

Radical Moderns/Poetry International

"My attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole. Out of the magazines I read

came a passionate call for the experiences of the disinherited. It said: 'If you possess enough courage to speak out what you are, you will find that you are not alone.' Indeed, we felt that we were lucky. Why cower in towers of ivory and squeeze out private words when we had only to speak and millions listened? Our writing was translated into



Pablo Neruda & Nâzım Hikmet at the 1950 World Peace Congress, Warsaw

Chinese, Spanish, Japanese Who had ever, in all human history, offered to young writers an audience so vast?" - Richard Wright

French, German, Russian,

LIT 121 K

Tuesday & Thursday

9:00AM-12:30PM

Social Sciences 1, Room 145

1:00-3:00PM

June 25 to July 27

Kenan Sharpe

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Cowell 202

Office Hours: Tuesday,

and by appointment

Required Texts:

- ❖ Nâzım Hikmet. *Poems of Nâzım Hikmet, Revised and Expanded Edition*. Trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk Blasing. Persea, 2002.
- ❖ Neruda, Pablo. *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*. Ed. Ilan Stavans, Trans. Miguel Algarin, et al. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- ❖ Rexroth, Kenneth. *The Collected Poems of Kenneth Rexroth*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2004.
- ❖ Rukeyser, Muriel. *The Book of the Dead*. West Virginia University Press, 2018.
- ❖ Course Reader

Street

Books and reader are available at The Literary Guillotine, 204 Locust



Course Summary:

In this course we study a global network of twentieth-century poets that has been called “Radical Moderns” and identified as forming “Poetry International.” These were poets who, as German poet Bertolt Brecht once quipped, “changed countries as often as they changed shoes”:

their poetry was as international as their lives. As a generation, these poets shared a number of commonalities. All were born in the first few years of the 20th century; lived through the First World War; were politically and artistically radicalized in the 1920s, aligning themselves with the international labor movement and the European artistic avant-garde; and participated, as activists and artists, in the

Popular Front and anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, facing fierce repression for their unwavering political commitments.

Each week we will focus our attention on one to two members of this poetic pantheon spanning Russia, Chile, Germany, Greece, the United States, Pakistan, China, and Turkey. We will look at the that literary/political milieu that inspired the work of these poets and the historical pressures that

shaped their biographies. Our readings consists of poems from the early, middle, and late periods of their careers, so as to give a strong sense of their evolution as poets. Alongside this sampling of each poet’s work, each week we will have a historical/critical reading that illuminates the context of the poetry.

A number of common themes and patterns will emerge as we move through the life and work of each of these distinct poets.

We will look at how, especially early in their careers, those poets were inspired by modernist and avant-garde cultural movements such as Surrealism (Neruda, Faiz), Futurism (Ritsos, Nâzım Hikmet), and Objectivism (Rexroth). We will explore how political commitment of various kinds exerted pressure on their work, especially as (socialist) realism became the dominant aesthetic mode of the global left. Each poet also exhibits a tension between erotic/love poetry expressed with a lyric voice and a penchant towards an epic style capable of taking up historical themes. Comparing the poetry of these various figures will give us the opportunity to see how similar events (such as the Spanish Civil War) or experiences (political imprisonment or exile) created micro-genres to which each contributed versions.



Finally, we locate the work of these international and international-*ist* Radical Moderns in the context of debates about world literature, discussing what made it possible for writers in non-dominant languages to achieve such a global reach. Throughout the class we will explore the enabling conditions, general perception, limitations, and potential of political poetry, and political art in general.

Assignments :

- **Advance Guard papers** (1-2 pages per week): *Avant-garde* is originally a French military metaphor for a scout who runs out ahead of the group to determine a course of action. You will come to class each week with some short, informal writing to help shape which directions we go in class. The goal is give you a head-start on your thinking about the poetry for that week, and to give you something in-hand to help you feel prepared to contribute in, and hopefully guide, our conversation. These papers will always include one discussion question and one clarifying question. We'll discuss protocols for how to do this in class.
- **Paper 1** (3-4 pages): Comparative close-reading paper. Prompt to be distributed in Week 2. Due at the end of Week 3.
- **Group presentation** (15-20 minutes): Research in groups and then present together on the life and work of a poet not covered in the class. Due Week 5.
- **Creative final project** (TBA). Due Finals Week on Canvas.

