I. ASCRC General Education Form (rev. 2/8/19)

Use to propose new general education courses (except writing courses), to change or renew existing general education courses and to remove designations for existing general education courses.

Notes: The unique general education designation may be requested for experimental courses (CS). Previously, XX designation was granted only for the semester taught. A NEW request must be submitted for the course to receive subsequent general education status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group (submit separate forms if requesting more than one general education group designation)</th>
<th>V: Literary &amp; Artistic Studies</th>
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<tr>
<th>Dept/Program</th>
<th>English / Literature</th>
<th>Course #</th>
<th>LIT 350</th>
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<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Chaucer</th>
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<tr>
<th>Prerequisite</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Credits</th>
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II. Endorsement/Approvals

Complete the form and obtain signatures before submitting to Faculty Senate Office.

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<tr>
<th>Please type / print name</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Ashby Kinch</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>Phone / Email</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Chair</td>
<td>John Hunt</td>
<td>2/7/14</td>
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III. Type of request

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<td>Reason for Gen Ed inclusion, change or deletion</td>
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<td>Description of change</td>
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IV. Description and purpose of the general education course. General Education courses must be introductory and foundational within the offering department or within the General Education Group. They must emphasize breadth, context, and connectedness, and relate course content to students' future lives. See Preamble:

http://www.edu/facultysenate/archives/comunities/gened/CS_preamble.aspx
This course aims to introduce students to the life and poetry of the earliest major named author in the English literary tradition, Geoffrey Chaucer, who is the foundational author around whom the canon of English literature was constructed in the 15th and 16th centuries. Called the “Father of English eloquence” by his earliest readers, Chaucer’s innovations in language, form, and literary structure influenced most of the major writers of the Renaissance (among them, Wyatt, Spenser, and Shakespeare). Students read biographical material on Chaucer, as well as historical material relevant to his life, while learning to read his poetry in Middle English: they are introduced slowly to the verse form and language in the opening weeks of the course, which does not assume prior knowledge of medieval literature. By way of analyzing Chaucer’s text, the course will also introduce students to basic techniques of literary analysis, asking them to utilize them in class discussion and in response papers. The course focuses on Chaucer’s importance as a figure who balanced his professional, military, and economic duties with his avocation as a writer, inaugurating a new tradition of writing in English. This course is inherently interdisciplinary, with major units on history, manuscript studies, and art history. It also stresses that Chaucer’s poetry serves as an excellent means to discuss the kinds of compromises (ethical and moral) that most humans face in their human relationships in a complex society. The course is foundational, then, in another sense, that it encourages students to question, and perhaps rebuild their moral, ethical, and intellectual foundation by engaging with the thought of this seminal author.

V. Criteria: Briefly explain how this course meets the criteria for the group. See:

Courses cover a number of works in one or more of the various forms of artistic representation; they also establish a framework and context for analysis of the structure and significance of these works.

This course requires students to read a major portion of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, a long linked-tale collection of stories written in poetic form (with two prose insertions). Chaucer’s work is studied within the context of late 14th century English culture, including readings in history and manuscript studies.

In addition, these courses provide mechanisms for students: 1) to receive instruction on the methods of analysis and criticism, 2) to develop arguments about the works from differing critical perspectives

A key component of this class includes exposing students to the major tradition of Chaucer criticism, which spurs discussion the various types of criticism and their limitations and drawbacks, as well as analysis of the way different critical perspectives lead to different arguments.

