Course Description

Focusing on the work of Chaucer, this course is designed to explore the late medieval world in its culture and contradictions. Setting aside tired notions of the Middle Ages as an era of suppression and uniform belief, we will focus on the individual subject struggling against normalizing social forces. We will highlight issues of gender, class, and race in conjunction with themes of justice, healing, and exclusion.

Though some of the readings in this course are in Middle English, no previous experience is required. We will read slowly at the beginning of the course, paying close attention to the language as your translation skills develop. As we pick up the pace, we will read some of the works entirely in translation. In all cases, both a translation and original language text will be available.

Learning Objectives

Our primary aim is to read and understand Chaucer’s works both in historical context and in light of the modern critical lens. As we do so, we will seek to learn to read and pronounce Chaucer’s language accurately and to understand the times in which Chaucer lived.

As we sharpen our research skills, we will attempt to write essays about Chaucer that will approach his work historically, textually, and critically. That is, we will be sure that our writing is sound in its use of history, Chaucer’s language, and modern critical approaches.

Methodology: How This Course Works

Our class will be a mix of short lectures, discussion, and small group activities. As we cover the majority of the works of the first major author of the English language, it will be important to come to terms with Chaucer’s language, methodology, concerns, and critical heritage. In order to facilitate this coming to terms, we will listen to and read Chaucer’s original language (though you will also have translations available for all of his work); complete “Connections and Patterns” worksheets; complete similar “Structures of Discourse” worksheets; read and present selected articles from The Chaucer Review on relevant topics.

As this is an upper-level class, you will be expected to carry out independent research on a significant topic. This means that you will need to focus on a specific idea for at least half of the semester and continue to bring to it fresh ideas. This is not an easy task, but a manageable one; and to help you to make your way through it, I will assume that we are often going to talk outside of class about your research papers.

Required Texts

Two Course Packets.

Recommended Texts

The Parlement of Foules. The Chaucer Studio.
Web Resources, including www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer
Course Requirements And Grading

25% Six Minor Writing Assignment (5% each; drop lowest)
10% Major Conference-length Conference Research Paper
30% Seven Cumulative Drafts of the Research Paper (5% each; drop lowest)
10% Final Exam
15% Three In-Class Presentations (5% Each)
05% Structures of Discourse Worksheets
05% Connections and Patterns Worksheets
xx% Several Conferences
xx% Attendance at All Class Meetings and Regular Participation

Minor Writing Assignments

Beginning in the second week of the class, you will write a short essay on the reading for the week. All of these will be due on Fridays. They will be graded on a five-point scale.

- Completed and on-time: Minimum of 3 points
- Up to one week late: Maximum of 4 points
- Later than one week: Maximum of 2 points

Otherwise, they will be judged on succinctness, clarity, and completeness. Of course, they will be judged on how well they address the topic. We will drop the lowest grade of these six papers.

One of these papers, the one due in the sixth week, will not be based on the reading for the week. You will actually work ahead of schedule to write a bibliographic paper on *The Canterbury Tales*. Everybody must complete the CT bibliography paper.

Major Conference-length Conference Research Paper

Everyone will complete one conference-length research paper. A conference-length paper is 2350-2650 words (at least 80% of these must be your own words). You will be expected to write a paper that actively engages in the ongoing discussion in Chaucerian studies.

The paper must have all of the following qualities:
- addresses a significant topic in literary criticism and Chaucerian studies;
- builds a complete argument about this chosen subject;
- carefully sharpens the focus of the argument;
- uses literary critical theory to discuss the text at hand and to build the argument;
- uses historical information to discuss the text at hand and to build the argument;
- utilizes (quotes or paraphrases) in a significant way at least seven peer-reviewed sources;
- focuses on at least two important passages from the central text;
- uses Chaucer’s original language in all of the quotes;
- shows the relevance of the specific topic beyond the narrow focus of the paper;
- is understandable to intelligent people who are not specialists in Chaucer.

