Course Description and Objectives

Ethics, Literature and the Law, introduces students to relationships among story structure, narrative theory, textual study, ethics and legal practice. The course considers substantial issues in the law from ancient times to the present, including contracts, covenants, culpability, mercy, retribution, guilt, discrimination, social justice, contingency, rule and the ethical questions they raise. It distinguishes forms of jurisprudence from one another and introduces students to judging, decision-making and the writings which enact and accompany them. It studies contemporary controversies and cases, raising questions about the death penalty, religion and law, civil liberties, matricide, military tribunals and shifting definitions of justice. It trains students to understand and analyze literary and legal language. It challenges students to think about story structures and literary features which characterize the trial as construct and process. Above all it asks students to define and engage ethical questions pertinent to various theories of justice (retributive, distributive, procedural) and their implementation.

Beginning with seven stories from the Bible and several dramas from fifth century Greece, we will go on to consider law, social justice, environmental justice, the trial, detection, aggression and other issues in classical American and European fiction, drama and film. Throughout the course we will compare past writing with present cases and problems. And when we are ready we will attend trials and examine ‘story structures’ and linguistic traits in real time.

Silver Core: This course satisfies CO 12: Ethics: Students will evaluate the ethical principles in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, consider how ethical principles might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of various actions.
Student Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course students will:

- demonstrate skills in close reading and narrative analysis of literary works and legal testimony, written and oral
- define ethical interests at stake in judicial testimony, literature, and real-world situations or practices (CO 12)
- articulate what makes a particular course of action ethically defensible (CO 12)
- integrate, synthesize, and apply knowledge of ethical dilemmas and resolutions through focused and interdisciplinary research (CO12)
- align historical developments in jurisprudence with shifting conceptions of ethics
- identify the real-world ethical values in non-classroom activities, including trials in federal and district court, observing court practice, analyzing linguistic and narrative features of the trial and defining ethical issues inherent in the effort to provide procedural justice. (CO 12)

Prerequisites: This course is open to English majors and minors who have completed English 303 and to students with at least Junior standing.

Readings:

- Xeroxed readings distributed in class
- The Bible (any edition, including the Oxford edition, as in WT)
- Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*
- Sophocles, *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*
- Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*
- Melville, *Billy Budd*
- Reginald Rose, *Twelve Angry Men*
- Walter van Tilburg Clark, *The Ox-Bow Incident*
- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*
- Pleadings and decisions in recent Supreme Court cases

In addition, students may focus on ONE of the following novels for the final project: Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*
  - Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*
  - Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

Course Requirements: Students will complete all readings, participate in class discussions (CO12), maintain a portfolio of written assignments (CO12), complete a take-home midterm exam (at least 50% of which will focus on CO12), participate fully in group assignments, report in class from time to time, complete a final
project (at least 50% of which will focus on CO12) and report on that project to the class.

**Late Work Policy:** All written assignments must be submitted on time as unexcused late work will not be accepted.

**Grading.** Your final grade will be determined according to the following formula:
- Portfolio 25%
- Midterm exam 25%
- Class reports 10%
- Final project 25%
- Report on final project 5%
- Participation 10%

**Grading:** We will use the A/A-/B+/B/B-/C+/C/C-….system of grading. Numerical correlations for letter grades are as follows: A: 94-100, A-: 90-93, B+: 87-89, B: 84-86, B-: 80-83, C+: 77-79, C: 74-76, C--: 70-73, D: 64-69.

**Office Hours:** Formal office hours for this class will take place regularly, as listed above. We will add office hours as necessary to meet the needs of students. Students can e-mail the instructor with questions and to arrange meeting times.

**Disclaimer:** The course outline below is a plan for the semester but not a ‘contract’. We may need to modify the course outline slightly as the needs of the class become apparent.

**Policy on Disability:** This course welcomes students with diverse abilities and backgrounds, and will accommodate appropriately. Students should document disabilities by registering with Student Services early in the semester, and speak with the instructor as soon as possible about special needs.

