This course is an internal history of the English language. The central emphasis will be on how the successive stages of the language work, the differences among them, and the techniques and problems of analyzing them. The approach will be theoretical in its emphasis on the nature and function of linguistic forms, structures, and processes, but will also aim at practical knowledge of the material. Students will be expected to apply their new knowledge to problems of linguistic analysis. Some major topics of study will be phonology, sound change, writing vs speech, the origins of English, Grimm's Law, Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, the Great Vowel Shift, the rise of notions of Standard English and correctness, and semantics and meaning change. A secondary focus will be on the question of the innateness of language, including some readings describing attempts to teach English to animals (or allow them to learn it). The graded work for the class will be a phonetics quiz, one or two linguistic "problems" and a final exam. Be prepared to participate actively: class work will supplement and challenge the readings more often than reinforcing or recapitulating them.

Note: this course satisfies the English Language requirement. If you have had a similar course elsewhere, please contact me about a possible exemption from the requirement.