

TERM: Spring 2027

COURSE CATEGORY: ENGL 50XX: Seminar: Advanced Studies

COURSE NUMBER & TITLE: ENGL 5000.02 (Undergraduate Section)/ ENGL 5000.05 (Graduate Section)
CLAR 4999

SECTION TIMES/DAYS: M 6:00 – 8:30 pm

INSTRUCTOR: SHEPHERD

COURSE DESCRIPTION/PRINCIPAL TOPICS:

THE INVENTION OF THE BOOK This course was formerly named "The Archaeology of the Gothic Book." The archaeological/forensic core of that course has been retained but the period coverage has become more extensive to include the time before books were invented. This course will delve deep into the sciences, scholarly sub-disciplines, and related critical/theoretical arts used to facilitate the understanding of the physical tablets, inscriptions, scrolls, manuscripts, books, and other objects that preserved the very first examples of writing and literature, culminating with the invention of print technology. Students will gain access to new skills (paleography, use of ultraviolet light, MRI analysis, radiology, DNA tracing, dialectology, recension analysis of variants) that can radicalize their critical interpretations of sometimes familiar texts like the ancient epics of Gilgamesh, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and (from the Dark Ages) Beowulf. The material nature of central cultural works such as the earliest surviving Bibles and then the first printed Bible, by Gutenberg, will be studied--but also texts like The Dream of the Rood, carved in stone. Famous later (but still very old) works in English will also be examined in terms of what their physical copies can reveal: The Canterbury Tales, Malory's Morte Darthur, The Book of Margery Kempe, Piers Plowman, the Polychronicon, and rediscovered texts from Antiquity. The skills introduced in this course can also be translated to modern endeavors such as publishing, library sciences, law, advanced graduate study, anything that rewards a spirit of inquisitiveness, even forensics-based law-enforcement.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Among other things, students will 1] acquire specialized knowledge and vocabulary, focusing on codicological practices and theories, but which then extend into the analysis of broader period/literary concepts; 2] learn how the wide range of inscribed media studied (including stone, wood, and metal, often with illustrations) have a correspondingly wide textual/visual representation and purpose, from such things as physical gathering places, to objects invested with divine power, to scrolls used haptically and iconographically to ease and protect women giving birth, to texts rendered in "signifyin'" demotic dialects and registers; 3] be exposed to errors in existing criticism derived from a lack of appropriate theoretical and codicological skills and/or technology; 4] learn how some of these books' content is inherently radical and/or underclass-oriented, working against prestige languages such as Latin and French.

CLASS LEVEL RESTRICTION:

Junior/Senior or Graduate Student Only

RECOMMENDED/PREREQUISITES:

N/A

UNDERGRADUATE COURSE ATTRIBUTE:

☒ 5000-LEVEL SEMINAR (UD)

CORE ATTRIBUTES: N/A

M.A. PROGRAM ATTRIBUTE:

Theory Elective