

Carleton University  
Department of English  
Winter 2027 Preliminary Outline

*This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term.*

ENGL 4401: Jane Austen, Our Contemporary

Instructor: Professor Julie Murray



**Course description:**

2025 marked the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Jane Austen in 1775, and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1995 “Austenmania.” Ever since Amy Heckerling’s film *Clueless* was released in 1995, critics and fans have talked excitedly of a “Jane Austen revival.” Over thirty years later, the revival shows no sign of abating and in fact demands that we rethink the very idea that Austen needed to be “revived” in the first place. She has always been popular in the strongest sense of the word, and in this course we will explore the history of her reception beginning in the early nineteenth century and continuing up to the present moment. Topics we will consider include:

early readers and critics of her novels; Charlotte Brontë's assessment of Austen's novels as akin to a "carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden" with "no open country – no fresh air"; biographical constructions of Austen as, variously, spinster, recluse, feminist, Regency satirist, patriotic embodiment of "Little England," and "Aunt Jane"; the canonization and professionalization of her work in the early twentieth century by R.W. Chapman's 1923 edition of *The Novels of Jane Austen*; and the perhaps surprising popularity of Austen's novels among soldiers (the original "Janeites") in the trenches of the First World War.

We will also devote some time to our own cultural moment and the Jane Austen phenomenon – that is, to Austen's pervasive and persistent popularity in contemporary popular culture. We will explore Austen as robust global brand: the thriving literary tourism and heritage industry devoted to capitalizing on Austenmania; the love affair with Hollywood and the "adaptation industry" around Austen; and the seemingly infinite variety of ways in which Austen and her novels have been commodified, consumed, personified, impersonated, ventriloquized, appropriated, remediated, parodied, satirized, and embodied.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- To refine your ability to write and speak persuasively, to engage directly with different ideas, and to express yourself in clear, effective language.
- To refine your ability to analyze literary, critical, and theoretical texts and make coherent and well-supported arguments.
- To gain experience in giving oral presentations and to gain confidence in public speaking.

### **Required Texts:**

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Broadview Press, approx. 16\$)

*Sense and Sensibility* (Broadview Press, approx. 16\$)

*Emma* (Broadview Press, approx. 16\$)

*Persuasion* (Broadview Press, approx. 16\$)

All other course material is available on ARES or Brightspace.

### **Evaluation:**

#### **Four discussion board posts**

**20%** A 200-300 word response to the week's readings. Worth 5% each.

#### **Mid-term test**

**30%** The test will be written in-class in early March and will include passage analysis and an essay question.

#### **Proposal for Austen Adaptation**

**10%** A 1-2 page proposal for your Austen adaptation.

#### **Austen Adaptation**

**30%** - Calling all writers, directors, podcasters, and TikTok artists! This is a creative assignment that consists of two parts. One is the "creative" part in which you adapt some aspect of an Austen novel

using the medium of your choice (video, podcast, social media, print, etc). The other part of the assignment consists of a 3-page (double-spaced) interpretation of your adaptation. The last class of term will be devoted to presentations on your Austen adaptation.

### **Engagement Grade**

**10%** Engagement includes attendance (which will be taken each week), willingness to participate in seminar discussion, and contribution to in-class activities.