Attendance Policy:

Each class session is worth an entire week of work in a regular quarter. For this reason, attendance is extremely important. An unexcused absence will result in a seriously reduced grade. More than 1 unexcused absences is ground for failing. Anyone who needs to miss class should get in touch with me ahead of time in order to put plans in place for a full make-up assignment.

Grading:

Advance Guard papers: 10%
 Paper 1: 25%
 Participation: 25%
 Group presentation: 20%
 Final project: 20%

Course Schedule:



*In the dark times
 Will there also be singing?*

**Yes, there will also be singing.
About the dark times.
- Bertolt Brecht, "Motto"**

Week 1:



In **Week 1** we get acquainted with some of the poetic precursors of the Radical Moderns and dive into the work of our first poet, Nâzım Hikmet from Turkey. Described as a "romantic communist," Nâzım exhibits productive tensions between the lyric and epic modes, the realm of the personal and the realm of politics. His biographical trajectory (from Istanbul, to the University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow where he encounters Futurist poetry, to decades as a political prisoner back in Turkey, to semi-celebrity status in exile in the Eastern Bloc) will mirror that of our other poets. The theoretical reading from Badiou will lay the groundwork for thinking these poets together as a distinct generation, while the selection from Hobsbawm will provide a necessary refresher on the history of the early twentieth century and the way the 1917 Russian Revolution and 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War energized the world.

[6/26] Tuesday Class: Who are the radical moderns?

- ★ Alain Badiou, "Poetry and Communism" - to be read together in class

[6/28] Thursday Readings: Nâzım Hikmet, Romantic Communist

Poems by Nâzım Hikmet (1902-1963) - in *Poems of Nâzım Hikmet, Revised and Expanded Edition* (focus especially on the poems in **bold**):

- ❖ "Foreword" and "Introduction"
- ❖ "About My Poetry," "**Regarding Art**," "On Shirts, Pants, Cloth Caps, and Felt Hats," "Letter to My Wife," "Letters From a Man in Solitary," "On Death Again," "**Istanbul House of Detention**," "Letters From Chankiri Prison," "A Strange Feeling," "On the Twentieth Century," "**9-10 P.M. Poems**," "Ninth Anniversary," "**Since I Was Thrown Inside**," "The Strangest Creature on Earth," "**On Living**," "It's This Way," "**Angina Pectoris**," "You're," "About Your Hands and Lies," "**Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve in Prison**,"

Additional poems by Nâzım Hikmet - in Reader:

- ❖ "Weeping Willow," "**To Become a Machine**," "Eighth Letter to Taranta-Babu," "Gallop Full-Tilt from Furthest Asia," "A Strange Feeling," "**Don Quixote**," "Five Days into the Hunger Strike," "**Sad Freedom**"

★ Background reading: Eric Hobsbawm, “The Century: A Bird’s Eye View” from *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-199*, - in Reader (1-top of 8)

★ Optional reading: Eric Hobsbawm, “The World Revolution” - on Canvas

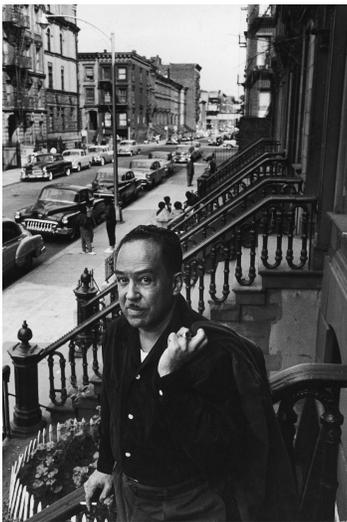
Week 2

How is it that the work of these Radical Moderns was able to gain such a wide geographical reach? Their poems were quickly translated into multiple foreign languages, often while being censored in their own countries! Key to this international accessibility was the literary center of Moscow and the cultural sponsorship of the USSR. And yet Nâzım Hikmet and his colleagues complicate rigid



categories, occupying a liminal position between the national and the international. As Stathis Gourgouris writes in this week’s critical reading, figures like Greek poet Yannis Ritsos “represent [. . .] exemplary positions, fully immersed in their national traditions and yet entirely uncategorizable within strictly national boundaries.” The secret to this flexibility is in their politics—unabashedly radical but often “maverick,” heterodox and impatient with “prescriptive aesthetics”

of any kind. Throughout his long career, Ritsos experimented with long-form, serial poetry as well as short, fragmented work in order to take up themes related to memory, history, mythology, deep time, pain, and beauty.