Any papers that do not meet these requirements will be given a grade of R (Rewrite, or Revise). If you complete all of the cumulative drafts

Cumulative Drafts of the Research Paper

Beginning in the eighth week of the semester, everyone will build on one of the short papers completed in the first six weeks of class. Each week will add a new dimension of the paper. If you hand the papers in on Friday, I will return them on the following Monday. You will then add more to the paper, hand it on Friday, and I will return it to you the following Monday. (Be sure to turn in all the drafts each time you turn in your paper. Get a folder and keep all relevant materials in it.) If you break the timing, however, this cycle will be thwarted. Grading for these will follow the minor writing assignments.
Final Exam
There will be a final exam based especially on *The Canterbury Tales*. It will likely be a take-home exam.

In-Class Presentations
Each person in the class will choose two presentations slots. Once you have chosen the slot, you will check the Chaucer Review index to find the most recent articles on the topics. For example, if you choose *The Pardoner’s Tale*, you will find the most recent articles on that tale (we have all of the copies, more or less, of *The Chaucer Review* in the library). You will then choose one of them, read and summarize (make your own notes on) it, and present it in class. The presentation should be less than ten minutes and will be judged on the following five qualities (one point for each):
- organization;
- professionalism (not stiffness);
- clear presentation of the main idea;
- concise presentation of supporting information and examples;
- completion on time and within the allotted time.

If you are going to use any handouts, please be sure that they are minimal and to the point.

Each person will also present his or her research paper. (This might need to be an abbreviated form of it.) These will be judged by the same criteria as the article summary presentations.

For more information on presentations, see “Making an Effective Presentation” in the Course Packet.

Worksheets
As we proceed, we will fill out Structures of Discourse Worksheets as well as Connections and Patterns Worksheets. Completing these will be a rather straightforward matter. They are really just structured note-taking sheets that you will complete as and after you read. Each one counts for one-sixth of a point on your final grade.

Does That Seem Like A Lot Of Work?
(Conferences)
Yes, it is a good deal of work, but the course is designed in such a way that you really only need to be consistent and conscientious in order to be at least reasonably successful. If you carry out the assignments every time, you will have little problem bringing things to a fine conclusion. As you know, I have been through this process from both sides of the desk a good number of times, and I think that the way we will be proceeding is absolutely the best way to work. I also know that a short conference between an instructor (or coach) and student can make a huge difference in the course of your work, so we will be scheduling these as part of our class work.

Attendance & Participation
Well, of course. Please see the Attendance Policy, under Course Policies.
Course Policies

Attendance
In this class, as in all of your classes, you are expected to attend all of your class meetings. With this in mind, my policy on missing class is very simple: if you miss more than three classes, your grade is lowered by one increment for each class you miss over three. For example, if your average is a B and you have missed four classes, your final grade will be a B-; if your average is a B and you have missed five classes, your final grade will be a C+.

If you do not want to lose any credit for missing class, you will need to write a one-pager reaction paper to the day’s reading and complete one of the tasks on the Backgrounds and Ideas forum in Blackboard.

If you miss class, I expect that you will contact me before or directly after class. I also expect that you will consult with another student to find out what you have missed, so that when you return to class the next time you will be in stride with the rest of the group.

All absences are excused absences. I trust that you will be mature enough to manage your time and personal circumstances to make it to class each time. If not, I trust that you have good reason. But I also expect you to keep up with your work.

Late Policy
All late work will be downgraded, as described above. I do make exceptions, but I have two conditions: the student must request an extension at least twenty-four hours before an assignment is due; the student must show me a draft of the work-in-progress, which must demonstrate that the student has made a substantial effort. This will only count for extensions to the next class period.

I would much prefer that you ask for an extension than you hand in sloppy or incomplete work.

Policy on Plagiarism
Any student found guilty of willful plagiarism (claiming another’s work to be one’s own) will be dropped from the course immediately and given a grade of F. The student’s name will then be submitted to the student’s advisor, the Student Affairs Officer, and the Academic Dean with a recommendation that further action be taken.

Occasionally a student will accidentally forget to include a reference for a work that has been used, quoted, or paraphrased in the student’s paper. In this case, the student’s work will not be assigned a grade until the proper citations have been submitted to me.

