So we made ourselves into a society for asking questions.
— Woolf, “A Society”

In this course, we’ll explore Virginia Woolf’s life and work, the story of her remarkable accomplishments. We’ll read deeply into Woolf’s massive body of fiction and essays, trace her engagements with her social world, consider her distinctive place in modern literary history. I’ll argue throughout the semester that Woolf’s writing, lyrical and sly and strange, bears re-reading for its radical ways of thinking about several fundamental, intractable questions. She seems to ask about everything: how can we tell stories about the complexity of modern existence? How should we represent the damage done by modern warfare? How does one bear ethical responsibility for others, in their vulnerability and mortality? What is time, how can we understand and endure its passing? What sort of knowledge can we have about another’s inner lives, what role might the literary imagination play in intersubjective intimacy? Who has social power, how do hierarchies hold together, how do institutions shape our identities? How does gender work within modern gender systems and how might it work otherwise? How can literature interrogate the ideological intersection of empire and patriarchy? And more, inevitably, from you, following from our conversations as a community of readers. Throughout our reading, based on your ideas, we’ll continue to develop approaches to Woolf that account for her formal inventiveness and narrative audacity, as these evolved over so many years.

This is a four-credit course. I expect students to spend at least nine hours a week preparing for class sessions and completing assignments.

The learning objectives for this course are:
• to understand the arc of Woolf’s literary career from early stories and essays to late novels and autobiographical writings; to be able to relate texts from her different periods to one another
• to develop critical terms and aesthetic vocabulary for analyzing Woolf’s unique narrative techniques and prose style; to be able to describe, in detail, significant elements of Woolf’s writerly craft
• to be able to use philosophical and theoretical concepts to describe Woolf’s experimental representations of consciousness, as these representations involve questions of gender, sexuality, time, ethical obligation, and other complex questions of selfhood
• to trace Woolf’s crucial role in creating the larger phenomenon of literary modernism; to trace the influence of prevailing trends in modernism on her own work
• to be able to assess and present significant scholarship about Woolf, and to enter into critical debates that she has inspired
**Required Books (at Brandeis Bookstore; alternate editions are acceptable):**

All by Woolf: *Jacob’s Room* (Penguin), *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harcourt), *To the Lighthouse* (Harcourt), *Orlando* (Harcourt), *A Room of One’s Own / Three Guineas* (Oxford), *The Waves* (Harcourt), *Between the Acts* (Harcourt), *Moments of Being* (Harcourt). Other editions are fine, although ebooks are not. As optional reading, Hermione Lee’s biography *Virginia Woolf* is on reserve at Goldfarb Library.

**Rules and Requirements:**

- Laptops may be used in class only for accessing relevant course materials on LATTE. If you use a laptop for other purposes (email, web browsing), you will be asked to leave the class and be considered absent for the day. Bring other materials (e.g., paper, pens) for taking notes. No ebooks.
- Use of cell phones in class for talking, texting or reading/writing email is prohibited. If you wish to leave your cell phone on in silent mode because of an ongoing emergency situation that you may need to respond to, please speak to me at the start of class to let me know.
- Three unexcused absences lowers the final course grade by one plus/minus, and each additional absence by another plus/minus.
- If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.
- You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

**Grades and Assignments:**

**Close Reading Walk and Talk:** A brief, 3-4 minute talk about a passage you find powerful in the assigned reading for the day, with the option of moving about the classroom, or otherwise creating physical movement in the class, during your comments. Bring the passage to life: read it, talk about its craft, describe what it says and does, reflect on what it might make us think more about, suggest some larger context or unexpected connection that sheds light on it. Hold a conversation *with* the passage. If possible, pose some question to the class for further discussion, or describe something you’d like to understand better. This is a prepared, but informal talk—both appreciation and analysis—in which you show the class a bit about who you are as a reader. To receive credit, presentations should discover and explain features of the passage that are not evident in a first reading. Schedule tbd, in the first weeks of the semester. Credit/no credit. 5%

**Critical Presentation:** In pairs. 10-15 minute presentation on a recent critical or scholarly debate about Woolf’s writing. Presenters must address at least two published pieces of criticism in tracing a critical conversation that resists easy consensus. You can find relevant scholarship on JSTOR and Project Muse (databases of scholarly articles and books, available on Brandeis Scholar) and by browsing the Woolf shelves in the library (roughly, PR6045.O72). Please circulate a handout with citations and brief excerpts to the class. Schedule tbd, in middle and end of semester. Credit/no credit. 10%
Position Papers: Two 2-3 page statements of argumentative intent—critical salvos, rehearsals, suggestions, provocations—posted on LATTE by 10:00 am on the morning before the class session about the text you address. These position papers (more than an impressionistic “response,” but far less than an essay) should take a position in a debate or conversation about the text. To help you do this, I will post excerpts from published criticism about our texts on LATTE to give you something to respond to and a sense of debates you can engage. These position papers can be expanded and revised for longer work; think of them as a sketch or kernel of a longer argument. Be prepared to discuss your work in class. Credit/no credit. 5% each.