With the poet Langston Hughes, we have our first chance to put the United States into the international (and internationalist) history of radical modern poetry. Like that of his colleagues, the poetry of Hughes is intensely attuned both to local traditions, histories, and struggles as well as global ones. With his many poetic dedications to the Spanish Civil War, we are able to start cataloguing what is shared across different people’s versions of this mini-genre. At the same time, Hughes was fearlessly outspoken about injustice in the U.S. In a way characteristic of this historical moment, Hughes’ poetry links the African-American freedom struggle with global anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggles. Our background readings from Michael Denning will allow us to begin speculating on how these international modes of solidarity affect the very form of Hughes’ poetry.

[7/3] Tuesday Readings: Yannis Ritsos, Partisan of Dreams

Poems by Nâzım Hikmet - in *Poems of Nâzım Hikmet, Revised and Expanded Edition*:

- ❖ “After Getting out of Prison,” “You,” “**Last Will and Testament**,” “The Mailman,” “Last Letter to My Son,” “**In the Snowy Night Woods**,” “Prague Dawn,” “From Sofia,” “Thirty Years Ago,” “On My Country Again,” “Waitress,” “Loving You,” “**Straw-Blond**,” “Untitled,” “**Autobiography**,” “**Things I Didn’t Know I Loved**,” “**My Funeral**,” “**Vera**”

Additional poems by Nâzım Hikmet - in Reader

- ❖ “Quatrains,” “Optimism,” “**Great Humanity**”

Poems by Yannis Ritsos (1909-1990) - selections in Reader, focus especially on:

- ❖ “**Romiosini**,” “**The Meaning of Simplicity**,” “**Understanding**,” “**Ready**,” skim the poems of *Diaries of Exile*, “**Smoked Earthen Pot**,” “**Peace**,” “**Interchanges**,” “**Necessary Explanation**,” “**The Usefulness of Art**,” the poems from *Stones*, “**The Graves of our Ancestors**,” “**After the Defeat**,” “**The Conjunction ‘Or**,” “**Chile**,” “**Carnal World I, V, and X**”

- ★ Background reading: Eric Hobsbawm, “Against the Common Enemy” - in Reader (especially pp. 156-169, 171-177)

- ★ Optional reading: Eric Hobsbawm, “The Fall of Liberalism” - on Canvas

- ★ Stathis Gourgouris, “Communism and Poetry” - to be read together in class

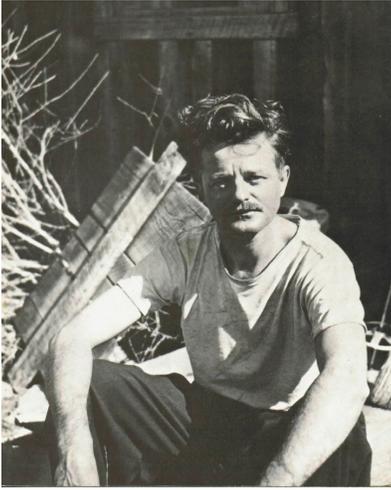
[7/5] Thursday Readings: Langston Hughes, Balladeer for Liberation

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) - selections in Reader, focus especially on:

- ❖ Poems, 1921-1930: “**The Negro Speaks of Rivers**,” “**Negro**,” “**I, Too**,” “**Formula**,” “**Merry Christmas**”
- ❖ Poems, 1931-1940: “**Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria**,” “**Good Morning, Revolution**,” “**Black Dancers**,” “**Let America Be America Again**,” “**Song of Spain**,” “**Letter from Spain**”
- ❖ Poems, 1941-1950: “**Big Sur**,” “**Gypsy Melodies**,” “**Moonlight in Valencia**”
- ❖ Poems, 1951-1960: “**Prelude to Our Age: A Negro History Poem**”
- ❖ Poems, 1961-1967: “**Cultural Exchange**,” “**Not What Was**,” “**Flotsam**”

