How often have you heard people invoke authority by saying, "The dictionary defines ...."? In this class we will examine how dictionaries have established their authority in the English-speaking world over the past 400 years. We'll consider how dictionaries differ from other reference works, look at elements of dictionaries for various audiences, learn how lexicographers write definitions, and write definitions of our own. We will also examine how lexicographers, who view themselves as recorders of the vocabulary of languages, have dealt with tricky questions of usage, and we will look at how computerization has affected both the process of dictionary making and the finished products. We'll end the semester by discussing how dictionaries are made and consider legal and ethical issues in the making of dictionaries. I hope that you will learn that "the dictionary" comes in a variety of forms, is a complex product of culture, is the work of many people, and has a long and interesting history.

Since this course is a senior seminar, you are expected to write a twenty-page paper on some aspect of dictionaries. I will also consider a Web site of sufficient depth and complexity in lieu of the traditional paper. Although I will hand out some suggestions for possible topic areas broadly defined, the final choice for a paper topic is your own. I'll ask you to write a topic proposal outlining your project, though I expect your projects will evolve as you write and research.

**Sources**


Gold, D. “The Debate Over Webster's Third Twenty-five Years Later: Winnowing
the Chaff from the Grain.” *Dictionaries* 7 (1985): 225-236.


Nagy, A. “Defining English: Authenticity and Standardization in seventeenth-century


**Requirements & Grading:**
- Final paper 40%
- Topic proposal 15%
- Definition assignment 25%
- Presentation 10%
- Class participation 10%

**Schedule:**

**Weeks 1-2 Overview: what are dictionaries?**

**Week 1 January 19-22**

Monday January 19 First class day

Friday January 22 Cultural meaning of dictionaries; Monolingual dictionaries, structure of entries, entry terms, entry counting, front matter

Reading: Nagy, “Life or Lexicography”

**Week 2 January 25-29**

Monday January 25 Monolingual dictionaries: structure of entries, entry terms, entry counting, front matter

Reading: Landau, “Key Elements of Dictionaries”

Wednesday January 27 Learners’ dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, visual dictionaries, electronic dictionaries, and other types of dictionaries

Reading: Scheidlower, “Principles for the Inclusion of New Words”
**Weeks 2-6 History of dictionaries**

Friday January 29 Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance dictionaries

Reading: Landau, “A Brief History of Lexicography”

**Week 3 February 1-5**

Monday February 1 Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance dictionaries

Wednesday February 3 Renaissance bilingual dictionaries

Friday February 5 Early monolingual dictionaries

Reading: Hanks, “Lexicography, Printing Technology, and the Spread of Renaissance Culture”

**Week 4 February 8-12**

Monday February 8 Early monolingual dictionaries

Reading: Nagy, “Authenticity and Standardization”

Wednesday February 10 18th century dictionaries

Reading: Lynch, “Disgraced by Miscarriage”

Friday February 12 18th century dictionaries

Reading: Johnson, “Plan & Preface”

**Week 5 February 15-19**

Monday February 15 18th century dictionaries

Reading: Landau, “Johnson’s influence on Webster and Worcester”

Wednesday February 17 18th, 19th century dictionaries

Friday February 19 19th century dictionaries

**Week 6 February 22-26**

Monday February 22 The OED

Reading: Jackson, “The New English Dictionary”

Wednesday February 24 Webster's Third
Reading: Gold, “The Debate over Webster’s Third”

Friday February 26 The American Heritage

Reading: Ottenhoff, “The Perils of Prescriptivism”

**Weeks 7-8 Defining**

**Week 7 February 29-March 4**

**Monday February 29 Discussion of final paper topics**

Wednesday March 2 Principles/practice of defining

Reading: Landau, “Definition”

Friday March 4 Defining by part of speech

**Topic proposals due**

**Week 8 March 7-11**

Monday March 7 Polysemy

Reading: Stock, “Polysemy”

**First drafts of definitions due**

Wednesday March 9 Polysemy, ordering of senses

Reading: Kipfer, “Methods of Ordering Senses”

Friday March 11

**Week 9 March 14-18 Spring Break**

**Weeks 10-11 Other elements of entries**

**Week 10 March 21-25**

Monday March 21 Illustrations

Reading: “Hancher, Bagpipe and Distaff”

Wednesday March 23 Etymology

Reading: Jackson, “Etymology”
Final draft of definitions due

Week 11 March 28-April 1

Monday March 28 Etymology

Weeks 11-14 Dictionaries and society

Wednesday March 30 Legal issues

Reading: Butters, “A Linguistic Look at Trademark Dilution”

Friday April 1 Legal issues

Reading: Solan, “When Judges Use the Dictionary”

Week 12 April 4-8

Monday April 4 Social issues

Reading: McCluskey, “Dictionaries and the Labeling”

Wednesday April 6 Social issues

Reading: Whitcut, “Taking it for Granted”

Friday April 8 Social issues

Reading: Cablitz, “Documenting Cultural Knowledge”
Chung and Rechebei “Community Engagement”

Week 13 April 11-15

Monday April 11 Taboo, slang, usage labels

Reading: Cassidy, “The Rise and Development of Modern Labels in English Dictionaries”

Wednesday April 13 Taboo, slang, usage labels

Reading: Mugglestone, “Decent Reticence”

Friday April 15 Taboo, slang, usage labels

Week 14 Electronic and collaborative dictionaries

Week 14 April 18-22

Monday April 18 Electronic and collaborative dictionaries
Reading: Damaso and Cotter, “UrbanDictionary.com”

Wednesday April 20

Reading: Lew, “User-generated Content”

Friday April 22

**Week 15 April 25-29 Presentations**

**Monday April 21 First draft of final paper due**

**Week 16 May 2-6 Presentations**

**Final draft of paper due Wednesday May 11**

**Policies:**

**Attendance:** Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance will be taken during each class. If you must miss class for a valid reason, get in touch with me as soon as possible.

**Late work:** I normally do not accept late assignments except by prior arrangement. If you are having problems completing an assignment, get in touch with me as soon as possible to make arrangements. I do not give incompletes without sufficient documentation of illness or other appropriate circumstances. I will not accept final drafts of the definitions or the paper if you have not previously turned in a draft.

**Academic accommodations:** The University of Austin provides appropriate Academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities upon request. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY.

**Web Site:**