

UHON 301-009 MW 2:30-3:45
UNM Honors College Room 1020

Dr. Obenauf
Fall Term 2026

THIS CLASS IS A JOKE: SATIRE AND SOCIETY

SYLLABUS

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Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays
12:30-1:00 and 4:00-4:30
and by appointment, Room 1071

Because it is written to delight and outrage such a targeted audience, satire is highly reflective of the society for which it was originally written. In this course, we will consider satire both as a literary mode and as a genre in which authors attempt to imitate and outdo their predecessors as they explain and critique their societies. We will see how literary techniques and traditions that emerged in ancient Rome evolved to criticize church corruption at the end of the Middle Ages and spurred the Reformation, and then became a favorite genre of the Enlightenment. As a low-pressure pretext for reading some of the “greatest hits” of the Western canon with implications for the present, you’ll get to read such touchstones as Thomas More’s Utopia, Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, and Voltaire’s Candide. We will compare the satiric commentary on Jazz Age America in Anita Loos’s Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby and the worlds of Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World and George Orwell’s 1984. Other authors may include Mark Twain, Dorothy Parker, Langston Hughes, Kingsley Amis, John Kennedy Toole, and Kurt Vonnegut, or others recommended by the class.

It may be worth mentioning from the start that it takes considerable standing and safety to criticize the powerful by mocking them, and until recently this has meant that much satire has been so veiled as to be unrecognizable as satire, or too subtle to be accessible as such to later generations. The reading list for our class reflects this practical constraint on the available materials—while nevertheless presenting students with works by authors whose experiences were entirely unlike their own. We will read highly canonical works for the first part of the class; for the final month, students will get to set the readings from the last century, as it has become safer for increasingly diverse voices to speak truth to power.

Consistent attendance and active participation are expected. Students will keep a reading journal, which will form the basis for a series of short response papers. There will be one shorter analytical paper and a longer creative final project in which you will try your hand at writing satire of your own. Depending on enrollment, each student may be expected either to lead class discussion for a day or to offer a series of three-minute “leads” to stimulate our discussion throughout the semester.

A good time will be had by all.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS CLASS

What you get out of this class depends on what you put into it.

“This Class is a Joke” is different from other classes you may have taken in that it is centered on primary historical literary sources. In most cases, I will be interested in how you respond to the ideas and themes in our readings without regard for what anyone else has said about them. There is no prize for discovering the “right” interpretation or saying what you think I want to hear. Our task is to look closely at the evidence, see what we notice, and develop measured arguments that make no claims beyond what the evidence suggests.

To help you slow down and practice reading, thinking, and writing carefully, most weeks you will need to spend between five and ten hours outside of class preparing for our seminar sessions. I hope you can use that time to “unplug” from many of your favorite distractions and, as much as possible, write in a paper journal, read from print editions of books, and revise your papers in longhand. We won’t use Canvas in this class—you’ll use Microsoft Word to produce MLA-style documents, which you’ll print out and turn in as hard copies. I’ll read your papers with a pencil in my hand and return them with notes you will then review and use as you work on your next paper. When we’re in class together, we will rarely use the projector for videos or PowerPoint; rather, we’ll give each other our full attention by putting away our electronics and listening to what each person is really trying to convey through their words.

Before each reading, I will give a brief lecture on the upcoming text. You should take notes on this background information so that you can incorporate it into your response papers. Your readers need context which you do not yet possess. Rather than relying on outside sources that may color your reading of the materials, you should rely on the information I give in class. Then, as you read, I recommend taking notes, looking up unfamiliar words, and coming to class with questions you were unable to answer on your own. If you don’t already own a decent dictionary, you should consider buying one. A print dictionary will allow you to look up unfamiliar words without getting sucked into your phone. It is normal to be a little confused at times. That is part of the process.

Since this class does not use Canvas, you are responsible for keeping track of deadlines, the grades you receive on completed work, and the course requirements you still need to complete. Develop whatever system works for you and keep it up to date throughout the semester.

You are expected to be the sole creator of all work you submit and of every idea you raise during class discussion. You are strictly prohibited from using ChatGPT and other AI resources for any aspect of this course. You will need to resist the temptation in order to master the skills that AI appears to approximate. If you are ever in doubt about whether it is acceptable to use a particular resource for this class, you should ask your instructor. Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself this question: Did I do this work myself, yes or no?

YOUR GRADE

There are many ways to assess student learning. In this class, the main form of assessment will be the feedback on your work. The comments you get on your papers are for your benefit. You should read my notes and ask questions so that you can follow up on each piece of advice as you work on each subsequent essay.

In addition to the handwritten and typed notes, I will assign letter grades to your formal writing (i.e., the Analytical Paper and your Final Project) and grade the shorter work on a pass/fail basis. These grades are a necessary evil: the grade you earn on each assignment is far less important than the feedback you receive and the progress you make over the course of the semester. You should not fixate on the grades. Take each assignment as an opportunity to try doing something differently.

30% Participation, including leading discussion
 70% Written work
 20% Informal response papers (pass/fail)
 20% Shorter Analytical Paper
 30% Creative Final Project

Your semester grade will follow the Honors College's unique grading system according to these criteria:

A semester grade of A+, A, or A– will be recorded on your university transcript as an A. An “A” signifies exemplary work that fully meets Honors expectations and will compute into your academic GPA.