**University Policy on Attendance:**

Students will need to understand principles taught class by class, week by week. Therefore I encourage and require steady attendance. If you are ill or need to miss a class for a legitimate reason, please call or email me in advance. You are allowed one unexcused absence during the semester. Please do not leave class early unless you talk with the instructor in advance.
University Policy on Academic Dishonesty:

Statement on Academic Dishonesty: “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 canceling a student's enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment. For more details, see the University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog.”

My Statement about Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a serious offense and a fundamental violation of academic honesty. I define plagiarism as the presentation, intentional or unintentional, of another person’s writing or ideas as your own. All work submitted in English 425B/625B must be your own and must be written exclusively for this course. Using someone else’s words or ideas without giving credit to the author is a serious violation of academic honesty. Any ideas, quotations or paraphrases you borrow from other sources, including anything from the Internet or anything from an essay you have already written, must be properly acknowledged and documented. If you have questions about how to document sources, please see me. You can find the University of Nevada, Reno’s policy on academic dishonesty at http://www.unr.edu/stsv/acdисpol.html.

Penalties for a proven case of plagiarism are severe. A proven plagiarist receives an F for the entire course (a grade which cannot be replaced by retaking the course). Please see me if you have questions about this policy.

University Policy on Disability Services:

Statement of Disability Services: “Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building, Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.”

This course welcomes students of diverse abilities and backgrounds. Students who need special assistance or have special needs should speak with the instructor during the first week of class and also visit the Disability Resource
Center in Thompson Building Suite 101. Students can always reach the instructor by email at the above address.

**University Policy on Audio and Video Recording:**

Statement on Audio and Video Recording: “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 be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.”

**University Statement on Academic Success Services:**

Statement for Academic Success Services: “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.”

**University Statement on Online Course Evaluations:**

Statement on Online Course 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 Web Campus 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 Web Campus and will not have access to the contents of these evaluations until after final grades have been posted.”
Course Outline: Ethics, Literature and Law from the Bible to the present


September 1: Labor Day Holiday


September 15: The Book of Judges: first papers due. What does it mean to ‘judge’? Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson and others. The ethics of promise, oath and dedication.


Aeschylus, *Oresteia*: Problems in reading the ancient texts; key terms; from blood vengeance to legal process *Agamemnon*: retributive justice, gender, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, interests of the individual, interests of the.

September 24:  *Agamemnon* (completed): Clytemnestra, Cassandra, and ‘ethical claims’. Introduction to core metaphors and their persistence in law and literature. The nature of ethical argument in the *Oresteia*.

September 29:  *The Libation Bearers* and *The Furies*: from blood vengeance to the jury system. The structure of the trial and the ethos of the trial. Justice and ethics: complex claims by Athena, Apollo, Orestes, the Furies; conflict and resolution. What does it mean to ‘try’ a case?

October 1:  Sophocles, *Antigone*. The ethics of ‘allegiance’ to the state. Redefinitions of ‘blood’ and retribution

October 6:  *Spaces of Justice*: Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*: story structures, difference, competing theories of justice, legal process and decision-making. The ethics of submission and commission. Mercy as an ethical construct.

October 8:  *The Merchant of Venice* (continued). Close reading of Act IV scene 1. Legal and literary language: ‘crossing’ Venice and Belmont. ‘Just’ conclusions in each. Ethical issues raised and not raised in the play.


October 15:  Structuralist narrative theory concluded. Final discussion “Godfather Death”. Ethics of decision-making
in the tale and restoration of ‘balance.’

Workshop: Amy, Judy, Night Court and Others: Group Project: Story Structures in contemporary media.

October 20: Group Project Reports: Amy, Judy, Night Court and others.

October 22: Group projects concluded, if necessary. 
Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* (opening chapters). 
Take Home Midterm handed out today.

October 27: *Billy Budd*: black letter law and its imposition: legal contexts and imposition of the death penalty: ethical claims.


November 12: Language Training (4) Standard and aberrant witnesses concluded. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish (1).*


November 26:  Final Projects underway: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Kafka. In the alternative language analysis of recent Supreme Court cases. group meetings.

December 1:  Story structures in contemporary cases.

December 3:  Final Project Introductions due today. Review and conclude major issues in the course. Introductions workshop.

December 8:  Final Project Presentations.

December 10:  Dead Day.

December 12:  Final drafts of final projects due today.