- ★ Background reading: Michael Denning, “The Novelist’s International,” from *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* - in Reader
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Week 3



The U.S. poet Kenneth Rexroth combined aesthetic experimentation with political commitment. Kenneth Rexroth begins his poetic career under the influence of Cubism and Surrealism. However, under the political pressures of the rise of European fascism and the leftist strategy of a Popular Front against it, Rexroth switched towards a more lyrical mode. Like Neruda, his work combines erotic love and left-wing activism, the mystical and the political—often in the space of a single poem. Impatient with any form of political orthodoxy, Rexroth’s poetry embodies the distinctiveness of the West Coast scene with its amalgamation of anarchism, Buddhism, mystical Christianity, free love, and attention to nature. Though of an earlier generation, he is seen as mentor and inspiration to the Beat poets. His poetry allows us to rediscover a “weird, old America” that has all but disappeared. Our historical readings this week provide the context for the heady atmosphere of the Popular Front and the widespread influence of the left in U.S. American cultural industries before the advent of the Cold War and McCarthyism.

[7/10] Tuesday Readings: Kenneth Rexroth, Mystical Anarchist

Poems by Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982) - in *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth*:

- ❖ Earliest and Uncollected Poems: “I Pass Your Home in a Slow Vermillion Dawn,” “140 Syllables,”
- ❖ *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*: (skim for a sense of Rexroth’s early poetry in the Objectivist style) “In the Memory of Andrée Rexroth,” “The Thin Edge of Your Pride,” “Memorandum”
- ❖ *In What Hour*: “From the Paris Commune to the Kronstadt Rebellion,” “Hiking on the Coast Range,” **“Requiem for the Spanish Dead,”** “On What Planet,” **“Climbing Milestone Mountain, August 22, 1937,”** “The New Year,” “A Very Early Morning Exercise,” “Another Early Morning Exercise,” **“Autumn in California,” “August 22, 1939,”** “Toward an Organic Philosophy,” **“GIC to HAR,”** “Falling Leaves and Early Snow,” “The Heart Unbroken and the Courage Free”
- ❖ *The Phoenix and the Tortoise*: **“When We with Sappho,”** “Runaway,” “Lute Music,” “Floating,” “Another Spring,” **“Inversely, as the Square of Their Distances Apart,”** “Between Two Wars,” “Delia Rexroth,” **“Andrée Rexroth,”** “Precession of the

Equinoxes," "Again at Waldheim," "Un Bel di Vedremo," Wednesday of Holy Week, 1940," "Incarnation," "We Come Back," "Martial - XII, LII," "Theory of Numbers," "Past and Future Turn About"

- ❖ *The Signature of All Things*: "**The Signature of All Things**," "Lyell's Hypothesis Again," "Blues," "Andrée Rexroth," "**A Letter to William Carlos Williams**," "Blood and Sand," "For the Chinese Actress, Gardenia Chang," "Stone and Flower," "The Light on the Pewter Dish," "Me Again," "Discrimination," "Further Advantages of Learning," "Under Soracte"
- ★ Background reading: Michael Denning, "Introduction" (**until right side of p. 52 of Reader**) and "Waiting for Lefty" from *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* - in Reader

[7/12] Thursday Readings: Kenneth Rexroth

Poems by Kenneth Rexroth - in *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth*:

- ❖ *The Dragon and the Unicorn*: "**Leda Hidden**," "Golden Section," "Time Spirals," "Mirror," "Only Years," "Empty Mirror," "Doubled Mirrors"
- ❖ *In Defense of the Earth*: "**The Reflecting Trees of Being and Not Being**," "Growing," "A Living Pearl," "**The Lights in the Sky Are Stars**," "Quietly," "**For Eli Jacobson**," "**A Singing Voice**," "Xmas Coming," "**The Bad Old Days**," "The Orphic Soul," "**Thou Shalt Not Kill**," "The American Century," "A Bestiary," "Epigrams and Translations" (all), "**They Say This Isn't a Poem**," "**Codicil**"
- ❖ *Natural Numbers*: "Fish Peddler and Cobbler," "**Venice**"
- ❖ *Gödel's Proof*: "Gradualism," "The Wheel Revolves"
- ❖ *Love Is an Art of Time*: "Now the Starlit Moonless Spring," "**Confusion of the Senses**," "Your Birthday in the California Mountains"
- ❖ *The Morning Star*: "The Love Poems of Marichiko" (browse/skip around, and see notes in "Appendix"), "XVII"