A semester grade of B+ through C– will be recorded on your university transcript as “CR.” A grade of Credit in this course signals that you participated meaningfully in class discussion and that you made an earnest attempt to meet the basic norms of scholarly writing even if your work did not consistently meet Honors-level expectations for writing and rigor. You will receive credit towards graduation for your satisfactory work in this class, but your grade will not factor into your academic GPA.

A semester grade below a C– will be recorded on your university transcript as “NC.” A grade of No Credit signals a failure to meet basic conventions of scholarly work, such as deadlines, formatting, grammar, accurate citations and bibliographies, and/or meaningful attendance and participation. **It is not possible to pass this course if your final project is incoherent or lacks appropriate citations or an accurate bibliography, regardless of your grades on earlier assignments.** Thus, a grade of NC indicates unacceptable work and is not computed into your GPA or counted towards graduation.

I believe that every student enrolled in this seminar is capable of earning an A for the semester in “This Class is a Joke.” Since I do not grade on a curve, nothing would delight me more than to turn in all As in December.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Attendance: We all benefit from hearing your perspectives in class discussion. **I will lower your participation grade for each unexcused absence. After four unexcused absences, therefore, you will no longer be able to earn a passing grade in the class.** Your consistent attendance and contribution to class discussion are crucial to the success of this small seminar. And although I expect you to be ready to begin on time, it's better to be late than not to come at all. Consistent tardiness will affect your participation grade in proportion to the consistency of your disruption. Please keep in touch with me if you must miss class or encounter an unexpected circumstance that interferes with your coursework. I want to help you succeed in this class and will work with you when ordinary problems arise; students who need ongoing accommodations should follow the process described later in this syllabus.

Book policy: Bring the book we're reading to every class session. We will need to cite evidence for every claim we make. To practice quoting the text extensively during class discussion in preparation for your papers, we will all (literally) need to be on the same page. I have prepared a photocopied coursepack of shorter readings and ordered the most inexpensive editions I could find of longer books to make sure that you can afford the materials for this class, and you are expected to use these physical printed materials, in the exact editions I have requested. Our classroom is both a NO-B.S. ZONE and a safe space to try out new ideas; the best ideas are anchored in concrete evidence; without your book, you cannot cite evidence for your claims, and therefore you cannot participate meaningfully in discussion. **If you realize you've forgotten your book, please tell me immediately; with permission, you may share with a classmate or use an electronic version for that day only. Otherwise, you may be dismissed from class and marked absent for the day.**

Participation and preparation: Honors seminars are neither lectures nor bull sessions; active attendance is a part of participation, and so your presence alone does not guarantee participation points. You are encouraged to contribute when you have something thoughtful to say...which means coming to class thoroughly prepared to discuss the day's readings with an open mind. The best way to prepare is to read the course materials attentively, looking up unfamiliar words and concepts, and generally considering the major issues of the works before we begin our discussions.

Electronics use: The emphasis in a seminar is on conversation. Even before class begins, Honors wishes to cultivate a sense of community through chitchat amongst your peers. In order to be fully engaged in our discussions, you should put away your electronic devices when you are in class so that you can devote your total attention to what your classmates are saying and to what you can contribute. I again ask that you use PRINT editions of the texts we will be discussing so that you can leave your phones, computers, tablets, e-readers, and other distractions in your bags. If you must use electronics during class, you will need to resist the temptation to check social media or work on other projects.

Honors Week: This year we will not hold class the week of October 26–30 to make room for **Honors Week**, when you will have the opportunity to interact with students and faculty from across the Honors College. You must participate in **two Honors Week events** and submit a **two-page reflection** addressing these questions: 1) How did you participate in Community, Curiosity, and Creativity during Honors Week? and 2) What connections can you draw between your Honors Week activities? **The reflection is due the following week.** The two events must be hosted by other Honors faculty or students; events I host do not count toward this requirement.

Leading class discussion: Depending on course enrollment, you will be expected to lead class discussion in one of two ways. If enrollment drops to approximately one dozen students in the course, you will be charged with leading class discussion for at least 30 minutes (and likely the entire class session after my opening remarks) at some point during the semester. You should email me several days ahead of time with your tentative questions and plan of attack so that I can offer additional questions and offer some hints for the text you will be teaching.

Leads: In order to minimize duplication, if enrollment is near capacity, you will instead be assigned to prepare a series of BRIEF (two- to three-minute) “leads” on a rotating basis to stimulate our discussion throughout the semester. I will post these on the website and announce them in class ahead of time. **You should begin with a CONCISE (no more than one minute, and ideally just two or three sentences) original summary of your assigned section to jog your classmate’s memory of the section.** I am specifically requesting that you not bog down class time with lengthy summaries. We have all done the reading. We do not need a page-by-page account of what we have already read. Being able to write a brief summary without relying on ChatGPT, Wikipedia, or any other source is an important skill for you to develop. This will be good practice for you, and it will help the class stay focused on your section. Then, help the class draw a link between your section and the larger themes of the course: what does your passage suggest about how satire works, what or whom it targets, the audience it addresses, or the society in which it was written? While you might mention other relevant material from elsewhere in the text, you should try to limit your comments to your passage so as to avoid overlapping with other students who are taking the lead on other parts of the book. **You must have some sort of argument for your lead: you can’t just say that you found something “interesting”**—though you could certainly use that as a springboard. You must explain why it seems surprising at first, and what your observation suggests about our course themes. You are obviously free to agree or disagree with our texts.