VI. Student Learning Goals: Briefly explain how this course will meet the applicable learning goals. See http://aimm.edu/faculty senate/documents/forms/GE_Criteria45-108.aspx
| Analyze works of art with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions, including emergent movements and forms. | Assignments early in the semester focus on reading Chaucer’s poetry closely, familiarizing them with Middle English as well as with Chaucer’s innovations in prosody. Students read about Chaucer’s place in the literary tradition, and they are evaluated on a reading exam for their ability to read, analyze, and comment upon his poetry. |
| Develop coherent arguments that critique these works from a variety of approaches, such as historical, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, political, and philosophical. | A weekly online posting requires students to comment on specific details of individual literary texts: each of those postings require students to analyze the “content” of Chaucer’s poetry. Students write an extended research paper in which they analyze Chaucer’s work, but their engagement with “intellectual traditions” is accomplished more often in class discussion and weekly writing. |

**VII. Justification:** Normally, general education courses will not carry prerequisites, will carry at least 3 credits, and will be numbered at the 100-200 level. If the course has more than one pre-requisite, carries fewer than three credits, or is upper division (numbered above the 200 level), provide rationale for exception(s).

None needed.

**VIII. Syllabus:** Paste syllabus below or attach and send digital copy with form. The syllabus should clearly describe how the above criteria are satisfied. For assistance on syllabus preparation see: [http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/syllabus.html](http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/syllabus.html)
English 350: Chaucer
LA 133; MW 10:10-11:30
Dr. Ashby Kinch
Office: LA 126; Phone: x4462; E-mail: ashby.kinch@umontana.edu
Office Hours: T 1-3:00; W 3:30-5:00; Th 1-3:00

Course Description
As spy, soldier, diplomat, tax officer, minister of the King’s works, and Member of Parliament, Chaucer accumulated an incredible breadth and diversity of social experience, which he shaped in one of the great works of social imagination: The Canterbury Tales. These diverse identities relate directly to Chaucer’s principal attributes as a poet: his famously capacious intellect, his linguistic complexity, his ear for dialect, and his interest in the shared anxieties that simultaneously draw us together and pull us apart. This course will explore the cultural context from which Chaucer emerged to define a new English literary voice in a work that simultaneously synthesizes the major genres of medieval literature that influenced this capacious intellect and announces a new beginning. First, we will become comfortable with Chaucer’s Middle English through a close reading of the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. As we do so, we will navigate the available sources of information about Chaucer’s life, allowing students to come to their own conclusions about Chaucer’s “character” before we tackle selected Canterbury Tales.

General Education Goals Met by This Course (from the University Gen Ed Description): Upon completion of the Literary & Artistic Studies requirement (V), a student will be able:
1. analyze works of art with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions, including emergent movements and forms; and
2. develop coherent arguments that critique these works from a variety of approaches, such as historical, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, political, and philosophical.

Required Texts:
Moodle: online supplement for this course, contain support readings, an image database, as well as providing a space for weekly postings by students. For complete login instructions, see: http://umonline.umt.edu/StudentInfo/welcome.htm

Electronic Reserve: look in library catalogue under Kinch ENLT 350 (p-word: Chaucer)

Course Requirements
Research Presentations: 10% (Pilgrim Portrait: Week 5; Research Paper: Week 15)
Weekly Moodle Posting: 20% (due each Friday at NOON)
Translation/Commentary Exam (Week 10; Oct. 29): 30% (10/19)
Research Paper: 40% (discussed fully on Moodle)
(Due Dates: Prospectus: 10/24; Ann. Bib.: 11/21; Draft: 12/1; Final Paper: 12/10)
A Note on Middle English

Chaucer’s Middle English will be strange to you at first: the spelling system, based on a phonetic representation of various English dialects, is tricky and variable; the vowels will feel awkward to pronounce; and the vocabulary will seem foreign. Indeed, in some ways the most productive way approach Middle English is to treat it like a foreign language. But it is not: it is the native root of English we still speak today. Chaucer coined hundreds of new words in English, some of which we still use, and he put down in writing for the first time dozens of proverbial, colloquial, and idioms expressions of his time, thus passing along a vibrant record of the English of his day. For all these reasons, reading Chaucer’s Middle English will be easier, and more productive, than you may at first think. We will read a lot of Middle English aloud in class, though I want to emphasize that the main goal is to get you reading large swaths of text with comprehension and insight.

