Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* present a dense, multi-layered reading experience. Your first task is to learn to read and pronounce the London dialect of late Middle English. In itself, this task is not too difficult, since Modern English is the direct descendant of this dialect, and Modern English spelling, as developed by Caxton and other early printers, is based on the spelling of late Medieval manuscripts, including manuscripts of Chaucer. However, you need to develop these skills quickly. We will devote a fair amount of class time during the first weeks to reading, translating and pronouncing, and you will need to work on these skills at home.

Once we move on to the tales, you will discover that they participate in a web of intertextual allusions and connections. Each tale can be read on several levels:

- for its own sake, simply as a tale;
- as a revelation of the teller's character, motives or ethics;
- as a reply to another teller or tale;
- as a participant in the thematic web that grows increasing dense as we proceed through the tales;
- as a component of the larger work known as *The Canterbury Tales*.

In the case of some tales, such as the Wife of Bath's tale, we have the opportunity of reading Chaucer's version against closely related versions, and we will be able to explore the features and qualities that make his tales distinctly Chaucerian.
**Student Learning Outcomes:**

Through class discussion and writing, students will be able to:
--demonstrate their ability to read Middle English poetry and prose;
--apply their understanding of the structure of Middle English;
--describe the linguistic features which distinguish the Northern dialect of Middle English from Chaucer’s own London dialect;
--interpret the tales according to their generic horizons as well as their contexts in *The Canterbury Tales*;
--analyze the ethical situations within tales, between the tellers and their tales, and among the pilgrims (CO12)
--describe the continuities and differences between late Medieval and modern ethics (CO12)
--write lucid, well-constructed arguments analyzing and interpreting texts.

All of the tales are narrated on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Thomas á Beckett in Canterbury, an undertaking with spiritual and ethical implications. The work begins with verbal portraits of each of the pilgrims, passages which are closely related to Medieval estates satire. These portraits reveal, often with seeming inadvertance, the moral failings or virtues of each of the pilgrims. The tales conclude with the Parson’s Tale, a treatise on the examination of conscience prior to confession. Embedded within this treatise is a detailed account of the seven deadly sins. All these factors make our reading, discussions and analyses of *The Canterbury Tales* an excellent opportunity for an examination of late Medieval ethics and a comparison of these ethics with modern ethics. Thus our course will satisfy:

**Core Objective 12 — Ethics:** Students will demonstrate understanding of the ethical principles in general or in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to recognize, articulate, and apply ethical principles in various academic, professional, social, or personal contexts.

**Grading:**

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<tr>
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<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tests</td>
<td>30% (15% each)</td>
<td>25% (12.5% each)</td>
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<td>Papers</td>
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<td>Reading Journal</td>
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<td>Term paper</td>
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We will use the plus and minus system for the final grades: 93-100 = A; 90-92 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C; 70-72 = C-; 67-69 = D+; 63-66 = D; 60-62 = D-; below 60 = F.
•Nota bene: Your attentive presence earns you a C for participation. If you have more than two unexcused absences your grade may drop. Contribute to class discussions regularly, and this grade can climb as high as A+. If for some reason you prefer not to participate in class discussions, you can still earn an A for participation by doing additional entries in your journal. If you wish to pursue this option, speak to me by the end of the second week.

Assignments:
In addition to the daily reading assignments, there will be three translation and vocabulary quizzes, a midterm, a take-home final, and two papers. You will also keep a journal, with entries for each reading assignment. Graduate students will also write a longer paper (10-15 pp.) which includes research.

Schedule:

All readings must be completed by the date they are listed. Tale assignments include all prologues and links. Be sure to reread each pilgrim's portrait before you read their tale.