- ★ Optional background reading: Michael Denning, "May Day" - in Reader

Week 4



Beloved Chilean poet Pablo Neruda can be seen as the preeminent Radical Modern. With his global friendships and connections, his years spent abroad, his time in exile and in hiding from the authorities, his commitment to political experiments in Spain and Latin America, and his world-wide reception, his life and work are Poetry

International incarnate. Like the other poets we've studied, he was not only an engaged poet but a lyrical one. Looking at his love poems and his committed poems side by side allow us to interrogate the very division between personal and political, emotion and history. These dual tendencies come together most clearly in Neruda's poetic odes.

[7/17] Tuesday Readings: Pablo Neruda, Soldier of Praise

Poems by Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) - in *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*:

(Note: for selections from each of Neruda's works, read the brief description in "Notes on Neruda's Life and Poetry" at the back of our anthology)

- ❖ *Book of Twilight*: "Love"
- ❖ *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*: (all)
- ❖ *Residence on Earth*: "Dead Gallop," "Alliance (Sonata)," "Phantom," "We Together," "Ars Poetica," "One Day Stands Out," "Only Death," "**Walking Around**," "Ode to Federico García Lorca," "There is No Oblivion (Sonata)," "The Drowned Woman of the Sky," "Furies and Sorrows," "Meeting Under New Flags," "**Spain in Our Heart: Invocation**" (and all the rest of the *Spain in Our Heart* sequence lasting until p. 136).
- ❖ "I Explain A Few Things" p. 925
- ❖ *Canto General*:
 - all of Part I: A Lamp on Earth
 - all of Part II: **The Heights of Macchu Picchu**
 - "They Come Through the Islands," "Cortés" from Part III
 - "**Insurgent America**," "Sandino" from Part IV
 - "The Oligarchies," "Standard Oil Co.," **United Fruit Co.**," "I Accuse," "The Victorious People" from Part V
 - "**America**," "America, I Do Not Invoke Your Name in Vain" from Part VI
 - "Eternity" from Canto General of Chile from Part VII
 - "Cristóbal Miranda (Shoveler, Tocopilla)," "Maestro Huerta," "The Earth's Name is Juan" from Part VIII
 - "Beyond Your Lands, America" from Part IX
 - "**The Fugitive, Part XII**" from Part X
 - "**The Poet**," from Part XI
 - "**Letter to Miguel Otero Silva, in Caracas**," "To Miguel Hernández, Murdered in the Prisons of Spain" from Part XII
 - "I Recall the Sea," "There's No Forgiving," "Happy Year to My Country in Darkness" from Part XIII
 - "**Love**" from Part XV

- ★ Background reading: Vijay Prashad, "Introduction" from *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* - in reader

[7/19] Thursday Readings: Pablo Neruda

Poems by Pablo Neruda - in *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*:

For most of today's readings, you'll be focusing especially on a single one of Neruda's works (as excerpted in our anthology). The options to focus on are:

- ❖ *The Captain's Verses, Elemental Odes, Extravagaria/Estravagario, or One Hundred Love Sonnets*

At the start of class you'll be working with other people who chose the same book. You'll discuss the poems together and then devise an activity to introduce them to the rest of the class.

In addition, we will all skim:

- ❖ *Song of Protest*: "Do Not Ask Me," "The 'Free' Press"
- ❖ *Fully Empowered*: "The Poet's Obligation," "The Word," "The People," Fully Empowered"
- ❖ *Isla Negra*: "Poetry," "Revolutions"
- ❖ *World's End*: "The Sadder Century"
A Call for the Destruction of Nixon and Praise for the Chilean Revolution (all poems)
- ❖ *The Sea and the Bells*: "To Search," "I Am Grateful," "I Will Tell You"
- ❖ *2000* (all poems)
- ❖ *The Book of Questions*: "I," "VII," "X," "XXI"

Week 5:



Muriel Rukeyser comes out of the strong tradition of U.S. leftism. At the same time, she was active as a journalist and feminist. She covered such stories as the Scottsboro case, the Spanish Civil War, and the Vietnam War. In this way, she was involved in both political activism and poetic composition regarding the same issues. We will pay particular attention to her 1938 *The Book of the Dead*, a long poem that uses documentary techniques to portray, and intervene in, an industrial disaster that killed hundreds of miners in West Virginia. Her poetry allows us to meditate on the question of witness: poetry's power to provide testimonial to trauma, defeat, and

emotional extremity. Her engagement in the same international struggles as our other poets also allows to question the gendered and other exclusions that complicate access to the position of being a Whitmanic spokesperson for global events.