Policy Statements

Attendance

You may miss class three times with no immediate impact on your grade, and you need not provide a reason for doing so. After the third absence, however, each subsequent absence will lower your final grade 3 percentage points regardless of the reason, except in extremely unusual circumstances (death in the family, documented physical illness, etc). So beware: if you sleep through a couple of classes, you are using up your reserve of sympathy for when you may really need to be away from class. If you are required to miss class for a University commitment, you are obliged to let me know that well enough in advance so that you can make up the work missed. The burden lies on you, the student, to communicate with me; I will not come chasing after repeatedly absent students. If you miss more than 8 classes (4 weeks!!), you will automatically fail the course.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an affront to the fundamental values of an academic institution, indicating a lack of respect for intellectual labor and a lack of responsibility for each student’s part in sustaining academic community. Acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and page number, all work that has influenced your thinking. The University’s official warning can be found on pg. 22 of the Catalog, which refers you to the Student Conduct Code (Academic Conduct), available on the web: http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321.

Add-Drop Deadlines, Incompletes, Disability Accommodation

For information on these topics, please see: the back page of the Class Schedule for add-drop date; 21 in the Catalog for incompletes; and p. 334 in the Catalog for disability accommodation.

Reading/Discussion Schedule (subject to change: pay attention to
Week 1 (August 25 and 27)

Monday: Introductions; in-class reading (pronunciation guide, opening lines)
esday: Read: “Language and Versification,” Norman Davis, xxvi-xxi (come with questions!)
    Read: Course Requirements on Moodle
    Read: General Prologue, lines 1-360
    Read: “Chaucer’s Life,” Martin Crow, xiii-xxiii,
    In-class reading: “Chaucer’s Retraction,” p. 310

For Moodle, write about your take on Chaucer’s portrait style: what techniques of description have you observed in his writing that help you understand his deeper motives? Use a couple of specific examples to flesh out your analysis.

Week 2 (Sept. 1 and 3)

Monday: LABOR DAY: NO CLASSES
Wednesday: GP, lines 361-858
    Jill Mann, “Intro,” Medieval Estates Satire, pp. 1-17 (e-res)

For Moodle, comment on the way Mann’s approach helps to clarify the relationship between character typology and Chaucer’s particular style. Do you think Mann’s approach opens up the portraits for greater understanding or forecloses interpretation?

Week 3 (Sept. 8 and 10):

Choose pilgrims for presentations in Week 5 [NOT Knight, Friar, Parson, Plowman]

In preparation for presentations, each student will need to read the relevant material for their pilgrim in Mann and Lambdin-Lambdin (see reserve bibliography).

Monday: Re-read GP lines 715-858
    Read: Katharine Wilson, “What Man Artow?” The Narrator as Writer and Pilgrim,” in Lambdin and Lambdin, pp. 369-84 (e-res)

Wednesday: Re-read portraits of the Knight and the Friar
    *John of Salisbury, “Chivalric Duties,” and Ramon Lull from The Book of the Order of Chivalry, in Miller pp. 175-186
    *Peggy Knapp on Estates/the Knight (handout)
    *Arrival of Friars/Complaint against Friars (handout)
    *John Gower, from Vox Clamantis in Miller pp. 231-234
    *Selections of antifraternal writing in Miller pp. 237-239, 251-263

For Moodle, comment on the way the historical/contextual reading we discussed Wednesday influences your reading of Chaucer. Be specific, both with respect to the text you choose (cite it directly) and respect to the specific lines/passage in Chaucer on which you choose to comment.

Week 4 (Sept. 15 and 17)

Meet in Special Collections with Jordan Goffin (4th Floor, Mansfield)

Look at Chaucer Portraits slide show (under “Course Documents” on Moodle)
Look at Digital Images of the Ellesmere Chaucer (“External Links” on Moodle)
Pay close attention to the portrait of your particular pilgrim, so you can come to Special Collections ready to ask questions/comment on the material you see there. For Moodle, comment on the visual material we looked at on Wednesday: how did looking at the manuscripts and/or seeing portraits of the pilgrims affect your understanding of the text? Vice versa.

