At the core of the women’s poetry movement is the quest for autonomous self-definition. Shaping that quest is a heritage, external and internal, which opposes female autonomy. “If we don’t name ourselves we are nothing,” says Audre Lorde. Alicia Ostriker, *Stealing the Language*

This literature course will consider the work of a number of modern and contemporary women poets (with some historical antecedents)—contextualizing their poetry in terms of questions of societal reception, overt moves against (or in relation to) male patriarchal models, feminist theory, sexuality, and gendered writing. Through class discussions, short responses, and longer analytical essays and projects, we’ll explore poetry by writers including H.D., Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Robin Coste Lewis, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Mary Szybist, Natasha Trethewey, Carol Ann Duffy, Emily Dickinson, and Anne Bradstreet. For context and to help frame our discussions and analysis, we’ll also read essays—theoretical, scholarly, and personal—by writers including Helene Cixous, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler, and Adrienne Rich.

Given the breadth of the subject—as Carolyn Kizer says, poetry that represents and reimagines the “lives of one-half of humanity”—my goal with this course is not to provide a comprehensive (or even chronological) history of women’s poetry, but rather to introduce you (or deepen your understanding of) some of the central issues that have been, and are, at stake for women poets in terms of the intersections of their lives/bodies/sexuality/political interests and other subjects and the writing and reception of their poetry. Like any 400-level literature class, this will be extremely reading intensive (an average of 40 pages per class)—with response papers, and the expectation that you contribute meaningful, well-thought-out ideas to our class discussions.

That said, learning is a process of hypothesizing and moving toward clarity (and then back to confusion, etc.) so please feel brave about hazarding your ideas as you’re in the process of working them through. I’m not expecting perfection, just deep investment. I believe that people learn by participating in active reading, writing, and discussion much more than by being told information, so my lectures will be minimal—with much more of my focus on helping to elucidate key ideas in our readings via class discussions and projects. If at any point in the semester, you have questions, confusions, or ideas about how this class could better serve you, please come talk to me!

**Projects**

*Blog Posts*: Twice during the semester, your group (1/3 of the class) will be posting a 500-750-word response (on BbLearn) to our recent reading, to help start our class discussion. These responses should thoughtfully draw connections to (and/or raise arguments with) our ongoing discussions and central issues in the poetry and theoretical readings. These responses are due by noon on Monday.
These responses can be conversational/informal in tone, but are taking the place of reading response papers, so I do expect depth and careful thought. I also expect that everyone comes to Tuesday’s class having read over the responses so that our conversations can move deeper from there rather than rehashing. You will also each be posting an initial exploratory essay (leading up to Essay 1) and a write-up (approximately 500-750 words) about a poet of your choice from *No More Masks* (or elsewhere, with my permission) that we are not already discussing in this class. Your write-up should connect this poet to our class discussions and readings, offer a bit of context about the poet/poetry, and some salient quotations and analysis.

**Longer Essays:** You will be writing two longer essays this semester. The first will be analytical—applying the ideas we’ve been reading about in the prose selections to a poet of your choosing, and offering more in-depth analysis of their work. (I’ll give you more details leading up to that project). The second may be purely analytical or a combination of creative and analytical. Again, more details later. If you haven’t done a lot of academic writing lately, please come see me early. I spent years teaching academic writing, and I’m very happy to help you with drafting, integrating, sources, etc. The Writing Center is also a wonderful resource.

**Grad students:** Each of your longer essays needs to be at least as long as the maximum required page count. Responses and other shorter projects do not need to be longer, although I will, of course, expect graduate-level thought in them. You may also be asked to lead discussions or do a bit of extra research.

**Attendance and Participation**

Our class discussions and in-class work are a central part of this course, and you should attend all sessions—barring serious illness or other life emergencies—and participate. For each class that you attend with all required homework, annotations, books, etc., and participate (showing that you have carefully done the reading and thought about its applications and relevant connections and questions), you will earn 4 points. For each class that you attend unprepared (or seriously late, or otherwise not fully), you will earn 1-2 points. For each class that you miss, you will earn 0 points.

Part of participating is helping to create an inclusive, nondiscriminatory, intellectually and emotionally engaged environment in which all students can thrive and learn. I am committed to working my hardest to create such an environment and look forward to all of you joining me in that endeavor as we dive into this fascinating and sometimes challenging (on all levels) material. As I noted earlier, if you want to talk further about the materials or any questions or concerns, please come see me in my office!

**Disabilities**

Please notify me early in the semester if you have a disability that requires accommodations. I’m committed to helping all students succeed in the course and am happy to work with you to make the class accessible. All accommodations for disabilities do need to be approved in advance through Disability Support Services, Idaho Commons Building Room 306 (885-6307 or dss@uidaho.edu).

