Course Description

English 2100 takes us through the dark ages of British Literature, through the Renaissance, and to the brink of the Enlightenment. This wide range of literary history—over a millennium of writing—is frankly too much to cover in one class, perhaps in one lifetime. In constructing your reading list, I have therefore had to resort to some pretty ruthless cutting of vital authors and texts. This is no comprehensive march from Caedmon to Milton, but a sampling of the varieties of texts, ideas, and problems that excited the intelligence of people long dead.

Professors inevitably attempt to impose unity on their material, and I stand guilty of this because of the obvious chronological sequencing of the syllabus. Although we can see how one sort of work influences a later sort, we have to resist the almost inevitable idea that literary traditions grow like people from childhood to complex adulthood. However, we can trace links between works and ask how this literature can be meaningfully connected and meaningfully read today.

Although an important aim of English 2100 is to have you read, appreciate, and enjoy some great early literature, a no less important goal is that you learn to express your opinions about what you read. To this end, we will sample a variety of literary types and structures—from the sad and allusive music of the Anglo-Saxon epic, Beowulf (in a modern English verse translation by one of the great poets of our age), through the tight structural confines of the Renaissance sonnet, to the high style of Milton’s masterwork, Paradise Lost. This course should help introduce you to the language and methodology of literary analysis. You will be asked to apply the skills you learned in composition classes to literary interpretation. English 2100 aims at developing and refining your ability to engage in concrete textual analysis; articulate and advance well-supported theses based on arguable propositions; offer specific claims and avoid unsubstantiated and sweeping generalizations; move well beyond paraphrase and summary to engage and utilize the
language of the text as a fundamental form of evidence for a thesis; understand that writing is a form of critical thinking; express your ideas orally; and finally, to attain a style and a level of discourse commensurate with a college English course geared towards majors.

Course Objectives

- Gaining factual knowledge about medieval and Renaissance drama, poetry, and culture
- Learning and practicing fundamental principles of literary analysis as they relate to the criticism of early literature
- Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of some distant and difficult texts in the literary canon
- Developing skills in expressing your ideas about said literature, both orally and in writing

Required Material


Grade Breakdown

Exam 1: 20%
Final Exam: 25%
Response Essay 1: 15%
Response Essay 2: 15%
Group Presentation: 15%
Class Participation: 10%

We will use the optional plus minus system for grades. Letter grades correspond to numerical values in accordance with the chart below.

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Please note: I will not allow you to go Credit/No Credit after census day (3-11); Also, I will not sign a withdrawal form after week 10.

Explanation of Course Content

*Exams:* Your presence is kindly requested at two exams. One is scheduled for early April, after we return from break; the other will be held during finals week on Wednesday, 5-28. The final will be comprehensive in scope. The exams offer you opportunities to tell me how much you’ve learned about medieval and early modern culture and literature in the course of the class. These
may consist of any combination of identification questions, short-answer questions, and essays. I will not give make-up exams, so please mark your calendars.

**Essays:** I will assign two response essays this semester. For each, you must write a well-organized, original piece in response to specific literary texts in the light of course issues. I will provide prompts for these; research is not required unless specified in the prompt; rather, the emphasis will be on close-readings of texts and your own ideas. Essays will be graded on the basis of style, persuasiveness, acumen, and analytical quality. For the specific grading criteria I follow, click [here](#). Specs to follow in due time.

Topics and Guidelines for Response Essay #1

Topics and Guidelines for Response Essay #2

**Group Presentation:** For this project you will be split into groups of 2-3. Each group will be responsible for giving a 15 minute in-class presentation on a given topic from a list that I will distribute. Your presentation should include 1) a thorough discussion of your topic (which may be an event, thing, concept, literary work, etc.) and its relation to course issues, including, perhaps, other works on the syllabus; 2) a handout for your classmates with relevant details and an annotated bibliography of useful scholarly print and web sources; 3) an individual 3-page paper for me detailing the experience of the group project and presentation, due one week after your classroom experience.

Group Presentation Assignment

Group Presentation Schedule

**Class Participation:** An average participation grade indicates that you are present, prompt, and prepared for class. A superior grade in this area indicates that you offer constructive, thoughtful feedback and respect others and their opinions. Serious participation in group and class projects, effort, and classroom demeanor also play a part in your participation grade. Note that an above average grade in this area is not automatic; you must earn a good participation grade through honest effort and serious input. If you are shy or otherwise unwilling or unable to offer feedback in class, explain your difficulties to me and offer feedback during my office hours.

Closely tied to the concept of class participation is **classroom decorum:** what is appropriate behavior in a college classroom? For starters, each student must be completely prepared with all assigned reading and must undertake an active, responsible role in all classroom activities. The score you receive for class participation is not awarded simply for attendance. Each student must earn it by contributing to the exchange of ideas upon which every successful course depends. Here are some behavioral guidelines: don’t talk disruptively, especially when others are talking. Have your textbook with you every class, and have it on your desk and opened to the relevant pages. Don’t read the paper or do work for other courses in class. Falling asleep in class is the height of rudeness. Don’t behave as if I’m on television and I can’t see or hear
you. Also, turn off and put away all cell phones and PDAs before class begins. I don’t
want you texting or fooling with any sort of technology during class time. This includes
laptops.