**Week 5 (Sept. 22 and Sept. 24)**
Monday and Wednesday: Pilgrim Portrait Presentations (5-7 minutes per student)

**Week 6 (Sept. 29 and Oct. 1)**
Monday: *Knight’s Tale*, Part 1-2
Wednesday: *Knight’s Tale*, Part 3-4
For Moodle, comment on the central thematic tensions in *The Knight’s Tale*: what is compelling the story thus far and what deeper ideas is Chaucer probing through the Knight?

**Week 7 (Oct. 6 and 8)**
Monday: *Miller’s Prologue and Tale*
Wednesday: *Reeve’s Tale*
For Moodle, comment on the Miller’s interruption of the tale-telling sequence: after reading the ‘Reeve’s Tale’, what do you make of Chaucer’s “apology”? What would a reader miss if she turned the page?

**Week 8 (Oct. 13 and 15)**
Monday: *Reeve’s Tale, Cook’s Tale*
Wednesday: *Man of Law’s Tale*
For Moodle, comment on the way the *Reeve’s Tale* extends the social tension of the *Canterbury Tales* through the mechanism of “quiting”: what is the basis of the Reeve’s objection to the Miller’s story and how does he “answer” the Miller in his tale?

**Week 9 (Oct. 20 and 22)**
Monday and Wednesday: *Wife of Bath’s Prologue, Wife’s of Bath’s Tale*
For Moodle, post an exam review in preparation for Wednesday’s exam.

Post Prospectus for Research Paper on Moodle on Friday, 10/24.

**Week 10 (Oct. 27 and 29)**
Monday: The Shipman’s Tale; review for exam

Wednesday: EXAM (part of the exam will be administered online)

Week 11 (Nov. 3 and Nov. 5)
Monday and Wednesday: Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale
   For Wednesday Read: one article on the Pardoner from Harvard Page:
   http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/sourcebook.html

Post on Moodle a practice annotation on Pardoner article

Week 12 (Nov. 10 and Nov. 12);
Monday: Clerk’s Prologue and Tale

   Read: Clerk’s Tale analogues from Sources (reserve)

Wednesday: The Prioress’s Prologue and Tale

Week 13 (Nov. 17 and 19)
Monday: The Nun’s Priest’s Tale
Wednesday: The Franklin’s Tale

Post Annotated Bibliography on Moodle on 11/21.

Week 14 (Nov. 23 and 25)
Monday: The Franklin’s Tale

Wednesday: THANKSGIVING; NO CLASSES
   Post DRAFT of Research Paper Online by Monday, Dec. 1st

Week 15 (Dec. 1 and 3)
Monday- Wednesday: Student Presentations
FINAL DRAFT due 12/10 at NOON

"Philology is that venerable art which demands one thing above all from its worshipper, to go aside, to take one's time, to become silent, to become slow...just by this it attracts and charms us most in the midst of an age of 'work,' i.e., of haste, of indecent and sweating hurry which wants "to have done" with everything in a moment...it teaches us to read well: that means to read slowly, deeply, with consideration and carefully, with reservations, with open doors, with delicate fingers and eyes."
   --Nietzsche

Lectio transit in mores. (reading turns into action)
"The custom among the ancients—as Priscian testifies—
was to speak quite obscurely
in the books they wrote,
so that those who were to come after
and study them
might gloss the letter
and supply its significance from their own wisdom.
Philosophers knew this,
They understood among themselves
That the more time they spent,
The more subtle their minds would become
And the better they would know how to keep themselves
From whatever was to be avoided.
He who would guard himself from vice
Should study and understand
And begin a weighty work
By which he might keep vice at a distance
And free himself from great sorrow."

--Marie de France, "Prologue," Lais

"And with the shoutyng, whan the song was do
That foules maide at here flightyng awy,
I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
To rede upon, and yit I rede alwey.
I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I ny1 nat spare."