**Books**

*Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose*, Eds. Gelpi and Gelpi  
*No More Masks!: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Women Poets*, Ed. Florence Howe
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to

1) Convey an understanding—through analytical essays and class discussions and presentations—of central issues that have been, and are, at stake for women poets in terms of the intersections of their lives/bodies/sexuality/political interests and the writing and reception of their poetry
2) Structure articulate analytical essays that develop a thesis, use a variety of sources from this class (and, as necessary, outside research) to support the thesis, and consider relevant alternate positions
3) Articulate—through writing and class work—how your positions are in conversation with literary and scholarly conversations about women’s poetry (as defined by the scope of the class readings)
4) Demonstrate an understanding of analytical (and potentially creative) ways in which the theoretical articles we read may be applied to individual poems, poets, and books of poetry
5) Do the necessary research to contribute relevant outside ideas (about additional poets and theories) to class discussions and writing

Grading Rubric

- Preparation/Participation/Attendance (including annotations, discussion-leading, and group work): 30%
- Short Responses: 7.5% each (total of 15%)
- Additional Poet Write-Up: 10%
- Exploratory Essay (including Peer Responses and Conference Option): 10%
- Essay 1: 15%
- Essay 2: 20%

Late Work: Any late work will receive reduced credit unless I have approved an extension in advance.

Plagiarism: This should also go without saying in an upper-level English class, but all work that you submit must be your own. You will certainly be gathering ideas from other sources, but you must always quote or properly paraphrase and cite those sources. (Citation is really a form of respect to others’ language, as well as a legal requirement.) Any work that is not properly cited or is not done by the alleged author will receive a “0,” an official write-up, and may lead to course failure. If you have questions about citation or quotation, or are ever feeling desperate or as if you are falling behind, please see me! I am much more able to help you before a problem occurs than after.
A=Outstanding, superior work relative to the level necessary to meet the assignment. 90% or more
In order to earn an “A” in this course, you will need to:
1) Complete all of the required writing assignments in a timely manner
2) Come to class having carefully read the assigned readings (and potentially looked at additional relevant texts)
3) Participate in class discussions, group work, and other projects
4) Go beyond the texts and class discussions to synthesize and analyze ideas presented—drawing meaningful connections among texts and demonstrating original and analytical thought
5) Craft and revise your essays so that the ideas are articulately and thoroughly presented, and show a recognition of relevant context and counterarguments. These essays will meet the assignment (as described on the schedule or an assignment sheet) and demonstrate meaningful connections, original thought, and careful polishing in terms of structure and sentence-level writing. Essays will be assessed using a point system (from 0 to 100), with detailed comments letting you know the areas that need continued work. You will also always have the opportunity to come meet with me individually to get feedback on drafts.

B=Significantly stronger than the level necessary to meet the assignment requirements. 80-89%.
In order to earn a “B” in this course, you will need to:
1) Complete all of the required writing assignments in a timely (or mostly timely) manner
2) Come to class having carefully read the assigned readings (and potentially looked at additional relevant texts)
3) Participate in class discussions, group work, and other projects (though participation will be less frequent than an “A” student and/or occasional absences may affect participation points)
4) Go beyond the texts and class discussions to synthesize and analyze ideas presented—drawing meaningful connections among texts and demonstrating original and analytical thought (though development, organization, and/or quality of the writing or articulation will not be as strong as at the “A” level)
5) Craft and revise your essays so that the ideas are articulately and thoroughly presented, and show a recognition of relevant context and counterarguments. These essays will meet the assignment (as described on the schedule or an assignment sheet) and demonstrate meaningful connections and thinking, and mostly polished structure and sentence-level writing. With one more round of revising (in terms of the writing or research or thinking), these essays would be at the “A” level. Essays will be assessed using a point system (from 0 to 100), with detailed comments letting you know the areas that need continued work. You will also always have the opportunity to come meet with me individually to get feedback on drafts.

C=Fully meets the assignment requirements. Average work. Please note that a “C” does not imply a lack of effort; it merely means that the work does not exceed the basic expectations. 70-79%
In order to earn a “C” in this course, you will need to:
1) Complete all of the required writing assignments in a timely (mostly) manner
2) Come to class having read the assigned readings
3) Participate in class discussions, group work, and other projects (though participation will be less frequent than an “A” or “B” student and/or occasional absences or lack of preparation may affect participation points)
4) Show an understanding of class texts and discussions, and move toward meaningful synthesis and analysis of ideas

5) Craft your essays to have clear, meaningful theses and development—using relevant sources and sustaining and building on central ideas. Compared to “A” or “B” essays, these essays are strong drafts with some gaps in research, development, and/or issues with clarity of writing or grammar that need several rounds of further revising. “C” essays may also demonstrate less original thought, or less nuanced understanding of the texts. Essays will be assessed using a point system (from 0 to 100), with detailed comments letting you know the areas that need continued work. You will also always have the opportunity to come meet with me individually to get feedback on your drafts.

