

English 414: Chaucer

About the Course

Chaucer is at once one of the greatest and the most dynamic of English poets. His best-known work, *The Canterbury Tales*, shows him as a master of narrative and of stylistic variety which has few rivals. His minor works focus on themes of particular interest in present-day criticism, such as the cultural formations embodied in the literary landscape, gender politics, and the workings of dreams and the imagination. In this course we will explore Chaucer's most important themes and literary strategies by reading a selection of *The Canterbury Tales* and some of Chaucer's shorter poems in his original Middle English. The scope of the course also embraces the study of Chaucer's sources and literary analogues and will reflect on his influence on later writers.

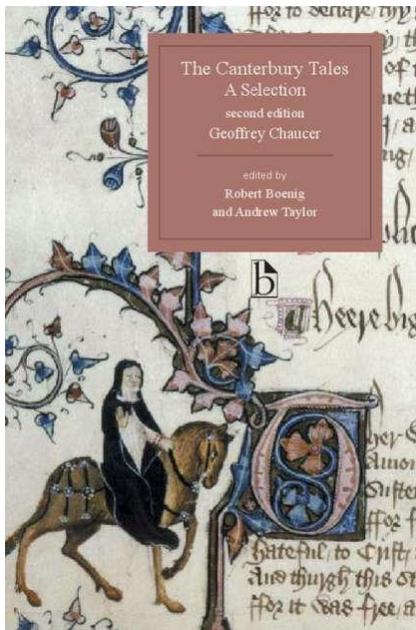
Course Objectives

- Acquire a basic reading knowledge of Chaucerian Middle English.
- Acquire knowledge of the historical and cultural background which informs Chaucer's works, as well as a familiarity with the issues that have been discussed in Chaucer scholarship.
- Learn to read and discuss Chaucer's works for enjoyment and for their insight into the human condition.
- Demonstrate the skills associated with the professional practices of literary criticism, including writing and formatting conventions, research skills, and methods of analysis.

Course Information

- Days: Thursday
- Time: 4:00-6:45 pm (Course Number 14337)
- Location: Jerome Richfield 246
- Office Location: Sierra Tower 803
- Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:00-2:50; Thursday, 2:00-2:50
- Website: <http://scottkleinman.com/courses/414/F-2019>

Textbook



[The Canterbury Tales: A Selection, Edited by Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor. Second Edition \(2013\)](#)

Note: If the Matador Bookstore has not ordered enough texts, you can order a copy (paper or digital) from Broadview Press by clicking the image.

I am frequently asked whether another edition of the *Canterbury Tales* is suitable for this course. I certainly understand the impulse to save money if you already have a copy. However, this must be balanced against the ways in which you will be disadvantaged in your learning. [The Riverside Chaucer](#) is the standard scholarly edition, and there is also an [edition of the Canterbury Tales extracted from it](#). Scholarly literature inevitably refers to this edition, as do certain essential tools to help you learn to read Chaucer's Middle English. Because of the nature of Chaucer's works, some editions actually give

different readings of the text. Although, most other editions, including the assigned textbook, will not differ significantly in their readings of the text, they will differ in their page numbers. This may lead to difficulties in following class discussion. Some editions offering extracts of the *Canterbury Tales* may not have all the tales included in the syllabus (even the assigned textbook is missing one or two). For these reasons, I highly recommend using the assigned edition, although either of the two named above are acceptable.

In addition to the assigned textbook, many course readings will be made available through the class Canvas site.

Coursework

Coursework will consist of two essays (30% for the first, 40% for the second), a journal of annotated passages (15%), and preparation and participation (15%).

The reading schedule is listed on the course website.

Essays

The essays will be approximately 5-6 pages long (8-10 for graduate students). All essays must be typed in polished standard English and formatted according to the standard conventions of literary criticism. Late submissions and submissions containing distracting numbers of typos, spelling mistakes, or grammatical errors will drop as much as one full grade.

Journal Assignment

You will keep a record of significant passages in *The Canterbury Tales* with commentary on why you think they are significant. This journal will help in constructing theses and compiling evidence for your essays.

Preparation and Participation

Enrolling in this class requires a commitment to participate in a community of learners in which you agree to contribute to and not to detract from the learning environment. In order to receive full credit for participation, you must do the readings in advance, bring your textbook to each class, be prepared to discuss the materials, and complete all assignments additional to

the exams and research papers. You must also arrive to class on time, remember to turn off your cell phones completely (vibrate is not good enough), and remain in the classroom for the duration of the class period. For disruptive behaviour (e.g. cell phones, frequent exits from the classroom), I reserve the right to increase the proportion of your final grade allotted to participation as I feel appropriate. There is no automatic credit for attendance, and frequent absences will be noted and may be reflected in your final grade. For further information on factors that can influence your grade, see under **Class Policies** below.

Grading

This course uses a system of contract grading. You will decide by the end of Week 2 whether you will receive an A, B, or C in the class (lower grades at my discretion). To receive this grade, you will have to meet the requirements specified for each grade below. If you are unable to meet the requirements for the grade for which you signed up, you must contact me to renegotiate your contract.

In addition to the provisions of each contract, all students must abide by the terms in the **Class Policies** section below.

