This course fulfills the pre-1660 distribution requirement.

Middle English and early Tudor plays, once studied mainly to support a teleological narrative leading triumphantly to Shakespeare, are now widely appreciated both for their aesthetic interest—some are masterpieces of dramatic construction—and for their ability to provoke stimulating analysis of late medieval religious, popular, textual, and civic culture. In this course, the approaches we take to the material will be partly determined by student interests, but topics are sure to include the vexed relationship between the textual record and actual medieval performance; auspices and staging; audience expectation, participation, and reception; drama as an instrument of social critique; and the vernacular play as a site of negotiation between sacred and profane language, transgression and discipline, religious and civic institutions, and theological and worldly concerns.

This course will have two instructional phases. The first several weeks will constitute an overview of surviving Middle English drama. In the second phase of the course, building upon the shared knowledge base acquired in the first, the class will read and discuss the entire contents of one late Middle English dramatic manuscript, known as the N-Town plays. The class will also participate in the production of an early Tudor interlude, *The Play of the Weather* by John Heywood. (Not every student has to act in the play; other forms of contribution are possible.)

The bulk of the course credit will come from a project of intensive study, original scholarship, and critical argumentation leading to a high-quality seminar paper. English plays will be read in their original language, but no prior experience with pre-Shakespearian English is assumed. Where the language is difficult, the editions chosen will provide for the needs of non-specialists with glossaries or marginal glosses.