Reading journal: In addition to your normal class notes, you will need a separate notebook—a **reading journal**—to use for reflection throughout the semester. For each reading, I will announce some reflection questions for you to consider in your private reading journal. I recommend tackling the questions before attacking the reading so that you can see how your ideas compare with those of the text. This will take approximately **one to two hours per text** and it is a significant part of this course. You will draw on your personal responses in your short response papers, and your observations about the readings will help you prepare for class discussion. **This**

reading journal is strictly confidential—you will never, ever be required to share its contents with me or with any of your classmates. You are expected to keep up with it.

Following up by email: Although Honors expects all students to contribute to our daily seminar discussion, you may not be able to express every idea that you would like to explore in our limited time. I encourage you to email me with your observations, questions, or even links to relevant articles. Past students have found it helpful to articulate an idea by explaining it in an email to me, and this is one way for introverted students to show that they are truly engaged in the course.

WRITTEN WORK

The writing in this course will give you several different ways to explore how satire works. You will begin with brief personal responses that put your own experience into conversation with writers from other times and places, then develop a sustained analysis comparing modern satire with its classical predecessors. By the end of the semester, you will put what you have learned to the test by writing satire of your own and then analyzing the choices you made. Throughout, the object is not to discover the “right” interpretation of a work, but to look closely at the evidence, notice what the satirist is doing, and develop measured arguments about what those choices suggest about the work and the society for which it was written.

The easiest way to meet the formatting requirements for this class is to use the MLA template I have provided on my website. It will allow you to focus your energy on your writing and argumentation and me to focus my energy on responding to your writing and argumentation. I have also provided a Guide to Writing and Reasoning Like a Scholar in the coursepack for this class to help you produce the sort of writing we are looking for in Honors, regardless of what writing classes you may (or may not) have had in high school or college. There will be other handouts and tools provided to you this semester to help you succeed in this class. These resources are designed to help you understand what I am asking you to do and to give you different approaches to try as you develop your writing and critical-thinking skills. Take advantage of them.

For this class you will need to use the **desktop version of Microsoft Word** to prepare your papers. The browser-based version of Word, Google Docs, Pages, and other word processors do not handle formatting in exactly the same way, and in my experience documents created in them frequently do not meet the formatting requirements for this course. **Microsoft Word is available to UNM students at no additional cost through the university’s Microsoft 365 subscription.** You should contact UNM IT if you need help installing the desktop version. I have provided an optional MLA template on my course website that will do most of the formatting for you when used with the desktop version of Word.

Each assignment is a new opportunity to apply what you learned from the last one; rather than rewriting work that has already been graded, you will use my feedback as you approach the next assignment. **Since you will not be permitted to resubmit papers**

after they have been graded, use the revision process before you submit them, and ask for guidance or an extension if you need more time. I would much rather spend my time responding to your ideas and argumentation than identifying formatting and proofreading problems that you can catch yourself with the tools provided for this course. Before submitting a paper, take the time to read it again, consult the relevant sections of the Guide to Writing, and make whatever changes your observations suggest. To help nudge you towards using these course materials sooner rather than later, **there will be a penalty of one letter grade for each significant formatting or proofreading issue.**

Assignments are due at the start of class in hard copy. If you must miss class on the day an assignment is due, email your essay to me before the scheduled class time. Please include a brief professional message identifying the assignment and explaining why you are submitting it electronically.

You are expected to follow the latest MLA style guide and to document your sources meticulously. For example, all work should be exactly double-spaced in a 12-pt. Times New Roman typeface, rendered with 1" margins, and therefore 24 lines of text per page; the page number and your name must appear in the upper right corner of each and every page. **Please print all documents single sided.** You must neatly staple or paperclip your pages together: loose or crimped pages will not be accepted.

I will not grade any paper that fails to meet the minimum expectations for length, formatting, proofreading, or accuracy in citations and bibliographies. As you write, you should consult references like The Elements of Style, a good dictionary, your MLA Handbook, and Dr. Obenau's Guide to Writing and Reasoning Like a Scholar. As a rule of thumb,

A papers open with an introduction that gives sufficient context without overwhelming the reader with irrelevant information and offer a concrete thesis statement at the end of the introduction. The body of an A paper is meticulously organized and well polished, using carefully selected and rigorously cited evidence to develop precise, persuasive analysis. Its conclusion takes the analysis a step further and considers the broader implications of the project's analysis, avoiding recapping or simply summarizing what has already been said. The bibliography is accurate. In short, an A paper follows the conventions of scholarly writing described in the MLA Handbook and in Dr. Obenau's Guide to Writing and Reasoning Like a Scholar.

B papers demonstrate most of the traits of an A paper, but weaknesses in their analysis, use of evidence, organization, or execution keep the paper as a whole from fully meeting these expectations.