Often these problems can be avoided by consulting the proper reference materials, such as MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.
**How to Succeed in This Class**

Naturally, this course is built for your success. Here are ten tips that will do much to ensure your success:

1. do all work conscientiously, and hand it in punctually;
2. ask questions when you do not understand the point or the assignment;
3. take your writing seriously, always with an aim to improve it;
4. read assigned material before class;
5. when you are reading, jot down important points and items you do not understand;
6. attend all classes and participate in all of them;
7. begin early on your longer assignments;
8. be creative, i.e., try to do things in such a way that no one would think of;
9. read directions and follow them as best you can;
10. if you have any sort of problems that will affect your work, let me know.

This class is your class: its success depends on you. If everyone puts a sincere effort into it, it will surely be a lively, energetic class. So, I will depend on you.

If there is anything that will affect your performance in this class, you should let me know as soon as possible. If it is a serious matter, you should also let the Office of Academic Affairs know as well (255-1224). Everyone here at UMM wants to see you succeed, and we will do everything we can to help you. So please let us help you in whatever ways we can.

**Tentative Course Schedule**

We will have to be flexible this semester. There are several classes that may need to be cancelled. (These are marked in one way or another.) We will need to make these up. We are also subject to the whim and caprice of Mother Nature. If we miss class on account of inclement weather, we will also try to re-schedule class.

In addition to this, the schedule, as written, is probably too ambitious. If we need to do so, we will cut it back a bit.

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<td><strong>Monday, January 24</strong></td>
<td><strong>Monday, January 31</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
<td>No Formal Class: Complete Class Activity.</td>
<td><em>The Parliament of Fowls</em> - Remainder of poem, both Modern and Middle English</td>
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<td><em>The Parliament of Fowls</em></td>
<td><strong>Friday, January 28</strong></td>
<td><em>The Parliament of Fowls</em> - First 400 lines, both Modern and Middle English</td>
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<td><strong>Week 4</strong></td>
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<td>Book of the Duchess – Remainder of poem, both Middle and Modern English</td>
<td><em>House of Fame</em> – Books 1 and 2</td>
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<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td><em>House of Fame</em> – Book 3</td>
<td><em>The Legend of Good Women</em> – The Legends</td>
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<td><strong>Winter Break, February 21-25</strong></td>
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Week 6
Monday, February 28
*Troilus and Criseyde* – Book 1

Friday, March 4
*Troilus and Criseyde* – Books 2 and 3

Week 7
Monday, March 7
*Troilus and Criseyde* – Books 4 and 5

Friday, March 11
*CT. General Prologue.*

Week 8
Monday, March 14 (Re-schedule)
*CT. Knight’s Tale.*

Friday, March 18
*CT. Miller’s Tale.*

Week 9
Monday, March 21
*CT. Reeve’s Tale. Cook’s Tale.*

Friday, March 25
*CT. Man of Law’s Tale.*

Winter Break, March 28 – April 1

Week 10
Monday, April 4 (Re-schedule)
*CT. Wife of Bath’s Prologue.*

Friday, April 8
*CT. Wife of Bath’s Tale.*

Week 11
Monday, April 11
*CT. Friar’s Tale. Summoner’s Tale*

Friday, April 15
*CT. Clerk’s Tale. Merchant’s Tale.*

Week 12
Monday, April 18
*CT. Squire’s Tale. Franklin’s Tale.*

Friday, April 22
*CT. Physician’s Tale. Pardoner’s Tale.*

Week 13
Monday, April 25
*CT. Shipman’s Tale. Prioress’ Tale. Tale of Sir Thopas.*

Friday, April 29 (Re-schedule?)
*CT. Tale of Melibee. Monk’s Tale. Nun’s Priest’s Tale.*

Week 14
Monday, May 2
*CT. Second Nun’s Tale. Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale. Manciple’s Tale.*

Friday, May 6 (Re-schedule)

Final Exam Week
Final Exam Is Due On Friday, May 13.