

Instructor: Randall McLeod

Course number: Eng 266F

Course title: The English Vocabulary

Course Description:

Late-eighteenth-century scholars suspected that English words such as kind, | general, nature, pregnant, genteel, jaunty, | genesis and gonorrhoea derived into English via Germanic |, Italic |, and Hellenic branches of a pre-historical common ancestor, to be reconstructed as Indo-European “*gen-” and assigned meanings pertaining to “birth”, “stock”, or “race”. As “Indo-European” implies, this root can also have reflexes in Indic languages—through Sanskrit janas, “race”, hence the political party of the “people”, Janata). Etymological understanding informs some modern dictionaries. Using the class text, general readers can now reconstruct family trees for roots like *gen- and thereby illustrate sound-change laws such as 1) the Great Vowel Shift in late-medieval English (to explain the different vowels in nature and natural) and, 2) in pre-history, Grimm’s Law for consonants (linking words of Germanic origin beginning with “f” (father, fish, five, foot) with Italic and Hellenic derivatives beginning with “p” (patron, Pisces, pentagon, pedal).

No knowledge of other languages or of linguistics is required for this introductory course.

Required Reading: *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, latest edition, will be ordered for the college bookstore.

Method of Instruction: Lecture/discussion

Method of Evaluation: Eight in-class, open-book tests, using specifically the assigned dictionary (80%). (No other dictionary will do.) One research paper (20%).