C papers demonstrate the basic practices of scholarly writing, but significant weaknesses in their analysis, use of evidence, organization, or execution keep the paper as a whole from approaching the standard of an A paper.

D papers make reasonable use of evidence but are too incoherent to build a persuasive argument. Their chief virtue may be that they are recognizably the student's own work.

F papers fail to demonstrate the basic practices of scholarly writing described in Dr. Obenauf's Guide to Writing and Reasoning Like a Scholar. Coherent papers may nevertheless receive an F if they fail to meet basic requirements for formatting and proofreading, do not present sufficient evidence to support their analysis, do not document their sources accurately, or do not respond to the assignment as given. Papers below the minimum length requirement cannot answer the assignment as described and will receive an F.

All work must be submitted by the beginning of class on the day it is due. I am reasonable about extensions, but we must agree on one in writing by email before the assignment is due. Otherwise, late work will be penalized one letter grade for each day it is late.

There are three kinds of papers you will submit in "This Class is a Joke":

- Your **six short response papers** are an exercise in being both deep and brief.

Each one asks you to explore a small puzzle: What happens when you compare something you have experienced yourself with the way a satirist writing in another time and place approached a similar issue? Your job is not to discover the "right" interpretation of the reading or to report what other people have said about it. Instead, you will look closely at the evidence and develop your own measured argument about what the satire is doing and what it might suggest about the society for which it was written.

For each response, begin by considering the reflection questions in your private reading journal, then read the assigned work carefully and see what you notice. Your own experience can provide useful evidence about the present: a true personal anecdote makes an ideal opening and closing frame for your discussion because it can show your reader how one person—you—experienced something without pretending to establish what "people today" or "our society" generally think or do. The assigned text provides your evidence about the past. Your task is to put these two bodies of evidence into conversation, paying particular attention to the differences that emerge even when two experiences initially seem similar.

After the opening anecdote, your essay should briefly give your reader the context needed to understand the comparison you are making: assume your reader is unfamiliar with the work, and identify who wrote it, when and where it was written, and summarize in your own words what it is about.

Then turn to carefully chosen and rigorously cited quotations from the text and explain what they show. Pay attention not only to **what the satirist is criticizing**,

but to how the satire works: what makes the treatment funny, surprising, outrageous, exaggerated, ironic, or otherwise effective for its intended audience? What might that suggest about its society? A brief conclusion can return to your opening observation and consider what you understand differently after reading. We need evidence for everything we say: if the evidence supports only a narrow conclusion, make a narrow conclusion. This is practice in building the kind of evidence-driven argument described in Step 3 of my Guide to Writing and Reasoning Like a Scholar.

These papers should be at least one full page but no more than two full pages of text, double spaced, plus an accurate Work (or Works) Cited page. Do not consult outside sources, summaries, commentaries, or AI tools such as ChatGPT. Those resources would defeat the purpose of the exercise: the puzzle is to see what you can discover by comparing your own observations with the evidence you find in the assigned reading.

Response papers are due at the start of class on the first day we discuss a text. You may choose which **six of the 16 or so works** on our syllabus you write about, and I recommend completing plenty of them early rather than leaving yourself a scramble at the end. I will comment on them lightly and grade them pass/fail. Papers that are incoherent, lack sufficient textual evidence, or have clearly not been proofread will not receive credit. You must submit **six** to receive credit for this requirement; response papers cannot ordinarily be submitted late or made up later in the semester. If you know you will miss class when one is due, arrange with me ahead of time by email to submit it electronically.

- **For the Shorter Analytical Paper**, you will break down some of the satiric techniques in recent satire from our culture or another that you know well, such as a novel, play, musical, movie, or TV show, and explain how it fits into one of the major classical schools of satire. Using no sources besides the course readings and your chosen subject (e.g., Last Week Tonight, Silicon Valley, etc.), compare and contrast the jokes and approach in your work at hand with the jokes and approach in Horatian, Juvenalian, or Menippean satire.

You will need to cite concrete evidence to develop an argument about how the satire works in the two different societies and what you can surmise about the expectations the first audiences had for each work. You should strive to show how the literary techniques echo through time rather than merely latching onto thematic harmonies in the satiric butts that may appear independently in both works.

Assume your reader has no knowledge of any of the materials you discuss—you will need to give an overview not only of the source you are discussing but also of the main school of satire you argue it is aligned with, quoting plenty of examples from each as you develop your argument. This means giving a concise summary of the modern work as well as a clear description of the

classical work, all in your own words and without relying on any other summaries or descriptions. The goal is to produce your own original analysis. By the conclusion, you should have staked out the extent to which the modern satire fits the ancient model in an attempt to uncover what the parallels and divergences might suggest about differences between the two cultures. That is the argument you will be developing.

