Course Description: Poems affect us differently from other genres. Poems attach themselves to us, seeping under our skin and into our memory. We carry them with us. A good poem has the ability to assist us in re-envisioning the world around us, helping us to see ourselves in new ways. German Romantic poet Rainer Maria Rilke said "a work of art is good if it has risen from necessity" and in this course we will explore how best to make our work contain the urgency or "necessity" that Rilke speaks of. We will explore aspects of content and structure that make poems potent while also engaging in generative writing exercises designed to allow for experimentation and growth. We will examine poems and essays on poetry writing by a wide variety of poets including Tony Hoagland, Louise Glück, Tracy K. Smith, Frank O'Hara, Adrienne Rich, and Bruce Smith. Students will work on cultivating and refining their "voices" as well as finding direction in their work. The online forum will serve as a way for students to connect with one another (as well as, of course, the instructor) in an honest, respectful, and dignified fashion.

Required Texts:
See web for text list.
Various PDF's I will have up on blackboard

Supplemental Reading:
Each week, I'll link to some additional poems, essays, or websites for you to check out once you've completed the weekly assigned readings and assignments.

Weekly Writing Assignments: Each week there will be a series of writing prompts that students can use to turn in for their weekly poem, but writing directly from the prompts are not required. You are to post one poem per week (at least 12 lines) or two poems of 11 lines or less). These do not necessarily need to be “finished” poems, but should lead you in the direction of a piece you'd like to develop. The prompts I give out are in service to you and your writing. You may use or manipulate them to your liking. Each Thursday you should post your poem so I, as well as your classmates, will have the opportunity to read and offer feedback on it. Your comments should not necessarily be as in-depth as when you comment on the larger groups of poems we'll be workshopping in the second half of the course, but it is important that we give each person's creative work the time and attention it deserves.

The Workshop: At the end of the sixth week, each student will hand in between four and seven poems to be looked at as a group. Poems must have been written during the course. This is the most important part of the course: each person gets in-depth feedback on something into which they have poured time and attention. We'll workshop 4-5 students per week in our last four weeks, and this will be the majority of your assigned work for those weeks.

Chat: Toward the end of each week, I'll host an hour-long live chat session. This is will serve as a sort of open office hours. Attendance is not mandatory and these sessions will be logged for those unable to make it. In these sessions we'll discuss elements of the writing process and as well as various craft points.

Your Weekly Responsibilities:
− Log onto blackboard and read through the “Schedule” page. This page includes my “lecture” for the week, as well as assignments, optional-supplemental readings, and other miscellaneous reminders.
Read the assigned texts and post your responses to the discussion section in the forum.

Weeks 1-6: Respond to the writing exercise, post your response in the forum, and read/comment on one other student piece as described below.

Weeks 7-10: Provide in-depth (about a page) of comments for each student packet submitted in the forum, checking back later in the week to continue your involvement in the conversation.

Participate in hour-long live chat session (optional)

What I'll Be Doing:

- Sending out a weekly e-mail containing class information and upcoming reading and writing assignments
- Setting up forums and moderating discussions within. I generally check in at least once every weekday, although I don't generally post on weekends.
- Reading and commenting on all student work in a positive and helpful manner. For short exercises, my responses will be a couple of paragraphs long, perhaps with a few lines of technical sentence-work. For the full-length pieces, I'll provide a page or so of comments, plus some line-by-line suggestions on the attached word document itself.

Workload: Although many students take online courses with the absolute best intentions of doing every last little assignment, life often has a way of making that impossible. I recommend simply doing what you can, when you can. If there are a couple of weeks in which you don't get to the reading, that's no problem. If you have to skip a couple exercises, this is also okay. As long as you both hand in a final portfolio and reflection and participate fully in the workshop, you’ll be fine. And remember, if you do have to take a couple of weeks completely away from the class, you can always come back! The door is always open.

Grading: For those of you who are taking this course for a grade, the breakdown is as follows. Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting (Friday of the last week of class) by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies department.

Writing Exercises (Wks 2-6): 20%
Final portfolio/reflection: 40%
Forum/Workshop Participation: 40%

One final note: When responding to student work students should be critical, but also supportive, even if that support amounts only to a set of questions or ideas for the author to think about. Writers can be sensitive, so take that into consideration when you're commenting on your classmates' pieces. Always be respectful and treat the creative work of one another with dignity and respect.

Syllabus:

Week 1 October 1 - 5:
Ilya Kaminsky – *Dancing in Odessa*
Tony Hoagland - “Altitudes, a Homemade Taxonomy: Image, Diction, and Rhetoric”
Rainer Maria Rilke – Letter 1 from *Letters to a Young Poet*

Week 2 October 8 - 12:
Anna Journey – *If Birds Gather Your Hair for Nesting*
Tony Hoagland - “Tis Backed like a Weasel: The Slipperiness of Metaphor” and “Self-Consciousness”
Rainer Maria Rilke – Letters 3 and 4 from *Letters to a Young Poet*

**Week 3** October 15 - 19:
Tracy K. Smith – *Life on Mars*
Tony Hoagland - “Obsession: Are You Still Writing About Your Father?” and “Sad Anthropologists: *The Dialectical Use of Tone***

**Week 4** October 22 - 26:
Bruce Smith – *Devotions*
Tony Hoagland - “On Disproportion”

**Week 5** October 29 - November 2:
Louise Glück – *A Village Life*
Tony Hoagland - “Fear of Narrative and the Skittery Poem of Our Moment”

**Week 6** November 5 - 9:
Jericho Brown – *Please*
Tony Hoagland - “Negative Capability: *How to Talk Mean and Influence People***
Dear Sugar #48– Writer like a Mother...

**Week 7** November 12 - 16:
Workshop I

Off for Thanksgiving November 19 - 23

**Week 8** November 26 - 30:
Workshop II

**Week 9** December 3 - 7:
Workshop III

**Week 10** December 10 - 14:
Workshop IV

Instructor bio:
Matthew Siegel is a poet and essay writer from New York living in San Francisco. A 2009-2011 Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University, he earned degrees from University of Houston and Binghamton University. Poems and essays appear or are forthcoming in *Indiana Review, The Journal, Mid-American Review, Ninth Letter, TheRumpus.net, Washington Square* and elsewhere. He teaches literature and writing at San Francisco Conservatory of Music and is a Contributing Editor at *The Offending Adam*. 