Rules and Regulations

Attendance and Tardiness: You should attend every class meeting. I will take attendance
during the first five minutes of class each day. Anyone not present during roll will be
marked absent. If you are late and miss roll, it is up to you to see that I correct the roll
that same day; failure to do so means the absence is permanent. If tardiness becomes
excessive, I reserve the right to treat a tardy as an absence. Each student is allowed two
absences without penalty. For each subsequent absence, 2 percentage points will be
deducted from your final semester grade. Further, you are responsible for keeping up
with the syllabus during any absence. Finally, if your absences exceed 8, you will fail
this course. I value your presence in class, so please come.

Late Work: For the purposes of this class, late means late. All work is due at the
beginning of class on the due date. Missing class or coming late on the day an
assignment is due in no way excuses you from submitting work on time. I will not accept
late work without having given prior permission. Please make every attempt to contact
me if something goes wrong, and the sooner the better—preferably, I’d like to know
about any problems a day in advance.

Academic Honesty: You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is and avoiding it.
This, and any other form of cheating, such as downloading or buying papers off of the
internet, having someone else write a paper for you, having Gertrude, who happens to be
your mother-in-law and a graduate student at UC Davis, “edit” your essay for you, etc.,
can’t be tolerated in college. Copying from another person’s test paper or other forms of
cheating on in-class written assignments are just as egregious. Your integrity, as well as
that of the entire academic community, is at stake. Please make sure all work is original,
individual, and done specifically for this class. The English Department’s policy on
plagiarism is as follows:

Academic honesty is an important principle to ensure that all authors, including students, are
acknowledged for their original expressions of ideas.

Instructors have a responsibility to demonstrate to students in their courses the difference in
acceptable and unacceptable use of others’ work. Students have a responsibility to ask their
instructor for guidance whenever they are uncertain about fair use of someone else’s work.

Students, in submitting work, certify that the work is their own original work except that all
information garnered from others whether quoted, summarized, or paraphrased has been
appropriately cited. Dishonesty by failing to acknowledge the work of others constitutes
plagiarism and is a serious offense. Normally, the penalty for plagiarism is failure in the course.
More serious penalties may also be invoked.*
In cases of plagiarism instructors should also submit the *Student Discipline: Academic Dishonesty Incident Report Form* to the Coordinator of Student Discipline for tracking or for disciplinary investigation. [http://www.csustan.edu/english/dept/AcademicDishonestyIncident.pdf](http://www.csustan.edu/english/dept/AcademicDishonestyIncident.pdf) Click on the URL below to read the text of the above policy: [http://www.csustan.edu/english/dept/plagiarism.html](http://www.csustan.edu/english/dept/plagiarism.html) in their syllabi.

*Title 5, California Code of Regulations, Section 41301 notes that students may be “expelled, suspended, placed on probation, or given a lesser sanction for one or more of the following causes which must be campus related: 1. Cheating or plagiarism in connection with an academic program at a campus. . . .” (see Appendix F of the current CSU, Stanislaus catalog).

Failure of the course will be the penalty for first time offenders. You may be subject to expulsion from the university for repeated offenses.

*Students with special needs: Students who require extra help, space, or time to complete assignments should speak to me as soon as possible.*

**Schedule of Reading and Assignments** (subject to change as the semester’s obligations develop—note that the instructor reserves the sole right to modify any of the terms or conditions of this syllabus):

**February**

W, 2-13: Introductions


W, 2-20: *Beowulf*

M, 2-25: *Beowulf*

W, 2-27: *Beowulf*

**March**

M, 3-3: “Lanval”; “Chevrefoil”; General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*

W, 3-5: *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale*

M, 3-10: *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*

T, 3-11: Census Day

W, 3-12: *The Pardoner’s Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue*

M, 3-17: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
W, 3-19: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; **Response Essay 1 due**

M, 3-24: Spring Break

W, 3-26: Spring Break

M, 3-31: Cesar Chavez Day

**April**

W, 4-2: Incarnation and Crucifixion Lyrics; *The York Crucifixion*

M, 4-7: **Mid-Term Exam**

W, 4-9: *The Faerie Queene*

M, 4-14: *The Faerie Queene*

W, 4-16: *The Faerie Queene*

M, 4-21: *Astrophil and Stella*

W, 4-23: *Dr. Faustus*

M, 4-28: *Dr. Faustus*

W, 4-30: *Dr. Faustus*

**May**

M, 5-5: John Donne, Songs and Sonnets

W, 5-7: *Milton, Sonnets*

M, 5-12: *Paradise Lost I and II*; **Response Essay 2 due**

W, 5-14: *Paradise Lost IV*

M, 5-19: *Paradise Lost IX*

W, 5-21: Last Day of Class

W, 5-28: **Final Exam 11:15-1:15**