- For your **Creative Final Project (10-15 pages)**, you will write a satire of your own, and then analyze it. Obviously, you should try to make it funny, but neither your comedic skills nor your politics or outlook are being judged. The point is to try your hand at imitating (or even outdoing) those who came before you and then review that attempt using the analytic skills you've honed in the course. To that end, by the twelfth week of the semester, you will submit a proposal showing what you aim to criticize through your satire and staking out your approach. Though I would recommend a short story, perhaps in the form of a series of journal entries or letters, you are free to propose another format. You have a considerable amount of leeway with this project; based on what you intend to critique through your satire, your project could be set in the present or in the past, in our society or in a world of your own invention. This creative component of your paper will probably fill 6-8 pages, but I invite you to write more. You should use our course readings as inspiration for your story, and in the second part of your project you will then explain your satire and show how you made your choices as the author of the piece. In your 4-6-page (minimum) analytical narrative you will justify each decision about your characters, setting, satiric targets, etc. This analytical section must include rigorous documentation of every source that inspired any aspect of your story, quoting from the texts to explain not only how they led you to make certain decisions but also what those decisions suggest about our society. In this section you may wish to discuss what worked well, and what didn't seem to work well, and why. Think of this as a director's commentary on a film; you can reveal jokes that you ultimately decided were too cringey to leave in—or defend jokes that perhaps crossed a line, as satire often demands. What did you learn about satire from writing some of your own?

A NOTE ON CITING SOURCES ACCURATELY

Through these assignments, you will get lots of practice citing your sources. Your Works Cited page is perhaps the most important element of college writing because it shows your reader how to check the citations in your paper. You should plan ahead to create the bibliographic entries based on the sources you cite, and then painstakingly double- and triple-check them for accuracy. For reasons I explain in greater detail in my Guide to Writing and Reasoning Like a Scholar in your coursepack, it is very important that your Works Cited pages be accurate.

Bibliographies allow your reader to confirm that what you have said is true; inaccurate entries cast doubt on the entirety of your argument, and so they are anything but busy-

work. You must devote as much attention to detail at the end of your project as at the beginning. A meticulous bibliography is part of a gestalt of rigor and intellectual honesty expected in Honors that signals your devotion to truthfulness and openness in your work.

There is an important difference between making an honest mistake while learning MLA style and submitting references that do not accurately represent the source you actually used. You will make mistakes as you learn, and that is part of the process. A misplaced comma, an incorrect italic, or another error in MLA style is something we can identify and learn from. But the information in a citation must be true: your quotations must faithfully reproduce the source you consulted, your in-text citations must point your reader to the correct location within that source, and your Works Cited entries must accurately identify the actual versions you used.

I have a zero-tolerance policy for inaccurate citations that do not correspond to the sources they purport to document. Working directly with primary sources is at the core of what this class is all about. You are expected to choose appropriate evidence to drive each point you make, and you are equally expected to produce your own in-text citations and your own Works Cited entries based on the materials you have actually used. For assigned readings, your sources should be the versions I have assigned.

A quotation, citation, or Works Cited entry that does not correspond to the source actually used is not simply a formatting mistake: it misrepresents the evidence on which your argument depends.

If I find source documentation that does not correspond to the source it purports to document, I will treat the discrepancy as a potential academic-integrity violation and initiate the university's academic-dishonesty process.

At a minimum, any student who lists an edition other than the version actually cited in the paper at hand will not receive credit for the assignment, whether it is a short response paper, a Shorter Analytical Paper, or a Final Project. You will not be permitted to revise or resubmit the essay. Inaccurate source documentation can therefore prevent you from earning an A for the semester, and it may prevent you from passing the course. I may also initiate an involuntary withdrawal from the class. Academic dishonesty can have consequences beyond this course, potentially affecting scholarships or, in serious cases, a student's continued enrollment at the university.

Fortunately, accurate bibliographies are not difficult to produce. I provide extensive examples in my sample MLA template, including for some of the editions assigned in this class. **Do not use an online citation generator, ChatGPT, or another tool to produce citations for you.** Instead, consult your MLA Handbook and other reputable guides and build each entry yourself from the source in front of you. If you have doubts about how to document something, ask me for guidance. I would much rather help you work through an unfamiliar citation than have you submit one whose accuracy you cannot verify yourself.

The MLA Handbook is a required text for this class because it shows you how to make your own citations based on the materials in front of you. (Tip: what MLA calls “location” means the location within the source, such as a range of page numbers within an anthology; “place of publication” refers to the city or country where the work was published and is not generally needed for editions produced in the last hundred years.)

Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself this question: Did I do this work myself, yes or no?

WHAT SORT OF HELP IS OK?

You may seek help with all stages of the writing process, but you must be the sole author of all work you submit in this course. Submitting material as your own work that has been generated on a website, in a publication, by an artificial intelligence algorithm, by another person, or by breaking the rules of an assignment constitutes academic dishonesty. It is a student code of conduct violation that can lead to a disciplinary procedure.

There is an important difference between getting help with your work and having someone or something else do the work for you. You are welcome to discuss your ideas with other people and to ask friends and family to proofread your papers, but the observations, analysis, argument, prose, and source documentation you submit must be your own. **Do not use AI tools such as ChatGPT, paper-writing services, citation generators, or other outside tools to produce any part of an assignment for you.**

I urge you to enlist your friends and family to help you proofread your papers—and to read your own prose out loud.

You may wish to reach out to our Honors librarian over at Zimmerman Library, Adrienne Warner by email at adriennew@unm.edu or by scheduling an appointment through her faculty page, <https://ulls.unm.edu/people/directory/w/warner-adrienne.php>

Also, the Center for Teaching & Learning (formerly CAPS), offers resources at <https://ctl.unm.edu/> that you may find helpful at all stages of the writing process.