Open Assignment: Design an assignment that will help readers more deeply engage Woolf’s work, resulting in about 5 or 10 pages of written work or the equivalent in other media. Complete either your own assignment or one proposed by a classmate. You can develop any challenge that will stimulate interesting work, including an interpretive essay on an original theme, a short story prompted by Woolf in a specific way, a piece of creative non-fiction/memoir involving Woolf, visual art, a series of letters, a biographical assignment, a curricular or pedagogical project, a mapping project, a podcast, a theatrical piece, a proposal for an editorial project on Woolf’s writing, an interview with a prominent Woolf scholar, or anything else that will help you develop useful skills and insights. This assignment can involve Woolf’s fiction, essays, journals, letters, texts from her cultural context, biographies of Woolf, or other materials. Proposal: due 2/25. Draft: due 3/25. Final: due 4/17. 20%

Archive / Web: Create a large personal archive or web of Woolf passages and related materials. This flexible, idiosyncratic gathering of related texts, paratexts, objects, and otherwise should suggest surprising connections across Woolf’s writing and life, as these are entangled with other sorts of texts and cultural production. You can include passages that matter to you from Woolf’s published writing, her journals and letters, writing by others in Bloomsbury, music and visual art that influenced her or that she inspired in others, news reports of the time, Hogarth Press material, and much more. It can also include contributions from your own life’s archive, things relevant to Woolf only through you. This archive / web should capture your own associative logic, as a reader. It can work as a palimpsest or Woolf scrapbook (the sort of scrapbook she created, herself, in writing Three Guineas). As inspiration, consider this claim from Theodor Adorno, in Minima Moralia, a meditation on this associative logic as an important way of thinking: “Properly written, texts are like spiders’ webs: tight, concentric, transparent, well-spun and firm. They draw into themselves all the creatures of the air. Metaphors flitting hastily through them become their nourishing prey. Subject matter comes winging towards them. The soundness of a conception can be judged by whether it causes one quotation to summon another. Where thought has opened up one cell of reality, it should, without violence by the subject, penetrate the next. It proves its relation to the object as soon as other objects crystallize around it. In the light that it casts on its chosen substance, others begin to glow” (87). Your archive / web can take various forms: a hyperlinked website, paper collage, prose narrative, bound catalog, installation art, scrapbook, or any other form that will gather a wide range of related material that others can access and explore. Please include an explanatory, introductory note about your process in creating the archive / web and particular decisions you made about what to include. This assignment will be assessed by the depth and reach of the material gathered, the viability of the connections across the archive, the ability of the archive to suggest compelling ideas about Woolf’s work, and the clarity of the introductory explanation. Due 5/1. 30%
Final Research Paper: This 12-15 page academic research paper can develop earlier work, including your position papers and critical presentation, or could be a critical essay about themes gathered in your archive/web. Topics will be distributed. Proposal: due 4/10. Working bibliography, draft materials: due 4/29. Final: due 5/6. 25%

Class Schedule:
Wed 1/16: Introduction

Mon 1/21: *No class, Birthday for Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Tue 1/22: *Brandeis Monday*
“The Mark on the Wall,” “A Society” [LATTE]

Wed 1/23
“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” [LATTE] and Jacob’s Room, ch. 1

Mon 1/28
Jacob’s Room, chs. 2-10

Wed 1/30
Jacob’s Room, chs. 11-14; “The Patron and the Crocus” and “Middlebrow” [LATTE]

Mon 2/4
Mrs. Dalloway, 3-70

Wed 2/6
Mrs. Dalloway, 70-139

Mon 2/11
Mrs. Dalloway, 139-end

Wed 2/13
“A Woman’s College from Outside” and “The New Dress” [LATTE]

2/18-2/22, No class for midterm recess

Mon 2/25: Open Assignment Proposal Due
To the Lighthouse, “The Window”

Wed 2/27
To the Lighthouse, “Time Passes”

Mon 3/4
To the Lighthouse, “The Lighthouse”

Wed 3/6
Orlando, chs. 1-2
Mon 3/11
*Orlando*, chs. 3-5

Wed 3/13
*Orlando*, ch. 6 and “The Plumage Bill,” “Professions for Women,” “Madame de Sévigné” [LATTE]

Mon 3/18
*A Room of One’s Own*, chs. 1-3

Wed 3/20
*A Room of One’s Own*, chs. 4-6

Mon 3/25: Open Assignment Draft Due
“The Death of the Moth,” “Street Haunting,” “Craftsmanship” [LATTE]

Wed 3/27
*The Waves*, 1-72

Mon 4/1
*The Waves*, 73-181

Wed 4/3
*The Waves*, 182-297

Mon 4/8
“Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” [LATTE]; *Three Guineas*, chs. 1-2

Wed 4/10: Final Research Project Proposal Due
*Three Guineas*, ch. 3

Mon 4/15
*Between the Acts*, 1-122

Wed 4/17: Open Assignment Due
*Between the Acts*, 122-219

4/19-4/26, no class for Passover break

Mon 4/29: Final Research Project Draft Due
“The Man at the Gate” [LATTE]; *A Sketch of the Past*

Wed 5/1: Archive / Web Due. Final class.

*Final Research Paper Due Monday, May 6, noon*