Jan.  18 Introduction
      20 General Prologue, ll. 1-284

      25 General Prologue, ll. 285-586
      27 General Prologue, ll. 587-858;
         First quiz, on ll. 1-162 and part 1 of the vocabulary

Feb.  1 Boethius. The Consolation of Philosophy.
      3 Knight’s Tale, Parts 1 & 2 (ll. 859-1880)

      8 Knight’s Tale, Parts 3 and 4 (ll. 1881-3108)
      10 Miller’s Tale
         Second quiz, on ll. 715-858 and part 2 of the vocabulary

      15 Reeve’s Tale
         Third quiz, on ll. 859-1032 and part 3 of the vocabulary
      17 Cook’s Prologue and “Tale”; “The Miller and the Two Clerks”
         Portrait Paper Due

      22 Man of Law
      24 Wife of Bath: Prologue

Mar.  1 Wife of Bath: Tale; The Ballad of King Henry
      3 Tale of Florent; The Adventures of the Sons of Eochu Muigmedon (hand-out)

      8 Friar and Summoner
      10 Clerk

      15 Spring Break
17 Spring Break

22 Midterm
24 Merchant

29 Squire; Le Fresne, Lanval, Bisclaveret
31 Franklin; A Garden in January; **Teller and tale paper due**

April
5 Physician and Pardoner
7 Shipman

12 Prioress
14 Chaucer's Tale of Thopas; Chaucer's Tale of Melibee

19 Monk (selections); Nun’s Priest
21 Second Nun

26 Canon’s Yeoman
28 Manciple; The Parson’s Prologue; read your chosen sections of the Parson's "Tale"; Chaucer's Retraction; **Graduate Paper due**

May
3 Final discussion; **Hand in Journals**
5 Take-home exam due

**Writing assignments:**

**Portrait paper, due Feb. 17:** Analyze and discuss the portrait of the Friar, Franklin, Shipman, Wife of Bath or Pardoner. See the reading tips for the General Prologue for features and literary techniques to focus on. In addition to an analysis of the pilgrim's character, be sure to present also an analysis of the way the portrait presents this character, i.e. the way the portrait works. Include a discussion of any ethical issues that emerge in the portrait, and, when relevant, distinguish between the stances of the poet and the narrator. (5-6 pp. or between 1600 and 1900 words).

**Teller and Tale paper, due Mar. 31:** Discuss the relationship between teller and tale as seen in the case of one of the following pilgrims: Franklin, Physician, Pardoner, Shipman, or Prioress. Be sure to address any ethical issues that emerge in the portrait or the tale you are discussing. (5-6 pp. or between 1600 and 1900 words).

For one of these paper assignments you may substitute an essay that addresses an ethical dilemma in one or more of the tales. This essay topic must be cleared with me, and the paper you write must be at least 5 pp. (1600 words or more).

**Take-home final:** Write at least 5 pp. You have the choice of three topics:
1) Choose one of the seven deadly sins described in the Parson’s Tale and analyze the varieties of this sin as they are manifested in the tales. To what degree does this sin constitute a theme in
the tales? Do the tales provide any closure for this theme, or is closure provided only by the Parson’s Tale and the arrival at Canterbury?

2) We have seen how Chaucer draws upon *The Consolation of Philosophy* in the Knight’s Tale, and we have briefly considered a Boethian reading of the *Tales* as a whole. To what degree can we argue that the *Tales* present a literary manifestation of Boethius’ ethics and world view? Be sure to explain both the nature and the source of Boethius’ ethics as they appear in *The Consolation*.

3) Like much of what he writes, Chaucer’s Retraction can be read in multiple, seemingly contradictory ways. It is presented as a sincere plea for divine forgiveness and a genuine revocation of the tales that “sownen into synne.” Yet the “revoked” tales are still included in the text, and the placement of the retraction at the end of the collection suggests that it plays an important role in the structure and meaning of the *Tales*. What does this duality suggest about Chaucer’s ethical position in relation to the *Tales* and to the world he lived in? What clues does it provide about the purpose of the *Tales* as a whole?