Above all, if you are ever in doubt about whether it is acceptable to use a particular resource for this class, ask me before you use it.

HOW WE WILL HANDLE PROVOCATIVE AND OFFENSIVE MATERIAL

Satirists often intend to offend their first audiences; even works that were considered mild when written can inspire outrage and disgust in later generations. Considering concepts in their historical contexts should not be construed as endorsement of those ideas. Indeed, we will be reading, discussing, and writing about ideas that will make

you uncomfortable. You will not agree with everything we read in this course, and instances in which you disagree with a perspective often lead to valuable insights. (Why isn't that joke funny?) I encourage you to grapple with the seeming contradictions and internal inconsistencies within works and among various texts as a way to discover the forces that motivated people who held views different from your own. Our aim is not to litigate the truth or morality of the texts on our syllabus; our goal is to understand these works on their own terms for what they suggest about how other people lived and what they thought.

The syllabus for this course is packed with works chosen for their literary, philosophical, political, historical, and aesthetic significance. No historical artifact or document can capture the entire essence of the lived experience of a particular time or place; we will read these works for what they reveal about the broad expectations of their first audiences. But rather than judging the past by our standards, our time is best spent uncovering what old books suggest by thinking as historians, literary scholars, and anthropologists. For example, we will trace the classical, medieval, and early modern roots of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other kinds of bigotry that manifested as ridicule in literature and coercion in practice.

To that end, as a general rule we will not be censoring our works. We acknowledge that when we analyze primary literary works within their historical contexts, the words and concepts belong to the author rather than to the scholar who is quoting part of a text that is germane to the topic at hand. In your papers, you should reproduce quotations precisely, though you may paraphrase words and passages in your subsequent discussion to avoid using epithets in your own prose. In our seminar sessions, at times your instructor may take the reins and read certain passages out loud so that no student is forced to read them in class, though, again, we recognize that the words and ideas belong to the author and not to the person reciting them.

Per Section 2220 of UNM's Student Handbook, [The Pathfinder](#),

As an institution that exists for the express purposes of education, research, and public service, the University is dependent upon the unfettered flow of ideas, not only in the classroom and the laboratory, but also in all University activities. As such, protecting freedom of expression is of central importance to the University. The exchange of diverse viewpoints may expose people to ideas some find offensive, even abhorrent. The way that ideas are expressed may cause discomfort to those who disagree with them. The appropriate response to such speech is speech expressing opposing ideas and continued dialogue, not curtailment of speech.

The University also recognizes that the exercise of free expression must be balanced with the rights of others to learn, work, and conduct business. Speech activity that unduly interferes with the rights of others or the ability of the University to carry out its mission is not protected by the First Amendment and violates this policy.

While I would never pressure any student to say something simply because it's what you think I would want to hear, I encourage you to speak up when you have something relevant to say. Respectful debate and free inquiry are cornerstones of Honors seminars, so long as our discourse is germane to the seminar and the topic at hand. You do not have the right to derail class discussion.

Finally, at times this semester we may be discussing passages that could be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. If you ever feel the need to step out during one of these discussions, either for a short time or for the rest of the class session, you may always do so without penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss and should make arrangements to review notes with one of your classmates or to see me during office hours.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Once students successfully complete "This Class is a Joke" they will be able to:

1. Analyze, critically interpret, and evaluate primary works of literature that reflect the moral, social, philosophical, economic, and religious issues in satire from ancient Rome, the Reformation and Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, including works by Horace, Juvenal, and Petronius; Thomas More and Erasmus; Jonathan Swift and Voltaire; Mark Twain, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell; and others, all within their interdisciplinary cultural and historical contexts.
2. Construct persuasive arguments and increase writing proficiency through creative writing and analytical essays characterized by original and insightful theses, supported by logically integrated and sound subordinate ideas, appropriate and pertinent evidence, and good sentence structure, diction, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
3. Compare modes of thought and expression across a range of historical periods and/or structures (such as political, geographic, social, cultural, philosophical, and intellectual); for example, the role of satire and the danger of criticism in the Protestant Reformation as opposed to 19th century America.
4. Demonstrate knowledge that integrates ideas and methods from different disciplines; for example, how to evaluate literary, philosophical, and historical works as manifestations of changing attitudes towards social changes as well as resistance against changing attitudes in different societies.

RESPONSIBLE LEARNING AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic honesty is essential to the work we will do together in this course. Cheating and plagiarism are sometimes driven by lack of time, uncertainty, or desperation; if you

find yourself in that position, **communicate with me and ask for help—even at the last minute—rather than submitting work that is not your own.** Academic dishonesty includes claiming credit for work not done by you or failing to distinguish your own work clearly from material produced by another source.

These rules exist to protect your learning. If you do the work yourself, you will discover things you never would have noticed otherwise—connections, questions, and even disagreements with the text that no summary or algorithm could hand you. That is where much of the satisfaction of this course comes from. **You are therefore responsible for personally creating every part of every assignment you submit.**

This course is designed to help you develop and demonstrate your own reading, reasoning, and writing without generative AI assistance. **Do not use ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, Grammarly’s generative AI features, AI paraphrasing tools, citation generators, or similar technologies at any stage of work submitted for this course.**

Likewise, unless an assignment specifically calls for research, do not consult summaries, commentaries, or other outside interpretations of the assigned readings. **The emphasis in our class on primary sources means that, with a few clearly defined exceptions, you should consult no resources outside of the books we are discussing in the editions I’ve specified in this syllabus.** If you are ever unsure whether a particular resource or kind of assistance is permitted, ask me before using it.