Class Policies

By enrolling in this course you agree to be bound for the purposes of this class by the policies below, which serve as a formal legal agreement. You may reject these policies by dropping the class within the time allotted by the University.

Grading

Grades are A, B, C, D, or F and can receive a plus or minus. To receive a grade other than a WU, you must have completed more than half the coursework (no exceptions).

Since students in English courses are expected by society at large to be acquiring writing skills, I privilege grammar, spelling, and editing in my grading. Work containing distracting numbers of typos, spelling mistakes, or grammatical errors will be graded primarily on these criteria on a sliding

scale which may supersede any percentages given in the **Coursework and Grading** section above. That is, the more distracting these factors are, the more they are worth (up to 100% of your grade). A rough guide to what is distracting is any sign that might give an employer pause when evaluating a job application.

Extra Credit

In some semesters opportunities may arise for non-required activities such as guest lectures, and I will offer extra credit for attendance at or participation in these activities. I will always offer this extra credit to the entire class.

Because my time commitments do not allow me grade extra assignments, I do not award extra credit to individual students for any reason. I keep to this policy very strictly.

Preparation and Participation

Enrolling in this class requires a commitment to participate in a community of learners in which you agree to contribute to and not to detract from the learning environment. In order to receive full credit for participation, you must do the readings in advance, bring assigned textbooks to each class, be prepared to discuss the materials, and complete all assignments. You must also arrive to class regularly, arrive on time, and remain in the class room for the duration of the class period. For disruptive behaviour, I reserve the right to increase the proportion of your final grade allotted to participation, as I feel appropriate.

Inappropriate Use of Technology in Class

Ringling and/or vibrating cell phones in class disrupt my concentration and that of your fellow students, inevitably lowering the quality of the learning environment. If your cell phone goes off in class, I reserve the right to impose penalties to your grade or to ask you to leave the classroom, as I deem appropriate. If your cell phone disrupts my thought process as I am teaching, I may call a “class break” in order to recover from the distraction. It is in your interest to remember that you will have deprived your fellow classmates of this class time.

If you have a computer or smart phone in the classroom, it will be very tempting to check your e-mail, read Facebook, or generally surf the web for purposes unrelated to the class. Resist. If I catch you engaged in these activities, I reserve the right to impose penalties to your grade or ask you to leave the classroom, as I deem appropriate. Please be aware that this has the same effect on my teaching as cell phones and may also trigger the “class break” response.

Academic Honesty

It is extremely important that all aspects of your work are come by honourably. Efforts to gain an advantage not given to all students are dishonest and regarded as an extremely serious matter by the academic community. Consequences range from probation to expulsion. University policy stipulates that plagiarism, the submission of another person’s work as your own, is a violation of academic honesty, even if it arises out of ignorance or oversight, rather than deliberate cheating. Enrolling in this class means that you agree to abide by my decision regarding the appropriate action to take in cases of academic dishonesty. If you have any questions about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, or collaboration, please consult me.

Inclusion

CSUN values an inclusive learning environment, where we respect the varied perspectives and experiences of a diverse community. Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining a respectful space to express their opinions. Professional courtesy and consideration for our classroom community are especially important with respect to topics dealing with differences in race, color, gender and gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, disability, and age.

As a “responsible employee” at CSUN, I am required by federal and state laws to report incidences of harassment and discrimination to the campus Title IX Coordinator if they are disclosed to me. If you have experienced harassment or discrimination and do not want the Title IX Coordinator notified, instead of disclosing the experience to me, you can speak confidentially with CSUN’s Care Advocate by calling (818) 677-7492. For more information regarding your university rights and options, please visit the University’s Title IX website at <http://www.csun.edu/title-ix>.

Add/Drop Policy

Students should make sure that they follow the [university's add/drop deadlines](#), outlined in the Schedule of Classes. According to university policy, drops are only allowed after the set date when “a) there is a serious and compelling reason—specifically the student’s emotional or physical health or financial condition is clearly in jeopardy, and b) there is no viable alternative—including repeating the class”. Students will need to provide documentation on official letterhead—a letter, on official stationery, from a doctor or an employer—to support their reasons. No adds will be allowed unless a student can provide documented proof—e.g., a clerical error—for the reason for the tardiness. Please make sure to meet the deadline!

Withdrawals and Incompletes

The standard grade if a student fails to complete the work for a class is a “WU”. This is the equivalent of an “F”, but the grade may be changed if you re-take the course at a future time. This grade is also assigned to students who have not attended after the first few classes of the semester but have not officially “withdrawn” from the course.

I may assign an Incomplete (“I”) if and only if you meet all of the following conditions:

- You have completed the vast bulk of the assigned work;
- You are passing the class;
- You fill out and bring to me a [Request for an Incomplete form](#) (also available from the English Department office), on which I detail exactly what is still needed for completion of the course.
- I can make no exceptions to this policy, even if it affects your financial aid.

Once you take an incomplete, you have a year from the date recorded on the form to complete the requirements of the course and have your grade changed; therefore, you should submit work early enough to allow me to grade your work and fill out the necessary forms to assign you a new grade.

Keep in mind that, after you take an Incomplete, any grading of your work becomes an added burden on my busy timetable during the following year.

Therefore you should not expect the normal amount of comments on your work or any extra teaching beyond my normal office hours.