--Chaucer, Parliament of Fowls, 693-699

Course Requirements

Pilgrim Presentation Assignments

Each of you will have 5-8 minutes to present your pilgrim to the class. I will expect you to do
the following reading/research in preparation for this presentation, which should be a clear,
organized elaboration on your discoveries:

1) Read the relevant chapter on your pilgrim from Laura C. Lambdin and Robert T.
   Lambdin, Chaucer's Pilgrims: an Historical Guide to the Pilgrims in The Canterbury
   Tales. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996 (on reserve). Take notes on the
   historical context for this portrait and ask yourself how Chaucer may or may not have
   been referring to that context in his portrait (critically? is there evidence that he is using
   this portrait to advance a specific social critique? Is he endorsing a conservative view of
   English society or a more progressive one?)

2) Read the relevant material on your pilgrim from Jill Mann, Chaucer and Medieval
   Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the
Canterbury Tales: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973 (on reserve). Take notes on the Estates Satire genre relevant to your pilgrim and ask yourself how Chaucer may or may not have been referring to that material (ironically? approvingly?)

3) Look closely at the visual depictions of your portrait in the Ellesmere Chaucer, and any other editions of Chaucer that interest you, during your time in Special Collections. (Some of you may want to pursue this as a research project for the semester; ask me about the Susan Koch Essay, worth $3,000 in tuition credits).

4) Conduct a thorough, close reading of the portrait and be prepared to present to your peers your observations on Chaucer’s style, including any interesting poetic effects you observed, but also his “style” of characterization. What process or sequence of ideas does he follow in developing the portrait? That is, what is the “structure” of the portrait? What details does he include or exclude? What is unexpected or surprising? What words jump out as significant?

5) Make sure you look up all unusual or interesting words in the glossary. Integrate discussion of at least one word that you look up and research in the electronic Middle English Dictionary; I have provided a link on Moodle that will allow you to access this database of Middle English, to see how other authors are using a word that interests you.

Weekly Moodle Posting (30%)  
Through our own words, we begin to make sense of the worlds we inhabit through reading, leaving a kind of roadmap of our intellectual experience. Your weekly Moodle posting should reflect your sustained engagement in the course as you pursue your own path to understanding Chaucer. Consider this a repository of your thinking, allowing you to explore in free, uninhibited and creative ways the ideas that interest you. You should set aside at least one hour each week to write about your reading. You will need to post these ruminations once a week by Friday at NOON, so that your peers and I can think along with you about the text, compare ideas, and extend our discussion beyond the confines of the classroom.

Indeed, one mode of composing your on-line writing journal might be to respond to some idea or problem from class discussion or lecture: many of us leave class thinking about something that the heat of the moment or the sweep of time did not give us a chance to develop. Take some time to jot a note or two down in class and then respond more fully in your Moodle submission. Early in the class, you might use this assignment to explore questions of language by addressing how you are adapting to Chaucer’s Middle English. As the class progresses, you might consider ways in which certain key themes recur in Chaucer’s writing and how he develops them. And, as your own research progresses, you might use the weekly writing to develop your research ideas, in essence drafting your final paper.

The posting should be a minimum of 250 words (about 1 double-spaced page of text). You should write the short paper in a word processing program (preferably Word) and then either a) cut and paste it into a message in Moodle; or b) attach it as a Word file in Moodle under the relevant discussion component. This process gives you a back-up if your internet connection is interrupted or if the Moodle server times out while you write. It also provides you an electronic copy of what you have written, which will allow you to update and revise your work as the semester unfolds. You might find, for example, that these weekly responses play a role in a
paper later in the class.

Exam (30%)
In this exam in Week 10, you will have an opportunity to demonstrate that you have been keeping up with the reading, that you can translate the Middle English assigned, and that you understand the general ideas discussed in class. The exam will also include historical, biographical, and cultural material relevant to the given text, all of which will be discussed in class. The exam will consist of short translations; passage identification and analysis; and short answers to historical/biographical/cultural questions. I will give you some sample questions in the week before the exam to give you a sense of what you can expect, and part of the exam will be administered online.