Submitting material created by another person, source, or unauthorized tool as your own constitutes academic dishonesty. A paper containing material written by someone or something else may receive an F on the assignment and may result in an NC for the semester, an involuntary withdrawal from the course, and referral through the university’s academic-integrity process.

Source documentation is subject to the more specific standards described earlier in this syllabus. **If I find source documentation that does not correspond to the source it purports to document, I will treat the discrepancy as a potential academic-integrity violation and initiate the university’s academic-dishonesty process.**

The point of these policies is not merely to prevent cheating. This class is designed to give you the experience of wrestling with ideas, evidence, and language for yourself. By doing your own work, you contribute to a community in which grades represent actual learning, ideas are genuinely exchanged, and academic credit reflects work the student has actually done. **So, before you submit each assignment, ask yourself this question: Did I do this work myself, in its entirety, yes or no?** For additional information on plagiarism and other university policies, please consult UNM’s Student Handbook, The Pathfinder, at <http://pathfinder.unm.edu/>.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations: UNM is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for students with documented disabilities. As your instructor, it is my

objective to facilitate an inclusive classroom setting, in which students have full access and opportunity to participate. To engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations for this class and/or program, please contact Accessibility Resource Center (<https://arc.unm.edu/>) at arcsrvs@unm.edu or 505-277-3506.

CITIZENSHIP AND/OR IMMIGRATION STATUS

All students are welcome in this class regardless of citizenship, residency, or immigration status. I will respect your privacy if you choose to disclose your status. I support your right to an education free from fear of deportation. I pledge that I will not disclose the immigration status of any student who shares this information with me unless required by a judicial warrant, and I will work with students who require immigration-related accommodations. As for all students in the class, family emergency-related absences are normally excused with reasonable notice to the professor, as noted in the attendance guidelines above. UNM as an institution has made a core commitment to the success of all our students, including members of our undocumented community. The Administration's welcome is found on the website: <http://undocumented.unm.edu/>.

CONNECTING TO CAMPUS AND FINDING SUPPORT

Students who ask for help are successful students. UNM has many resources and centers to help you thrive, including [opportunities to get involved](#), [mental health resources](#), [academic support including tutoring](#), [resource centers](#) for people like you, free food at [Lobo Food Pantry](#), and [jobs on campus](#). Your advisor, staff at the [resource centers](#) and [Dean of Students](#), and I can help you find the right opportunities for you.

CREDIT HOUR STATEMENT

This is a three credit-hour course. Class meets for two 75-minute sessions of direct instruction for fifteen weeks during the Fall 2026 semester. According to federal guidelines, students are expected to complete a minimum of six hours of out-of-class work (including homework, study, assignment completion, and class preparation) each week. Honors courses generally demand more than six hours per week outside of class. You should budget at least ten hours a week for your reading and writing in this course.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Founded in 1889, the University of New Mexico sits on the traditional homelands of the Pueblo of Sandia. The original peoples of New Mexico Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache since time immemorial, have deep connections to the land and have made significant

contributions to the broader community statewide. We honor the land itself and those who remain stewards of this land throughout the generations and also acknowledge our committed relationship to Indigenous peoples. We gratefully recognize our history.

RECORDKEEPING AND ELECTRONIC BACKUPS

Because this course does not use an online gradebook, you should maintain your own record of the grades you receive and the requirements you have completed so that we both have a record of your progress. You are also required to keep electronic backups of all work you produce for this class that you can provide immediately upon my request. Additionally, I may retain scanned copies of the work you submit in this class to maintain my own records, tailor my feedback to you, and for other educational purposes.

RESPECTFUL CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

I am committed to building with you a positive classroom environment in which everyone can learn. I reserve the right to intervene and enforce standards of respectful behavior when classroom conduct is inconsistent with University expectations. Interventions and enforcement may include but are not limited to required meetings to discuss classroom expectations, written notification of expectations, and/or removal from a class meeting. Removal from a class meeting for disruptive behavior will result in an unexcused absence. Four or more unexcused absences may result in permanent removal and a drop from the course (see attendance policy). The University of New Mexico ensures freedom of academic inquiry, free expression and open debate, and a respectful campus through adherence to the following policies: D75: Classroom Conduct, Student Code of Conduct, University Policy 2240 – Respectful Campus, University Policy 2210 – Campus Violence.

UAP 2720 and 2740

UAP 2720 and 2740. Our classroom and university should foster mutual respect, kindness, and support. If you have concerns about discrimination, harassment, or violence, please seek support and report incidents. Find confidential services at LoboRESPECT Advocacy Center, the Women's Resource Center, and the Arcoiris Center. UNM prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (including gender, sex stereotyping, gender expression, and gender identity). All instructors are "responsible employees" who must communicate reports of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and sexual violence to Compliance, Ethics and Equal Opportunity. For more information, please see UAP 2720 and UAP 2740.

