Composition II: Shakespeare’s Tragedies and the Research Paper

Shakespeare’s status as a cultural icon is comparable to Jesus, Mao, and the incomparable One Direction. Yet in our age of finely calibrated irony, we must ask the question: what is the big deal? Many of our archetypal characters—proud and homeless Lear, depressed and sexually confused Hamlet, love-sick and middle-aged Anthony, ambitious and ruthless Macbeth—have their source in Shakespeare, and to read him for the first time is to be introduced to a world we recognize as our own.

In addition to reading two Shakespeare’s tragedies, the course will be devoted to writing a thesis-driven research paper, which will include a number of different skills, such as learning how to construct a critical reading of the text using outside sources, doing research in the library and on the internet, collecting useful and legitimate sources in a working bibliography, writing a helpful rough draft, deploying the MLA style, and finally, revising, editing, and proof reading a final draft.

Note: This course is an Honors section of 102 and offers an “honors experience,” to quote our former Dean, Dr. Eliot Stern. That means more work (reading/writing) and greater challenge overall for both student and instructor, but also, more reward.

Course Design, Meeting Times:

We will be meeting in GWH 286, four days a week, that is, Monday through Thursday for regular lecture and discussion of reading assignments. There is no online support for the course, so attendance is going to be key. Any time you miss a class, you are responsible for the material missed.

Required Texts:

Hamlet, Macbeth, Signet Classics
MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Seventh Edition
A good college dictionary (this is a must)

Writing Assignments:

1) **3 one page critical commentaries**—the last of which will be an annotated bibliography for your research paper. The exact assignments will be announced the Monday of the week they are due. These short papers should be more than a summary of the play but less than a fully developed essay, and will reveal what you are learning from your reading. A successful commentary will reflect an intelligent and critical engagement with the details of the text—its characters,
story, and language. It should also provide some kind of statement of what you think is interesting or compelling about the book under discussion. These commentaries must also be typed, double-spaced, proof read, and spell-checked.

2) A 4-page close reading of Hamlet in which you also engage ONE secondary, critical source from J-STOR database in the Everett Community College Library. Specific descriptions of the paper will be handed out in class closer to the due date.

3) One 12-15-page research paper on the tragedy of your choice that uses five outside critical sources. Our coursework will culminate in this final research essay in which you propose a topic, research its parameters in the library and on the internet, formulate and develop an argument about its meaning and relevance, incorporate secondary material into that argument, and use the MLA citation format. A larger paper prompt that explains the assignment in detail will be handed out sometime in week four or five. I WILL NOT ACCEPT RESEARCH PAPERS ELECTRONICALLY

Grading:
Response Papers and quizzes: 20%
Hamlet Paper: 30%
Research Paper: 50%

I reward effort and enthusiasm. Show up, do the reading, pay attention in class, commit yourself to learning how to write, and I will reward you with a satisfactory grade. The “A” paper is tough but not impossible to achieve and is characterized by clean writing, clear thought, and a nuanced development of your argument. The scale moves down from there: “A-,” “B+,” and “B” papers are usually characterized by a comparative lack of thought, clarity, nuance, and attention to detail in the writing. A “C” means adequate or competent work. Anything less than a “C” may mean that you are not trying hard, but not always. If you are a student who struggles with reading and writing, do not despair. I will be happy to meet with you outside of class, do extra conferences, and work with you in any way that I can.

General comportment in a college classroom:
   1) Come to class on time.
   2) Do the reading.
   3) Sit up straight.
   4) Stay engaged.
   5) Take notes.
   6) Respect your fellow students.
   7) Be tolerant of different perspectives.
   8) Turn your cell phone off.
   9) Do not look at the clock (at least while I’m facing the classroom).

Attendance
Attending class regularly is important—important for you and your classmates and important for your instructor. I usually tolerate one absence. Any more than that and your chances of doing well in this class start to decline. Learning to read and write well at the college level requires a concentrated and consistent engagement with the course material and lectures on an everyday basis. You cannot accomplish this goal without attending class.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the unauthorized borrowing of other people’s words, ideas, sentences, and phrases without proper citation. It may be done on purpose with malicious intent, but it may also occur out of ignorance for the rules governing textual acknowledgement.

*There are over ten thousand student essays on Shakespeare on the internet, and the temptation to borrow one is understandable, but that temptation will be punished by a failing grade.* It is also a lapse of student comportment that the college takes very seriously. We will be discussing how to avoid this problem throughout the quarter.

**Disability Statement:**

I encourage students with disabilities and who need accommodations to contact the Center for Disability Services in the Parks Student Union Room 267 (across from the Bookstore).

**Course Schedule:** (Subject to change)

**Week 1** (March 30, April 1-3)
Begin *Hamlet*, acts 1-3

**Week 2** (April 6-10)
Continue *Hamlet*, acts 4-5
**First critical commentary due Thursday, April 9th**

**Week 3** (April 13-17)
*Macbeth*, Acts 1-3
Lecture on writing the *Hamlet* paper
Begin writing the *Hamlet* paper

**Week 4** (April 20-24)
*Macbeth*, Acts 4-5
Continue writing the *Hamlet* paper

**Week 5** (April 27-May 1)
*Rough draft of Hamlet Paper with outside source due Monday April 27th in class*
Begin *Macbeth*, acts 1-3

**Week 6** (May 4-8)
**Final draft of Hamlet Paper with outside source due Monday, May 4th**
Continue *Macbeth*, acts 4-5
Lecture on the Research Paper

**Week 7** (May 11-15)
Continue *Macbeth* if necessary

**Second critical commentary on Macbeth due Thursday May 14**
Lecture on Research Paper
Research and Reading for final project

**Week 8** (May 18-22)
Lecture on Research Paper
Research and Reading for final project

**Third critical commentary due Monday, May 18**: Annotated Bibliography

**Week 9** (May 25-29)
No Class Monday: Memorial Day
Reading and Writing Week

**Rough draft of research paper Tuesday, May 27**

**Week 10** (June 1-5)
Edit and Revision Week

**Final draft of research paper due Thursday, June 4**
No Final Exam