Course Description:

A study of Chaucer’s major works, our course will stress critical issues and cultural tensions in the texts, especially in their political, historical, and economic contexts. Students will also engage with Chaucer’s Middle English language and literary forms. As opposed to a lecture, our class will be a hybrid of lecture and seminar, with students responsible to attend, contribute, and react to the readings and to each other’s formal and informal arguments. To this end, you will need to keep track of your responses to each of the readings, and to come to class prepared to comment. Because of this seminar approach, your regular attendance and conscientious preparations are crucial.

Course Objectives:

While the course acquaints you with a broad selection of Chaucer’s writings, their genres and themes, our long-term interest will be to read, write, and think critically about the texts through discussion, analysis, and argument. Thus, you should come away from the course with 1) sharpened critical faculties; 2) a solid introduction to texts and their language; and 3) as much as possible, a sense of how the cultural tensions of late medieval England inform the literature.

Required Texts / Materials:

4. Occasional secondary critical readings, either available on e-reserve (see asterisks) or otherwise provided.
5. Spiral notebook for response journal

Evaluation Guidelines:

I will determine your grade using these guidelines: Each student will write two presentation papers of one single-spaced page each on given issues in the readings (30%), along with a midterm (30%) and a final examination (30%). You will also be asked to write informal theses, characterizations, paraphrases, responses, etc. (10%)
Presentation Papers:

Each of you will be assigned to a presentation “group” (A, B, C, or D), meaning only that the members of each group independently prepare formal papers for the same class date. These very short papers (one page, single-spaced) are to be written, presented orally, and then submitted for a grade on the dates designated. Each student will write two, each addressing an audience of fellow scholars who are familiar with the readings. The brevity of the assignment dictates a bare-bones argument. In most cases, you will begin by setting forth a sharp critical position on the given issue, and follow with selected textual evidence in support of your position, and a brief conclusion. The thesis should be as pointed and controversial as your conviction. I will evaluate these papers for their aptness for oral presentation, as well as for the incisiveness of the analysis. Of course, all formal criteria for essays also apply.

Characterizations:

While I generally ask for volunteers to characterize specific readings, all of you should make it a point to prepare at least one or two readings. A “characterization” has three parts: 1) a terse distillation of the reading’s thesis, chief concern, or most salient feature; 2) your critical response to that thesis; and 3) your assessment of how that thesis or concern relates to our class conversation.

- Please be sure to keep all returned work in a safe place; also, keep copies/back-up files of all formal writing.
- Please notify me as soon as possible about any special accommodations you require.
- Feel free to contact me with questions; take advantage of my office hours (see above).

Reading / Writing Schedule
(* = available on e-reserve)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Article</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M 8/30</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 9/1</td>
<td>Book of the Duchess (intro and all); Bisson, “Double Vision: The Gothic Mind’s Eye”*</td>
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<tr>
<td>M 9/6</td>
<td>House of Fame, Intro and Book I; Howard, “The Medieval World Picture”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 9/8</td>
<td>HF, Book III; Howard, “Chaucer at Forty,”* conclude</td>
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W 9/10  Parliament of Birds, Intro and all; Presentation A: The significance of dream in Chaucerian love visions

M 9/13  Troilus and Criseyde, Intro and Book I; Parry, “Introduction” to Andreas Capellanus’ *The Art of Courtly Love”*

M 9/20  T & C, Book IV; Presentation B: Love, desire, and obsession in T & C; Frantzen, “Looking Through and At the Frame”*
W 9/22  Presentation B, cont’d; Flyer, “The Fabrications of Pandarus”*

M 9/27  T & C, Book V: Presentation C: Fate, fortune, and free will in T & C
W 9/29  Presentation C, cont’d;

M 10/4  Presentation D: T & C and the invention of romantic love
W 10/6  Presentation D, cont’d

M 10/11  Midterm Examination
W 10/13  Canterbury Tales, Introduction and General Prologue

M 10/18  CT, General Prologue, cont’d;
W 10/20  CT, General Prologue, cont’d; mid-semester grades due

M 10/25  CT, The Knight’s Tale, Parts 1 & 2; Mann, “Chance and Destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight’s Tale””*
W 10/27  KT, Part 3; Presentation A: The affinity of Venus and Mars in KT; Bisson, “”Till Death Us Depart: Love, Marriage, and Sexuality””*

M 11/1  Miller’s Prologue and Tale
W 11/3  Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale; “The Bible Epistles of St. Paul” (from Amt)

M 11/8  Presentation B: Gender and authority in CT
W 11/10  Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale; from Howard, “The Black Death”

M 11/15  Presentation C: The rising middle class in CT
W 11/17  Presentation C, cont’d; Nun’s Priest’s Prologue and Tale

---Thanksgiving Recess---

M 11/29  Chaucer’s Retraction; Presentation D: The trope of the pilgrimage in CT
W 12/1  Presentation D, cont’d; last day of class
Response Journal Prompts for English 401: Chaucer

Week 1: How do you define “Middle Ages”? How would you define “Renaissance”? Are these terms distinct? How? What ideas do you associate with each? Do they overlap?

Week 2: How would you characterize the tone of The Book of the Duchess? How is patronage relevant to the poem?

Week 3: Study GC’s verse form: How would you describe its rhyme scheme and meter? What is its effect on the reader?

Week 4: What’s the importance of the dream vision in these texts? How does dream vision work as a trope?

Week 5: Analyze GC’s idea of love: What does it mean? How does it differ from our notions of love? What traditions does the text draw upon?

Week 6: Based on the evidence of the “Love Visions” and T & C, how would you define “courtly love”?

Week 7: Analyze the character and meaning of Pandarus in T & C.

Week 8: What does the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales indicate about economic change in this culture?

Week 9: In-depth character study of assigned pilgrim.

Week 10: What evidence of class tension and class antagonism can you find in CT?

Week 11: How does the Wife of Bath’s Tale conform or conflict with her prologue?

Week 12: What does the Pardoner’s Prologue indicate about the relationship of language, rhetoric, and authority?

Week 13: How does CT represent the rise of secularism?