Research Paper (40%)
(Due Dates: Prospectus: 10/24; Ann. Bib.: 11/21; Draft: 12/1; Final Paper: 12/10)

The culminating work in this class will be an 10-12 page research paper based on your developed interest in a topic related to Chaucer. The course will allow you to define that interest early on and pursue it throughout the semester, or it will allow you to work from the material I assign. Obviously, a topic that you develop yourself will likely provide more motivation and interest, so I strongly suggest that you talk to me early in the semester about ideas you want to pursue. I may suggest that you read ahead to later material in the syllabus in order to insure that you get a running start at your paper before the end of the semester creeps up on you. On October 24th, you will post on Moodle a 2 page prospectus that outlines your topic, including why you chose it, why it interests you, and a plan for the reading and research you need to do. Use this initial step in writing to ask some key questions, elaborate on your interest in the topic, and locate passages, patterns, or problems in Chaucer that you want to address.

The research topics will likely correspond to one of the following four areas: 1) historical or cultural questions surrounding Chaucer’s life, including connections to his texts; 2) an analysis or study of some feature of Chaucer’s language; 3) a critical interpretation of one of Chaucer’s texts; 4) a critical interpretation linking two or more of Chaucer’s texts; 4) a comparison of one or more of Chaucer’s tales to its analogues.

Some Suggestions:
1) The Power of Love (the Knight’s Tale, the Squire’s Tale, the Franklin’s Tale)
2) Astrology in Chaucer (the Knight’s Tale, the Canterbury links, Astrolabe)
3) The Fabliau Tradition (the Miller’s Tale, the Reeve’s Tale)
4) Rape in the Biography/Texts of Chaucer (the Wife of Bath’s Tale, Physician’s Tale)
5) Make extensive lesson plans for a teaching unit on Chaucer, including analysis of texts
6) Antifeminism and Chaucer (the Wife of Bath’s Prol/Tale, the Nun’s Priest’s Tale)
7) Chaucer and Medieval Manuscripts (image/text relationships)
8) Chaucer and the Medieval University (Clerk’s Tale, Reeve’s Tale)
9) Marriage in late medieval culture/Chaucer (the Marriage Group)
Whatever you choose as a topic, you will need to consult with me in more detail about the parameters of your project and the specific tasks you will perform. If you are having trouble deciding on a topic, or if you feel overwhelmed by the project, please come and talk to me early in the process so that we can brainstorm together about options.

I will require that you consult a minimum of four sources specific to your topic on this paper (that is, four sources that I have not previously assigned for course reading), which means that you need to research, read, and annotate sources that will enhance your understanding of your research topic. You will produce from this reading an annotated bibliography, which is a standard research tool that allows you to organize your thoughts on your topic as you conduct your research. The annotated bibliography will be due on November 21\textsuperscript{st}. The bibliographic entries should conform to MLA style (see Chapter 4, “Documentation: Preparing the List of Works Cited,” MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 5th edition, ed. Joseph Gibaldi. New York: MLA Pub, 1999, 111-202), but I want the annotations to be more substantial than a typical bibliography. Each annotation should include at least 1-2 sentences on each of the following: 1) Topic of the article, including relevance to Chaucer’s life or writing; 2) a specific account of the thesis of the article; 3) a summary and analysis of the evidence used; 4) problems or questions raised by the article and their relevance to the course or to your research project. Given this outline, the annotations should be as long or as short as they are useful to you. You might consider typing in quotes that you might use in your paper, to save you time as you compose your draft. Indeed, if you use this assignment well, you will essentially be drafting a paper as you read and research your material.

There are many good web resources for Chaucerian bibliography, but, as with all web material, you need to do the reading and footwork yourself to make sure you have good and useful information for your purposes. On Moodle, I have provided addresses of two excellent links, both of which will offer general medieval and Chaucerian bibliographies as well as specific, topic-driven bibliographies. Below, I have included an excerpt from a good annotated bibliography; it should not be taken as an exact model to be duplicated, merely one approach.


