

English Honors Theses

English majors who are interested in developing their critical or creative writing are highly encouraged to write a senior thesis. Many students find that writing a senior thesis is their most rewarding and meaningful academic experience. We encourage all interested and qualified students to apply to the honors program. Interested students should be familiar with the requirements below and begin to think about possible topics by the Fall of their Junior year.

Eligibility

To be eligible to write a senior thesis, students must:

- Have a 3.3 cumulative GPA overall and in their English courses.
- Take the Literary Theory course (EGL 303) their Junior Year.
 - This course is only offered once a year, in the Winter term.
 - This course is designed to introduce students to the critical approaches used to write a thesis.
 - Students writing a creative thesis are required to take the theory course.
- Submit a 3 page thesis proposal and 5 – 10 page analytical or creative writing sample (consistent with the genre of the proposal) to lynesk@union.edu and peasea@union.edu by April 20th by 5 p.m. Submission of proposals does not guarantee acceptance. A committee composed of English department faculty will review the proposals and contact accepted students by May 4th.

Students interested in writing creative theses are also highly encouraged to take the Creative Writing workshops (in the proposed genre, if possible) offered by the English Department.

Requirements for accepted thesis students:

- Begin your thesis research over the summer.
 - Accepted students will be paired with a Second Reader. When possible, this faculty member will have some specialist knowledge of your chosen field. By the end of Spring term, Second Readers will provide accepted students with a list of reading and research that must be completed before the first day of Fall term.
- Take the Senior Honors Seminar (EGL 402 and 403) your Senior Year.
 - This two-term course runs each Fall and Winter term. It is designed to teach students how to research and write a thesis. The instructor of this course is the First Reader for all theses. **402 and 403 constitute the 13th and 14th courses toward English honors; they do not replace the 12-course requirements (including Senior Seminar) for an English major.**
- Complete and defend your thesis by the last week of Winter term, through participation in the annual Steinmetz Symposium.
- Completion of a thesis does not guarantee honors. In order to earn honors, college policy requires that students receive either an A or A- on their thesis and maintain a 3.3 cumulative GPA overall and in their English courses. The thesis grade is determined after the defense by the First Reader, in conjunction with the Second Reader.

Double-majors and Interdepartmental Majors

The above requirements apply to all students, including double majors and ID majors.

Guidelines for Writing Thesis Proposals

The key to writing a successful proposal is to begin by choosing a topic that you find intellectually stimulating and engaging. This topic should not be chosen lightly, so begin thinking about possible topics in your Junior year. Make sure to choose a manageable project, one that can be effectively researched and written in two terms. (Creative writing students should consider what genre they would like to work with and what kinds of experiences they would expect to have as their focus.) Speak with faculty members about the topics that interest you most and ask for advice about texts that relate to those topics. Although it is not required, some students find that reading a few secondary materials in their chosen field helps them to write a more persuasive proposal. Students may wish to run a draft of their proposal by a faculty member for informal feedback before the final submission. Proposals may not be revised and resubmitted, so it is important to submit a strong proposal.

When writing the 3 page thesis proposal, students should:

- In the header, include your GPA overall and in your English courses.
- In the opening paragraph, define your anticipated thesis or position on this issue.
- Define possible subtopics to be explored.
- List pertinent materials you have read, and others you anticipate reading in the future.
- Provide as much detail as possible about your project.
- While creative writing students may not have a thesis statement, they should explain what they hope to do in their work: providing a proposed plot and set of characters for fiction or a range of subjects and formal considerations for poetry.

Example of a Critical Project—A proposed critical project on women in Jane Austen novels is too vague. A stronger proposal will choose a specific topic and texts, such as examining marriage in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Define possible subtopics you might use to explore this issue (marriage, women's roles and family life in 19th century England, etc.). List materials you have already read and/or anticipate reading. Most importantly, define your anticipated thesis/position on this issue. We recognize that this is a preliminary position and may well be revised once you begin writing your honors thesis (final project: usually no more than 100 pages).

Example of a Creative Project—A proposed short story cycle on rock music is too vague. A stronger proposal will choose a few key characters and elements of the rock environment to be explored further. Define possible subtopics you might use to explore the characters and their setting (influence of music on culture, relationship between rock music and violence, dialogue of expectations between fans and performers, etc.). List materials (CDs, videos, musicians' autobiographies, music reviews, etc.) you have already read and/or anticipate reading, and provide a list of works that will serve as models of style or approach. (If your subject is not one requiring outside research, then your list will draw on the available range of work that you will read in order to broaden your sense of what is possible in the genre.) You should indicate a sense of the style you would expect to use in dealing with your material, although this may change as your thesis develops (final project: usually no more than 100 pages).