UNM EMAIL CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE

Students often use email to inquire about protected and sensitive matters, including grades and class progress, and faculty often use email to individually report such protected and sensitive matters. Unless students opt out, in writing, to the Honors College, the Honors College and Honors Faculty will assume that all email sent individually to students via their official UNM email addresses (generally their @unm.edu address) is private and confidential and that the student assumes all risk of inappropriate interception of email transmissions. If students opt out of this policy, they are agreeing to receive such information only in person (and they may be required to show identification before information is shared with them) or through regular mail to the student's official address on file with UNM.

COVID-19 HEALTH AND AWARENESS

I will be wearing an N95 mask in class and encourage you to do the same. UNM is a mask friendly, but not a mask required, community. Masking is a simple way to reduce the spread of illness and protect our community. If you are experiencing respiratory symptoms or think you may be contagious, please do not come to class. Instead, email me so we can arrange alternatives. I trust you to use this policy responsibly and maintain good attendance the rest of the semester, so that if illness does strike, you can take the time you need without falling behind.

READING LIST

Reading list: This course does not use Canvas for course materials. All required materials for "This Class is a Joke!" are **print books available through the UNM Bookstore** and a printed **coursepack available through the UNM Copy Center** in Dane Smith Hall for a nominal fee. You will need to purchase the following books in the **specific editions on file at the UNM Bookstore:**

- Erasmus, In Praise of Folly (Dover Thrift Editions)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (Scribner)
- Samuel Johnson, Rasselas (Dover Publications)
- Anita Loos, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (Penguin)
- The MLA Handbook (9th edition, 2021)
- Thomas More, Utopia (Dover Thrift Editions)
- Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels (Dover Thrift Editions)

- Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (Dover Thrift)
- Voltaire, Candide (Dover Thrift Editions)

Other course materials may be distributed throughout the semester, either by email or on the class website. Students are responsible for obtaining these texts and bringing them to class: again, you should come to class prepared to discuss the readings **in their entirety** on the day they appear on the electronic timeline on the course website.

You are required to submit a short response paper (described above) for at least six of the selections of your choosing, due at the beginning of class on the **first day** of scheduled discussion for each work.

This syllabus is subject to change, as I may announce changes in readings and adjust deadlines, ahead of time, in class, by email, or on the course website. We are sure to fall behind and likely to drop some of these readings.

TENTATIVE PROPOSED TIMELINE

Monday, August 17	Introduction
Wednesday, August 19	Jonathan Swift's 1729 parody of political scientists and pamphleteers, "A Modest Proposal" (in coursepack)
Monday, August 24	Selections from Horace (in coursepack)
Wednesday, August 26	Selections from Horace and Juvenal (in coursepack)
Monday, August 31	Selections from Juvenal (continued)
Wednesday, September 2	"Dinner with Trimalchio" from <u>The Satyricon</u> by Petronius (translated by Oscar Wilde in coursepack)
Monday, September 7	NO CLASS: LABOR DAY
Wednesday, September 9	"A True Story" by Lucian (in coursepack)
Monday, September 14	The anonymous late medieval morality play <u>Mankind</u> (ca. 1471) in my own translation (in coursepack); the Shorter Analytical Paper is due today!

Wednesday, September 16	<u>Mankind</u> (continued)
Monday, September 21	Erasmus, <u>The Praise of Folly</u> (1511)
Wednesday, September 23	Erasmus, <u>The Praise of Folly</u> (continued)
Monday, September 28	Thomas More, <u>Utopia</u> (1516)
Wednesday, September 30	Thomas More, <u>Utopia</u> (continued)
Monday, October 5	Jonathan Swift, <u>Gulliver's Travels</u> (1726)
Wednesday, October 7	Jonathan Swift, <u>Gulliver's Travels</u> (continued)
Monday, October 12	Samuel Johnson, <u>Rasselas</u> (1759), even though it is not technically satire
Wednesday, October 14	Samuel Johnson, <u>Rasselas</u> (continued)
Monday, October 19	Voltaire, <u>Candide</u> (1759)
Wednesday, October 21	Voltaire, <u>Candide</u> (continued)
Monday, October 26	NO CLASS: HONORS WEEK
Wednesday, October 28	NO CLASS: HONORS WEEK
Monday, November 2	Mark Twain, <u>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court</u> (1889)
Wednesday, November 4	Mark Twain, <u>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court</u> (continued)
Monday, November 9	Anita Loos, <u>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</u> (1925); the proposal for the final project is due today

Wednesday, November 11	Anita Loos, <u>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</u> (continued)
Monday, November 16	F. Scott Fitzgerald, <u>The Great Gatsby</u> (1925)
Wednesday, November 18	F. Scott Fitzgerald, <u>The Great Gatsby</u> (continued)
Monday, November 23	We will likely have fallen behind by this point. The remaining selections will be chosen by the class, with suggestions for works by Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Dorothy Parker, Langston Hughes, Kingsley Amis, John Kennedy Toole, and Kurt Vonnegut, or others recommended by the students
Wednesday, November 25	TBD by the class
Monday, November 30	TBD by the class; workshopping of final projects
Wednesday, December 2	Course summary, presentations of final projects, and closing remarks; final project is due today!!