D=Does not fully meet the assignment requirements. 60-69%
F=Fails to meet the assignment requirements.

Failure to do all of the above will earn a “D” or lower. A “D” or “F” in this class would suggest a lack of regular attendance, preparation, and participation; lack of time spent wrestling with the ideas in the texts and re-reading to come to a better understanding of them; lack of effort in terms of meeting with the professor and/or going to the Writing Center to remedy deficits in understanding or level of writing; and a lack of well-developed writing with clear theses and support (or missing or short essays that do not meet the minimum stated requirements on the assignment sheets)

W=Withdrawl from the course before the final Withdrawl deadline. The W will not affect your GPA, but you are allowed limited W credits during your time as an undergraduate.

Schedule Part 1 (and a bit of Part 2)
The schedule is subject to revision, additions, and deletions as I get a sense of your needs and the class personality and pacing. We’ll be dividing the semester into three main units: “Speaking . . . Truth . . . To Power,” “Embodying,” and “Reclaiming . . . Traditions,” with a roughly chronological (but also thematic) look at poets whose work could be considered through those lenses. I’ll give specific assignment sheets as we progress. Readings and other assignments should be completed by the date next to which they are written.

Speaking . . . Truth . . . To Power

Tues 8/23: Introduction to the course

Thurs 8/25: Read Ostriker “Stealing the Language” Introduction through 9 and Chapter 1 through the end of part 2 (28)
Read Anne Bradstreet “Prologue,” “The Author to Her Book,” “Before the Birth of One of Her Children,” “The Vanity of All Worldly Things,” and “A Dialogue Between Old England and New” (BbLearn)
Read Phillis Wheatley “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “On Imagination,” and “On Virtue” (BbLearn)

Tues 8/30: Read Chapter 1 Section 3 (beginning on 28) of Ostriker Stealing the Language
Read Adrienne Rich “Vesuvius at Home” (beginning on 177) in Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose

Reading Response Due by Monday 8/29 at noon (Group 1)
Thurs 9/1: Read Rich “When We Dead Awaken” (beginning on 166) and “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying” (beginning on 195) in Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose
Read Gertrude Stein “from Patriarchal Poetry” (beginning on 13) in No More Masks
Read Muriel Rukeyser “The Poem as Mask” xxvii and Rukeyser (beginning on 76) in No More Masks
Recommended Reading: Marianne Moore “Marriage” (beginning on 35 of NMM)
(please note that tomorrow is the last day to drop the course without a W)

Tues 9/6: Read Ostriker’s Stealing the Language from the bottom of 66 through 69 (the end of Section 2) and the Levertov section on 78-80
Read Denise Levertov (beginning on 142) in NMM
Read Adrienne Rich “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” (9), “Orion” (29), and “Planetarium” (38) in Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose
Reading Response Due by Labor Day Monday at noon (Group 2)

Thurs 9/8: Read Rich “from Diving into the Wreck” (all of this book beginning on 48)
Read Ostriker Chapter 4—“Herr God, Herr Lucifer: Anger, Violence, and Polarization” from 122 to 149
Read June Jordan (beginning on 264) of NMM

Tues 9/13: Read Audre Lorde (beginning on 234) in NMM and Lorde poems (BbLearn)
Read Audre Lorde “The Master’s Tools . . .” essay (BbLearn)
Listen to Sara Brickman (BbLearn)
Read Sonia Sanchez (beginning on 238) in No More Masks
Read Linda Hogan (beginning on 413) in No More Masks
Reading Response Due by Monday at noon (Group 3)

Thurs 9/15: Read Moira Gatens “Power, Bodies and Difference” essay (BbLearn)
Begin Lorna Dee Cervantes Emplumada through 37
Read Elizabeth Bradfield poems (BbLearn)
Recommended: Susan Bordo’s “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body” (BbLearn)

Embodying

Tues 9/20: Read Ostriker Stealing the Language Chapter 3 “Body Language: The Release of Anatomy” (from 91 to 110)
Finish Emplumada
Read Gloria Anzaldua “Don’t Give In, Chicanita” (BbLearn)
Exploratory Essay Due (All)

Thurs 9/22: Read Judith Butler “Bodies that Matter” essay (BbLearn)
Read Claudia Rankine excerpt (BbLearn)
Read Tarfia Faizullah Seam through 

. . . more Embodying to come. Final draft of Essay 1 will be due on 10/11 . . .