Course Description
J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy masterpiece, The Lord of the Rings, is one of the most popular and critically acclaimed works of imaginative literature in the twentieth century. From 1960's cult popularity to international scholarship in Tolkien Studies, to Oscar-winning Hollywood blockbuster, Tolkien's work resonates through its timeless human themes of good & evil, heroes & monsters, quests, courage and comradeship in the service of a common good. At the same time, Tolkien's Middle Earth evokes the epic conflicts of his century-- world wars, industrialization, xenophobia--seen through the eyes of an Oxford professor of medieval languages and literature. This course is a systematic investigation of Tolkien's literary world of Middle Earth, understood in relationship to the author's life world as a post-war Oxford scholar of cultural stories and practices.

I approach the novel as a case study, meaning that our semester-long immersion in LOTR/Middle Earth serves as a common 'site of investigation' for students' individualized and interdisciplinary learning. This approach relies on two dynamics: 1) building a shared, substantive, and cumulative understanding of the novel-world through immersion, micro-analysis, and discussion; and 2) creative experimentation with research perspectives, methods and modalities, in accordance with each student’s disciplinary interests. In short, we seek to create a collaborative Fellowship of Ring Scholars wherein each person’s unique skills and expertise contribute to our collective understanding of Tolkien’s worlds. The first half of semester builds foundational skills in analysis and writing, while the second half emphasizes creative research design, culminating in an individualized capstone project on Tolkien’s (literary/life) worlds.

This is a reading/writing-intensive, participation-dependent, and process-based course. Expect regular short writing prompts, mini-lectures, lively class discussion, in-class workshops, and small group projects. I work to foster a creative, collaborative classroom environment that emphasizes experiential, developmental, and multi-modal approaches to learning.

Goals and Objectives for the Course
• Acquire a deep knowledge & appreciation of The Lord of the Rings as an exemplar of imaginative fiction and a resonant mythology for our contemporary world.
• Expand critical thinking skills through close analysis of the novel and its contextualizing literatures.
• Enrich written and oral communication skills through analysis and presentation of Tolkienian themes.
• Enhance skills in creative research design and presentation through experimentation with a range of research methods and presentation modalities
• Practice successful collaboration in group discussions and projects.

Required & Supplemental Readings:

I will supplement the novel with ‘mini-lectures' on essays by and about Tolkien. These essays are available to you on D2L, but only one essay is part of your required common reading, and one will be self-selected from a list provided to you. A full bibliography of resources available to you online and at Morris Library Reserve will be provided.

Description of Assignments and Grading
• Semester Writing Portfolio 150 pts total (30%)
‘Distillation’ Project 100 pts (20%)
Peer Teaching Presentation 100 pts (20%)
Capstone Project & Presentation 150 pts (30%)

500 pts total

Final Grade Calculations: (450-500=A; 400-449=B; 350-399=C; 300-349=D; below 300=F)

Semester Writing Portfolio  150 pts (total)
I use a “writing to learn” approach in which a sequence of short (2-5pp), focused prompts develop foundational skills in textual analysis and written argument. Portfolio prompts include: thematic analyses, plot diagrams, essay outlines, project proposals, etc. Specific guidelines will be provided for each prompt; I grade each writing on a numerical scale (10--20 pts. per prompt), giving detailed feedback with an emphasis on helping you refine your writing/analysis skills over time. Your Portfolio grade is based on the sum of earned points for each prompt (140 pts possible) plus an additional 10 possible points earned through evidence of your writing progress over time.

Distillation Project/Presentation  100 pts
A ‘distillation’ is a mode of representing research that condenses and crystallizes a holistic perspective on a text into a visual, presentational, or interactive display. (A poster presentation, for example, is a familiar kind of distillation; a 3-D model, collage, performance or participatory activity are other options). This assignment is an opportunity for creative experimentation as you explore Tolkienian themes and research modalities. I will model and give examples of distillations to prepare you.

Peer Teaching Presentation  100 pts
Teaching material to others is one of the best ways to sharpen your own thinking and practice your presentational skills, and learning to contribute to a group project is needed in most work environments. Working in self-selected small groups, you will prepare and present a 30-minute ‘micro-teaching presentation’ on a set of chapters in LOTR and facilitate a group discussion and participatory exercise. Your presentation should include both informative and discussion/participatory elements and be accompanied by a written handout. All group members will receive a common grade on the presentation and accompanying handout. (the handout is calculated as a Portfolio prompt).

Capstone Project and Presentation  150 pts
The goal of this course is to facilitate independent and individual engagement with Tolkien’s work that best reflects your own disciplinary & personal interests while enhancing our collective understanding of his worlds. Your capstone project may explore any theme, feature or interpretation that captivates you; you are encouraged to explore any disciplinary lens, method or modality that suits the project and your academic identity. Projects will be developed in consultation with me and with your classmates; written proposal drafts will ensure early guidance and feedback. All projects must have a written and a presentational (or graphic/digital) component and will be presented during our scheduled final exam period.

Attendance & Participation Policy
This course is a ‘fully interactive site’ designed to make the best use of our class time through discussion and group activity. Attendance and participation are expected and I take attendance at every class meeting. Each unexcused absence (or repeated tardiness) will incur a 10pt penalty. Absences due to required, documented, university-related activities are not penalized. I reserve the right to suspend the attendance policy at my discretion, or under advisement from the office of the Dean, in individual circumstances of extended illness, hardship, or documented participation in extracurricular activities.

There are many ways to demonstrate your active participation, including quietly tracking observations, note-taking, participating in open discussion, contributing to diagrams & illustrations, etc. I work to create a
classroom culture that supports and encourages multiple ways of being, learning, and demonstrating engagement.

Additional Course Policies, Resources and Information

Accessibility / Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Statement
SIUC strives to be conscious of and sensitive to disability issues. In the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I wish to make this course as accessible as possible to students with disabilities, temporary medical conditions, or mental or emotional health issues that may affect any aspect of course assignments or participation. I invite you to communicate with me at the beginning of the semester or at your discretion about any accommodations that will improve your experience of or access to the course. We can create an agreement to document accommodations. The Disability Support Services (DSS) office provides support and various services for students with disabilities and can be reached at (618) 453-5738 or DSSsiu@siu.edu. To best serve the student population, DSS requests that students contact the office at the beginning of the semester or at their earliest convenience. The Achieve Program also offers support (for a fee) to students with learning disabilities and can be reached at (618) 453-2369 or achieve@siu.edu.

Emergency Procedures:
Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in buildings on campus, available on BERT’s website at www.bert.siu.edu, Department of Safety’s website www.dps.siu.edu (disaster drop down), and in the Emergency Response Guideline pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.

Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility. Additional emergency procedures will be distributed in a separate handout.