Ellis demonstrates how the intersection of language, commerce, and sexuality defined the roles of medieval women, particularly as means of exchange. A merchant’s wife highlights the restrictiveness of this role. As a result, women used language to subvert the male power structure in order to forge a limited and typically unrecognized place for themselves. Ellis notes the link between May and Proserpina’s return to the world from Hades in the Spring. With Proserpina’s intervention, May transcends "male ownership through female language." May employs women’s language to gratify her sexual appetite without punishment. Her language, unrecognized by the male discourse, remains incomprehensible to January, who therefore finds no basis for penalizing her.
s class, I would also suggest typing in salient quotes, and commenting on how you will use a particular source, including a critique or its principles or interpretation. An example follows that suggests the way you can use your annotated bibliography to advance your draft writing:

a former, un-named student):


Fletcher utilizes the history of medieval literary theory as a lens through which to read the Physician’s Tale. He writes: “[A]n appreciation of different medieval attitudes toward text can produce new readings of Virginia and her fate, helping to explain certain aspects of the Physician’s Tale that have proved puzzling to modern readers” (300).

Fletcher emphasizes the Physician’s citation of Livy through which he claims an authority for his tale (as it is history and therefore true). Fletcher then descends into a brief history of the medieval attitudes toward fabula as false (and therefore baser) and history as true (and therefore superior). Citing from House of Fame, Fletcher places Chaucer at a distance from this sort of attitude. Returning to the tale, Fletcher points out that the Physician quickly muddles his claim to history as he poetically personifies Nature (bringing in fabula characteristics). Furthermore, Fletcher argues, Virginia’s character is introduced as a quasi-fabula character specifically through her existence outside of authority and the simile in which she is likened to a book (lines 105-108 of the tale). Thus, Fletcher argument continues, the tale exists in a fluid genre somewhere between history and fabula.

Fletcher goes on to argue that following Virginius’s sentencing Virginia to death, Virginia is named for the first time. Fletcher argues that this naming propels Virginia out of the quasi-fabula space and places her unarguably in a position of history in which “Virginia loses her agency” (306). Fletcher parallels the sentencing of the tale’s characters (Appius, Claudius, and Virginius) to that of the tale itself as both extinguish Virginia’s existence (in the flesh and in the text). Fletcher concludes by turning to the Host’s response to the tale, arguing that “the Host also calls the tale back in existence, demonstrating the no sentence [...] is ever final” (307). His final conclusive emphasis upon the literary theory of the tale states that “there can no fixed understandings, no absolute evaluations, no final reading of Virginia” (307). Thus Fletcher glosses the text’s violence by focusing not on Virginia’s but on the “fluidity of the text” (307). Fletcher seems to feel the need to excuse the violence through a theory about the text/ Virginia as a commentary on the need to criticize a literary work into a static genre. He focuses a great deal of time on the romanticization of Virginia’s virtue and no time on her actual death (which occupies a significant space in the tale). Fletcher in a sense okays the violence by finding a positive role for Virginia (even in her victimized, murdered state) for existence in a pseudo-Christianizing fashion of accepting martyrdom by focusing not on the brutality but on the promise of salvation. It is interesting that Fletcher has sought out a space in which Virginia exists, here “through the work of endless hands” (307), in the saint story through the glory of heaven (but arguably also through the work of endless hands who record the stories of saints).

By December 1st, you will need to post on Moodle a draft of your research paper, which you will exchange with peers in the last week of class. The last two weeks of the course will revolve around 10-15 minute student presentations on these projects in a format each of you deems appropriate to the material. You will assign short readings to the class, from Chaucer,
your own writing, or from secondary or historical material, which will serve as a basis for a
class discussion of your project. On the basis of discussion, you may have ideas for further
revisions of your draft before you submit the final draft on December 10th.

Please note: Approved general education changes will take effect next fall.

General education instructors will be expected to provide sample assessment items and
corresponding responses to the Assessment Advisory Committee.