How do poets writing in languages typically underrepresented in translations into Euro-American



languages gain international reputations? The relatively wide reception and translatability of a radical modern like Faiz Ahmad Faiz from Pakistan is directly connected to his left and internationalist stance. As Vijay Prashad writes in The Darker Nations, throughout the twentieth century Marxism was central to a wide variety of movements precisely because it functioned as a language in which people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America could analyze and articulate the links between local and international struggles. Thus Marxism, in its function as a sort of revolutionary lingua franca, helped to make possible acts and expressions of global solidarity. It was fluency in this revolutionary dialect that made the work of Faiz Ahmad Faiz

legible and relevant far from home. Faiz was a prominent journalist, member of the Communist Party of Pakistan, and recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize (the Soviet alternative to the Nobel Prize for Literature). With his knowledge of the Arabic and Persian poetic traditions in addition to his native Urdu, Faiz combined free-verse forms with classical motifs and explicit political tendency.

[7/24] Tuesday Readings: Muriel Rukeyser, Speaker of Truth

Poems by Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980) - selections in Reader, focus especially on:

- ❖ *Theory of Flight* (1935): “**The Lynching of Jesus,**” “**Metaphor to Action**”
- ❖ *U.S. I* (1938): “**Mediterranean,**” “**Correspondences,**” “**Letter to the Front**”
- ❖ *Elegies* (1949): **all**
- ❖ *The Speed of Darkness* (1968): “**The War Comes into My Room,**” “**Poem**”
- ❖ *Breaking Open* (1973): “**Searching/Not Searching,**” “**Neruda, The Wine**”

★ Optional reading: Eric Hobsbawm, “Into the Economic Abyss” - on Canvas

[7/26] Thursday Readings: Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Protector of the Dream

Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984) - selections in Reader, focus especially on:

- ❖ “**Don’t Ask Me for That Love Again,**” “**A Prison Evening,**” “**A Prison Daybreak,**” “**Ghazal [We Were All Killed],**” “**We Who Were Executed,**” “**In Search of Vanished Blood,**” “**So Bring the Order for My Execution**”

- ❖ “Poem,” “The Dawn of Freedom, August 1947,” “Ghazal: The Tablet and the Pen,” “Hand Trapped under a Block of Stone,” “Prayer,” “The Day of Death”

★ Background reading: Vijay Prashad, “Paris” from *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* - in reader

Academic Integrity

All work submitted for this course must be your *own*. Plagiarism and cheating are contrary to the spirit of the kind of work we are trying to do here together, and they have serious consequences according to university policy. If you are unsure whether something is plagiarism or not, the best thing to do is check in with me and have a discussion about it. For more information, please see the UCSC policy on academic integrity at http://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_integrity.

Support for Disabilities

UCSC’s Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides resources and support for students with documented disabilities. I take accommodations very seriously and want to do everything I can to make my class accessible to and enjoyable for everyone. In addition to the information with which the DRC provides me, I always appreciate open dialogue with any student requiring accommodations. Please feel free to come to my office hours or email me early on in the quarter.

Any student who thinks they might be in need of accommodation, based on the impact of a disability, can also contact me privately to submit their Accommodation Authorization and discuss specific needs. It’s best to do this within the first two weeks of the quarter. Please contact the Disability Resource Center at 831-459-2089 in room 125 Hahn Student Services or by e-mail at drc@ucsc.edu to coordinate those accommodations.

Mental Health Resources

UCSC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is a campus resource providing a wide range of short-term and long-term mental health services. Remember that counseling services are confidential and free of charge to all UCSC students. There is always someone out there to help. For more information, contact CAPS at 831-459-2628 or visit <http://caps.ucsc.edu/>.

