

Dr. Robert Whalen
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Homepage
Office Hours: MW 8:10am-9:50, 3248 JXJ or Zoom

1. Bulletin Description

“The poetry and plays of Shakespeare.”

2. Introduction

This course examines seven plays representative of the major genres—comedy, tragedy, history, and romance (or tragicomedy)—as well as a few selected sonnets:

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- *Richard II*
- *1 Henry IV*
- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *Measure for Measure*
- *King Lear*
- *The Winter's Tale*
- Sonnets 15, 43, 73, 116, 129

Our survey will attend to the plays' cultural contexts—social, philosophical, political, linguistic, and theatrical—but our primary concern will be their dramatic and poetic design. Time permitting, we will also examine excerpts from several film adaptations. Classes consist of lecture, discussion, performance exercises, and plenty of reading aloud.

The purpose of this course, like Shakespearean theatre itself, is to sharpen students' capacities for aesthetic pleasure through communal engagement with dramatic representations of the human. Such engagement is pleasurable for precisely the same reason that it is worthwhile—because it is both intellectually and spiritually ennobling. It serves no other purpose whatsoever.

3. Objectives

Students will experience Shakespearean drama and poetry by (1) becoming familiar with a representative selection of the plays and their generic features; (2) learning to distinguish among the plays and among major characters through analysis of specific passages; (3) acquiring the ability to think and write critically about the themes, ideas, and problems these plays embody; and (4) memorizing a small selection of Shakespearean verse.

Structured participation in class discussion and exercises will measure students' fulfillment of the first and second objectives; two sight-passage recognition quizzes will measure additional fulfillment of the second; two in-class essay assignments will measure fulfillment of the third objective; and two memory tests will measure fulfillment of the fourth.

4. Required Text

The Norton Shakespeare: Essential Plays and Sonnets, 3rd ed. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. New York: W.W. Norton, 2015. (ISBN: 978-0-393-93863-0)

This is not optional. All students must acquire a *physical* copy of *this edition*. Digital versions are *not* permitted because *the use of digital devices in class is strictly prohibited*. You may purchase your copy at the NMU Bookstore, on Amazon, or directly from Norton.

5. Grading Scheme

Quizzes (2)	20%
Memory tests (2)	10%
Essay 1 (in-class)	20%
Essay 2 (in-class)	25%

Participation			25%
In evaluating student work, I will use the following system:			
90-100%	A	64-67%	C
84-89%	A-	60-63%	C-
80-83%	B+	58-59%	D+
74-79%	B	54-57%	D
70-73%	B-	50-53%	D-
68-69%	C+	Below 50%	F

6. Essays: Writing is Reading

Two essay assignments, one at mid-term, the other during exam week, will be written entirely in class on the days indicated in the schedule. Flexible essay prompts will allow students to write about aspects of Shakespearean drama that most interest them. All prompts will ask students to base their analysis on at least *two* plays.

The purpose of these writing assignments, like all writing assignments in a literature class, is to test students' ability to *read* the assigned texts and critically to comprehend the ways in which they address and handle a variety of human concerns. Ideally, this will mean devising and defending a simple thesis. More important, however, is the ability to establish thematic connections between or among two or more plays.

Formal elegance, therefore, is less important than the quantity and quality of the observations contained in the essay.

7. Participation and Presence Policy

Regular and committed participation in class discussion is essential, for the social exchange of ideas around a common subject (the readings) is the course's main purpose. Students must read the scheduled reading prior to class; come to class on time and with the required text; be prepared to participate in discussion; and sustain participation throughout the duration of the class.

Students will earn a 1% participation point for each day they fulfill *all* of these objectives. Absence, tardiness, failure to bring the required text, leaving class early: any instance of any one of these is understood to disqualify a student from earning that day's participation point. Another way of putting this: students do not begin with a 25% participation grade and then *lose* a point for each violation of the policy; rather, students begin with 0% and *earn* a point for each day of *full* compliance with *all* criteria. This course, in other words, has no absence policy, only a presence policy.

Absence on a day that a quiz, memory test, or in-class essay is scheduled will result automatically in a grade of zero for that assignment. The only exception will be for absence due to illness that is documented and signed by a licensed physician on official letterhead, specifying the date(s) for which the absence is unavoidable.

Unless you are submitting a doctor's note as specified above, there is no need to approach me about tardiness or missed classes. I do not read such emails unless a doctor's note, as described above, is attached.

This policy applies to all students, NMU athletes included. Like the essay and other assignments, the grade for participation is earned, all students beginning with zero and moving up from there. There are no exceptions, nor any possibility of absence resulting in debit. There is only presence resulting in credit.

If you are enrolled in the course, it is assumed that you understand and are willing fully to comply with the terms of this policy.

8. Plagiarism

"No students shall submit as their own to an instructor any work which contains ideas or materials taken from another without full acknowledgement of the author and source." (Student Code, 2.2.3.02, in the *NMU Student Handbook*.) My plagiarism policy is simple: if you present as your own the ideas or phrasing of another and are caught, you will fail the course and might even be reported to the Dean. If you have any questions as to what constitutes plagiarism, or if you are not certain that your use of sources is free of plagiarism, please consult the *Handbook* and/or me before you submit your essays.

9. Quizzes

The quizzes test your ability to recognize passages from the readings. A typical quiz will consist of several sight passages. For each you will be asked to identify the author, title, and speaker (or speakers), and to write a brief paragraph explaining the passage's significance.

10. Memory Tests

There are two memory tests. For the first, you will be asked to write or recite, from memory, a single Sonnet of your choosing or, if you wish, a passage from one of the plays on the syllabus. If you opt for the latter, the passage you choose must be in iambic pentameter and no less than fourteen lines in length.

For the second memory test, your passage must be from one of the latter three plays on the schedule (*Measure for Measure*, *King Lear*, or *The Winter's Tale*). The passage must be in iambic pentameter and a minimum of twelve lines in length. Check with me if you are uncertain as to whether your selection meets these requirements.

11. Americans with Disabilities (ADA)

If you have a need for disability-related accommodations or services, please inform the Coordinator of Disability Services in the Disability Services office by: coming into the office at 2001 C.B. Hedgecock; calling 227-1700, or emailing disserv@nmu.edu. Reasonable and effective accommodations and services will be provided to students if requests are made in a timely manner, with appropriate documentation, in accordance with federal, state and University guidelines.

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