as well as final paper theses and prospecti. All students are encouraged to attend literary readings.

Classroom:

OFFICE: 47-26H (FOB)

OFFICE HOURS:
(or by appointment)

TELEPHONE: 756-2506 (Office)
756-2596 (Department Office--messages only)
544-3034 (Home--between 9AM and 8PM only)

EMAIL: kclark@calpoly.edu

WEB SITE: <http://cla.calpoly.edu/engl/faculty/kclark>
(See "teaching" on my web site for my pedagogical statement.)

BOOKLIST: *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry, vol 1 and 2 (3rd ed)*
Supplemental Booklet
handouts
dictionary and thesaurus

PREREQUISITE: Graduate standing in English
(see catalog)

ESSAY FORMAT: Make sure you use a good quality printer. Your name and the page number should be in the upper right corner of all pages. **Staple** all papers in upper left corner. Please do not supply blank title pages or any type of cover. *Your basic style guide should be the **MLA Handbook**, a post-1984 edition.* If you are using a word-processing program, twelve point font is standard.

Note: Though it rarely happens that an instructor loses an assignment, you are **required** to make copies of all your assignments **before** submitting them. All work must be done in order to receive a grade.

GRADING: in-class report (20%) 15 minutes
essay (80%) 15-20 pages/appr 4000-5000 words
(attendance and discussion are mandatory)

PRESENTATIONS: Each presentation will be an explication of a poem. (See syllabus for choice of poems.) An explication is, of course, a discussion of what a poem means and how it communicates its meaning. Generally an explication establishes a thesis which includes two primary components: (1) the "meaning" of the poem and (2) a brief but specific description of the poem's primary techniques (usually two or three). A caution regarding techniques: Overly broad terms are unacceptable; thus, the terms "symbolism" or "contrasts" are inadequate, while the phrases "the symbol of the fragmenting city" or "the contrasting images of human and animal life" are fine.

Remember: An explication is not primarily biographical or historical, though it may include *pertinent* aspects of biography and history for context. Above all, it is not a rewording of the poem, though you will undoubtedly want to paraphrase for explanation and concision.

Students are required to provide a comprehensive written outline of the explication for the class. (Duplicate for all members of the class.) The outline should include the following: (a) your name, (b) date, (c) title of presentation, (d) clear thesis, (e) supporting observations, (f) brief textual evidence. PLEASE SEE SUPPLEMENTAL BOOKLET FOR EXAMPLES OF GOOD OUTLINES.

Practice your presentation beforehand. If the poem you are explicating is reasonably short, you should read it. If it's long, you should read key passages of your choosing. You don't have to worry about the reading taking too long; your fifteen minutes will begin after the reading. Make sure you can complete the presentation *comfortably* within fifteen minutes.

If you think you may not be able to make the presentation at the appointed date, notify me *at least one week in advance*.

THESIS and PROSPECTUS: In order to facilitate the writing of your final paper, I am requiring that you submit a thesis and, later, a PROSPECTUS. (Note due dates on syllabus.) I will not hold students to their thesis and abstract, though changing your central idea at the last minute involves obvious risks. You may alter your thesis at any point, right up to the day you submit your final essay. A thesis is obviously an assertive statement of the argument you will develop over the course of the essay. An abstract includes your thesis, elements predicting the paper's outline, and a list of at least three secondary sources you will be using. Though you may use web listings in your paper, you must use at least five library sources and these must be included in the abstract. Remember: The prospectus is a comprehensive summation of your argument; it should be no more than 300 words.

Note on the Final Paper: The Final Essay is to be a research paper on the topic of your choice. You may write about any of the work we read this quarter, including the poem you explicated. Unless you receive explicit permission from me, you may not simply explicate a poem. I expect the final paper's thesis to be an original idea worthy of graduate-level thought. You should not simply repeat what we've discussed in class; for instance, if you

are writing about Eliot's "Little Gidding," then you must bring some new perspective to the discussion, one which was not considered during our class conversation. Students may simply delve deeply into a single poem of substance and find multiple layers of meaning. Others may focus on the particularly salient use of key poetic techniques.

There are, in fact, many ways to approach your final essay. You may write a sophisticated compare-and-contrast essay about two poems (including, if you choose, the poem you explicated) or you may write about an entirely different subject concerning our reading. You may also write an essay about any modern or contemporary poet that we have not read, as long as you receive my permission ahead of time.

I have often received excellent papers on cross-disciplinary subjects. For example, some students may be fluent in a foreign language and thus be equipped to discuss the influence of foreign language poets on a modern American poet. Other students may be able to apply certain principals from the psychological disciplines to their subject. Still other students may know something about musical theory and apply their knowledge to the poetry under discussion. Many graduate students are especially familiar with specific types of critical theory and can bring a specialized perspective to the work at hand.

Because the essay is a "research paper," I expect each student to research a *minimum* of five secondary sources. These may *not* include sources found on the web. The sources are to provide some kind of context for your paper. The secondary sources may offer support for a particular idea or may suggest a view from which you diverge. The secondary sources are not to be the source of your main idea. The MLA style sheet is the standard.

The papers will be graded on the significance of the thesis, the comprehensiveness of the support for the thesis, and the level of expression. Because this is a grad-level English class, I expect excellent grammar. I recommend that students draft their essays well in advance of the due date and that they revise them thoroughly

A FINAL NOTE: Modern American poetry can be both exhilarating and highly challenging. Don't be afraid to ask questions of me in or out of class. I'm interested in seeing that all students learn to understand and enjoy these great poems. Let's have a spirited, intellectual, and literary time of it.