COURSE DESCRIPTION

English 503 is a graduate level course designed to identify and explore selected topics and issues in the study of Shakespeare. It will focus on specific groups of plays for higher order discussion, analysis and critical interpretation. Shakespeare will be studied in the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and in relation to recent critical approaches to Shakespeare. A course on Shakespeare at undergraduate level would be an advantage though not a prerequisite.

COURSE RATIONALE

This is not an introduction to Shakespeare, but rather an exploration of specific elements in the plays that students can be engaged with in critical interpretation with a view to developing their analytical, interpretive and evaluative skills. In addition, discursive skills will be developed to handle themes, patterns, threads and other significant features running through the plays.

Additionally, students would be made aware of Shakespeare’s perennial meaningfulness to contemporary society and the relevance of such drama in shaping the human personality within a liberal education system.

COURSE COMPETENCIES

The competencies envisioned for this course include acquiring and developing:

- Some understanding of sixteenth century drama, theater, and Shakespeare’s place in it.

- Some sense of Shakespeare’s comic imagination, comic art and the range and variety observable in the comedies.
• Knowledge of the features and characteristics of the romantic comedies, their themes and the issues raised in them.

• An understanding of the history plays in general and close interpretation of a representative history play.

• A recognition of the nature of the “dark” vs. the romantic comedies and the insight into human values and personalities revealed in both types of comedies.

• Some knowledge of Shakespeare’s achievement in defining “Shakespearean” tragedy, and understanding the essential characteristics of such tragedies and their relationship to basic human moral and social values.

• Some ability to analyze the tragedies with a view recognizing variety among them.

• An understanding of the links between the comedies and tragedies, the creative impulse that produced the last plays and the nature of their distinctive qualities.

EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

During the course and on its completion, the student should be able to:

• Relate the social conditions of Elizabethan England, especially the drama and theater, to Shakespeare’s place in it.

• Interpret, analyze and discuss themes, topics and issues related to meaning and significance, etc. in the comedies in written and verbal presentations.

• Talk and write critically on the characteristics of the comedies as dramatic forms used to entertain and explore aspects of the human condition.

• Discuss the contemporary social and moral issues raised in the “dark” comedies.
• Show an understanding of Shakespeare’s treatment of the theme of kingship in the history plays.

• Analyze, interpret and discuss the great tragedies, recognize what they have in common or that is unique in their dramatic forms and presentation of the human condition.

• Discuss and analyze the last plays and relate them to the earlier comedies and tragedies.

• Demonstrate an acquaintance with one recent critical approach to Shakespeare, e.g., Feminist, Marxist, or Psychoanalytical Criticism.

• Show an understanding of dramatic conventions and elements of drama and how these enable plays to be related to the real world.

OUTLINE OF COURSE CONTENT

• Drama and theater before Shakespeare.
• Shakespeare’s life and development.
• The Comedies: The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, Measure for Measure.
• The History Plays: Richard II
• The Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth.
• The Last Plays: The Tempest or The Winter’s Tale.

LIBRARY ASSIGNMENT AND SPECIAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Seminar Paper
Research Paper
Reading Shakespeare Criticism

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Essays……………………………………………… 25%
Seminar Paper…………………………………… 15%
Research Paper………………………………… 20%
Mid-Term Exam………………………………… 15%
Final Exam……………………………………… 20%
Class Participation…………………………….. 5%
GRADING SCALE

A  90-100   B  80-89   C  70-79   D  60-69   F  59-0

BIBLIOGRAPHY

An extensive bibliography can be found in the textbook from page A74 to page A105.

The Riverside Shakespeare also has an extensive bibliography from page 2021 to 2034.