**Reading Journal**: The journal is an integral part of your reading. Write the equivalent of a one-page typed response (i.e. 300-350 words) for every reading assignment. These responses can include notes, questions and translation problems, but their main purpose is to help you reflect on what you’ve just read. At least one-third of your entries must address ethical issues raised in the portraits and tales, and at times I may give you questions to consider and answer. You can begin by using the tips below as guidelines for your responses to the portraits in the General Prologue.

Journal entries must be submitted before each class, preferably via e-mail. If you prefer not to type your entries, then submit a photocopy at the beginning of class. I will not be grading these entries as they are submitted; my only concern here is to see that the entries are written in a timely and appropriate manner. Journals will be collected and graded at the end of the semester along the following lines:

- If they contain primarily notes and summary: C
- If they contain notes, summary and reflection in roughly equal amounts: B
- If they contain 300-350 words of reflection, with as much summary and notes as you like: A

View your journal entries as a preparation for class discussion.

**Reading Tips for the General Prologue**

When you read the portraits in the General Prologue, read each of them a number of times. Pay particular attention to the following features:

1) the physical description of each pilgrim: personal appearance, clothing, manners and bearing, displays (wealth, jewelry, weapons)
2) social class and occupation
3) attitudes toward themselves and/or others; opinions
4) appetites and tastes
5) associations: Who (if anyone) are they travelling with? Where do they ride among the other pilgrims?
Reading Chaucer frequently requires us to read between the lines; he often implies more than he says. Therefore, pay particular attention to the following devices of the narrator:

1) the use of superlatives
2) ambiguity
3) understatement
4) repetition of words from one portrait to another (eg. “worthy” and “gentil”),
5) juxtapositions (esp. apparent non sequiturs)
6) and above all, IRONY!

Unlike most other literature courses, this course places considerable emphasis on learning to read an earlier stage of our language. Yet it is similar to every other literature course in that you will spend each class session developing your skills in reading and analyzing literature. Thus the process of reading, discussing and thinking about literature is essential to what we do here. Do not consult any summaries or commentaries, since these inevitably short-circuit your own engagement with the text, and completely undercut your purpose for taking this course. Use only the assigned texts. These texts supply you with on-page glosses and extensive notes--use these resources fully. Do not fall back on a modern English translations: such translations inevitably lose part of the meaning, and reliance upon them will also interfere with your learning to read Middle English, which is quite easy to learn as long as you invest the necessary time and effort.

Policies

If you miss class because of illness or another serious reason, be sure to contact me and to obtain notes from a fellow student.

If you find that you are having trouble with any of the course material, ask questions in class. If you are still having difficulty, come see me right away!--do not wait until you have done poorly on a test.

Electronic Devices: Unless they are being used for taking notes or reading course materials, all electronic devices (phones, tablets, laptops) are to be turned off before class. Any person using a device for texting, reading e-mails, browsing, gaming etc. will be credited with an absence for that day and will be banned from using all electronic devices for any purpose in the classroom for the rest of the semester.

Recording Policy: Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

Disabilities and Campus Resources:

Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (775) 784-4422, Tutoring Center (775) 784-6801, and University Writing Center (775) 784-6030. These centers support your classroom
learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

Any student with a documented disability should speak to me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building 101) as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations. I will be very happy to work with you to ensure equity in classroom experiences, outside assignments, and grading.

**On-line Evaluations:**

Your chance to evaluate this English course will appear two weeks before the last day of classes in the form of a new course on your WebCampus home page. This new course contains only the evaluation survey. These online course evaluations are extremely important to your instructor and to the Department of English, so please take a few minutes to complete your course evaluation when it becomes available. The evaluation is completely anonymous and your comments can never be connected with your name. Instructors cannot see the evaluation course on WebCampus and will not have access to the contents of these evaluations until after final grades have been posted.

**Plagiarism:** Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include the cancelation of a student's enrollment without a grade, an F for the course, or an F for the assignment. For more details, see the University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog.