Instructor: Steve Marsden  
Class Hours: R 6:00-8:30  
Classroom: Ferguson 183 and online via Zoom  
Phone: 468-6609 Please prefer email or  
Office: Liberal Arts North 209  
Email: marsdensj@sfasu.edu  
Office Hours: M, W, F 12:15-1:15, R 11:00-12:00 and by appointment. Email for Zoom link  
Webpage: D2l.sfasu.edu -- check it every week

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Identify the main themes and ideas in the major works of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson
- Read those works carefully and demonstrate understanding of their characteristic stylistic and aesthetic qualities.
- Place those works in the context of American literature, philosophy, and religious discourse.
- Demonstrate your understanding of the forces that influenced those works: societal, literary-historical, religious, and biographical.
- Demonstrate a variety of critical writing and research skills necessary to future endeavors in the field.

Required books:


(Or college edition, substantially the same, slightly cheaper, with a bad binding)

Recommended books:

Dickinson, Emily. *Open Me Carefully : Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*. Wesleyan UP, 1998.  I’ll hand out some letters from this, but it’s very useful to read to help understand the relationship.


We will also make extensive use of online works by Whitman at the Whitman Archive:  
[http://whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org), which will give us complete versions of all the editions of Whitman published during his lifetime, as well as many other scholarly resources.

Course Policies

Phones  
If you have a cell phone, please keep it silent and away unless you’re using it in the service of the course discussion.
Eating, Drinking, and So On
Feel free to drink coffee or eat anything that's not loud, messy, and/or smelly. Please clean up after yourself, however. At least feigning attention and interest is very important—in a small course, we need everyone’s participation to make the class lively and enjoyable.

Reading, Participation, and Note Taking

Graduate courses require a lot of commitment and effort. This course is reading intensive, and the poems of Whitman and Dickinson are well known for being difficult. Budget your time and read ahead when necessary. Take notes as you read and write out questions about your reading for use in class. Mark up your books. Reread when necessary. Talk about your reading outside of class. Ask questions in class. If you find anything particularly impenetrable and need help, feel free to drop by my office hours to chat about it. My job is to help you understand this stuff.

This course is taught largely as a dialogue—I ask and answer questions. Some assignments will also be designed to make you into experts and co-presenters in the course.

Email
Correspondence relating to this course must use your sfasu email account. The subject line must be ENG 5320. I am not certain to respond to emails with any other subject line, especially if they resemble spam. I never accept assignments by email unless I’ve solicited them, and unasked-for email attachments will not be opened.

Plagiarism

I take plagiarism very seriously. According to SFASU Policies and Procedures:

Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one’s own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one’s paper without giving the author due credit.

Assignments containing plagiarized passages will receive a grade of 0, and may not be revised. In addition, an Academic Dishonesty Form will be filed with the Dean of the plagiarizing student’s college. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or fear you may not have properly cited something, please talk to me immediately.

Attendance, Absences, and Class Participation

Of course, in graduate classes I assume a high level of commitment and engagement. This means you’re expected to attend every meeting having read and being ready to respond to the required readings. We’ll be working with difficult and fun material as a community, trying to come to an understanding of some complex and elusive poetry. To do this will require the best of each participant. Come with your texts marked up, ready to think and talk.

According to university policy, after three absences (the equivalent of three weeks of missed class) for any reason whatsoever, you may fail the class. Please keep an eye on your absences. The course will be held in a Zoom Room, with some remote participants. In the event of illness, accident, or quarantine, those who cannot attend in person may attend via Zoom.
Regardless of the reason for your absence, you are responsible for all information and work covered in class. If you missed deadlines or in-class work during an excused absence, it is your responsibility to find out what you’ve missed and arrange with me to make it up.

**Late Papers and Free Homework Late:**
Each student has one (1) free late homework assignment: to use it, write “Oops” clearly at the top of the completed assignment and turn it in within one week of the assigned due date (and before the last day of class). Other than this “oops” assignment, no late homework will be accepted without a university-approved absence or a compelling excuse (my judgment) in writing, detailing your reasons and providing evidence as necessary.

Major papers turned in after the beginning of the class period on which they are due will be considered late, and will have one full letter grade (10 percentage points) deducted from their final grade. Another full letter grade will be deducted for each day that passes after the due date. The easiest way to receive a very poor grade in this course is to turn things in late. Do not turn in papers under my office door or with office staff without arranging it with me in advance via email. I am not responsible for the loss of papers turned in that way, or your subsequently lower grade.

**Extra Credit**
Several times during the semester, I will announce extra credit assignments. Extra credit will only be assigned in class (it will not be posted on the website). Please do not ask me for individual extra credit. Any extra credit assignments I given will be applied to the homework / quiz score, and will be offered to everyone. With extra credit, the daily work score will top at 100%.

**Accommodations for Disabilities**
If you need accommodations in this class related to a disability, please make an appointment to see me as soon as possible so I can make whatever changes are needed. An accommodation request from Disability Services will be required.

**Assignments and Grade Determination**

**Grade Determination**

- Class participation, response papers, annotations, posts 15%
- Two brief reviews of an available critical monograph (one Whitman, one Dickinson) 10% (5% each)
- Proposal for One Poem Project 5%
- The One Poem Project 35%
- Proposal for your term paper, listing sources 5%
- A conference-length paper of about 9-15 pages (RD due posted on D2L) 30%
**Short Responses / Journal Entries / Online Postings**

Often, I'll have you write some response to the readings of the week. These should be typed, and will have other requirements as posted. The intention is to get you thinking and recording what you think about the works, and to prepare you for class.

5 = Excellent, flawless: Very insightful, and otherwise dazzlingly good. I think "wow! I wonder if I can get a copy to teach with next semester!" This is a rare score.

4.5 = Very good: Accomplishes everything needed with style and economy, reflects a strong understanding of the subject matter, and has no very significant errors. I think "good!"

4 = Good: Does the work expected, and contains only errors that might be expected of the average careful student at this point in the semester. I think "okay."

3.5 = Needs some work: Ideas may be incomplete or unfocused, organization may be sloppy. May be "off" in tone or style. I think "well, okay, I guess."

3 = Needs a lot of work: May be unclear in spots, or have numerous, embarrassing, or unprofessional errors. I think "well, maybe next time."

2 = Unacceptable: Fails to accomplish some aspect of the assignment, or has a variety of unprofessional errors. I think "maybe he or she had a high fever or something."

1 = Token effort: Wrong assignment or shows very little work. Accomplishes little of what the assignment asks. Reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the assignment or a deficit of effort or skill. I think "why did I ever get into this line of work?" A paper with a name on it and a sentence, turned in on time.

0 = Didn't turn paper in: I think "hmm, I wonder if he or she has dropped the course?"

**Monograph Reviews:**

You will sign up to write brief reviews of two critical monographs or biographies during the semester, one for Whitman, and another for Dickinson. You should pick a book that’s available in our library. You’ll read the book quickly, and write a brief review (a minimum of 2 pages—let the complexity of the book be your guide), which we will make available on WebCT for your classmates to use. A prompt and rubric for this assignment will be available soon. I encourage you to pick a book early that suits your interests and theoretical approach.

**One Poem Project Proposal:**

This proposal will be a brief paper which claims the poem you would like to do for your One Poem Project (the biggest project in the course). It will name the poem, and make the case in a page or two that the poem would be a great choice for the One Poem Project according to the criteria on the prompt for that project. It’s a functional document—if it doesn’t make its case well, I won’t approve your topic.

**One Poem Project:**

This is a multi-part project that will allow you to look in great depth at a single poem. You will research and report on its manuscript and publication history and its context of
production. You’ll find all of the substantial treatments of the poem in the critical literature, working extensively with ILL, write an annotated bibliography, and a concise readable summary of criticism. You’ll produce a markup of the poem, and an explication that accounts for all the formal and thematic elements of the poem, and explains any references or allusions that are explicable. Finally, you’ll condense this information into a concise summary.

**Term Paper Proposal:**
Your term paper proposal will be a brief paper which explains the topic you will pursue in your term paper and lists (in MLA format) and annotates some of the sources you plan to use and the approach you plan to take. It’s a functional document with which you win approval for your topic.

**Brief Term Paper:**
By the end of the semester, you will have produced a 9-15 page term paper on a work or topic of your choice within the range of the class. It will be in MLA format, and will incorporate a number of good, scholarly sources, showing both your ability to do research and your ability to make your own argument. Drafts will be required, and I will be glad to conference your drafts as time allows. A prompt, example, and rubric will be made available well in advance. I’ll be glad to help you choose a paper topic if you have no idea. You may choose to relate the term paper to your One Poem Project, but there is no requirement that you do so.

**Extremely Tentative Reading List:**
The following is an extremely tentative reading list, intended to give a peek at the future for those who like to read ahead. The schedule may change with notice, and the authoritative assignment will always be posted on D2L in the week-by-week. Critical works and background will be assigned on D2L as we go.

1. **Background.** Texts and contexts. Have read Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet,” Read the biographies at your own pace throughout the semester—specific sections will be assigned or recommended on a weekly basis to complimert our reading. Secondary articles will be linked or available.


Look at “Live Oak With Moss” articles and manuscripts online (Scholnick and Helms).
5 Whitman and ecology, progress, social upheaval, objects, time.

Poetry including: Song of the Open Road, Crossing Brooklyn Ferry, Song of the Answerer, Song of the Redwood-Tree, A Song for Occupations, A Song of the Rolling Earth, A Song of Joys. **Whitman Criticism Review Deadline, September 23**

6 Whitman the Downer: To You, A Hand-Mirror, Sea-Drift poems: Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking, As I Ebb’d With the Ocean of Life, On the Beach at Night, selections from Democratic Vistas.

7 Whitman and the Civil War: Drum Taps, Specimen Days, Lincoln poems. **One Poem Project proposal due, October 7 (or before)**

8 Dickinson MS history and publication history. Poems that were published, and revision history. Articles on D’s textual practices. Learn to use the numbering systems.

9 **Dickinson criticism review due, October 29.** Articles on D’s structures and verse variants, idea of poetry. Look over Higginson letters and accounts.

10 Dickinson and gender performance, sexuality, etc. Read overview article on Dickinson and Sue’s relationship, check out some letters, work through the poems. **Paper proposal due**

11 Dickinson, divinity, and religious noncomformism

12 Dickinson, power and surrender. **One Poem Project due, November 11.**

13 Continue Dickinson

14 Thanksgiving

15 Drafts of conference-length paper due

Final Exam day--Thursday, Final papers due.