

ENGL 496--Senior Thesis The Literary and Cultural Studies Capstone



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Office Hours in Colson 221: Wed 9:00-11:00 and by appointment

Welcome to your English capstone experience! In this course, you will create something original, creative, and important. I am looking forward to working with you as a class and individually.

In the coming months, you will compose a 20-page research paper on a literary subject of your choosing. We will spend the early part of the semester considering the purposes of literary criticism, brainstorming topics, conducting research, learning to contribute to scholarly conversations, and honing your topic into a thesis. The latter part of the semester will be devoted to organizing your ideas, selecting the best sources, strengthening your argument, checking documentation, revising drafts, and presenting your research to the class.

The course will strengthen your ability to analyze literary and critical texts, to write compelling essays, and to present your ideas effectively in speech and writing. The key will be to work consistently throughout the semester. This is not a sprint. It's a marathon!

Required Text

You will need to have access to the *Modern Language Association (MLA) Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition. You can find much of this information here:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

Course Objectives

- ✓ To create a stimulating environment for literary and cultural research
- ✓ To facilitate the best possible research and writing from every student

English Major Program Goals/Learning Outcomes

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Students who complete ENGL 496 should be able to do the following in their writing:

- Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects
- Identify and analyze the effects of complexity or ambiguity in literature
- Locate texts in social, economic, political, and literary history
- Connect a text to other literary or cultural texts

By the end of the semester, students should also be able to:

- Contribute to scholarly and everyday discussions about literature
- Analyze literary texts with detail and insight
- Synthesize and summarize scholarly articles
- Develop ideas and respond to the ideas of others
- Use effective tone, style, and sentence structure in writing
- Present ideas clearly and effectively in oral presentation

Requirements

- Attendance. You are allowed three absences. If you miss more than three classes, you will fail the class unless there has been an emergency. (See “Emergencies” below)
- Initial prospectus and revised prospectus
- 5-page exploratory essay
- Annotated bibliography
- 10-page research paper
- 20-page research paper
- Two oral presentations

Grade Breakdown

Initial prospectus	5 points
Revised prospectus	5 points
Annotated bibliography	10 points
5-page exploratory essay	10 points
Oral presentation – in class	10 points
Oral presentation – public	10 points
10-page research essay	20 points
20-page research essay	30 points

Grading Scale

A+ (98-100) ; A (97-94); A- (93-91); B+ (90-88); B (87-84); B- (83-81); C+ (80-78); C (77-74); C- (73-71); D+ (70-68); D (67-64); D- (63-61); F (60 or below)

Evaluative Criteria for Essays

- ✓ Complete drafts that engage with a difficult, original, or complex question
- ✓ A final revision that demonstrates a reworking of the draft in terms of argument, content, style, and organization
- ✓ A clear thesis or insight, which is suitably complex and provides a blueprint for the essay
- ✓ Smooth and grammatical integration of primary and secondary sources
- ✓ Solid evidence from literary works (in the form of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries) to support your interpretations
- ✓ Strong transitions that move the essay forward logically and thoughtfully
- ✓ A polished final essay free of grammatical and surface errors.
- ✓ A detailed outline
- ✓ Consistent use of MLA style for documentation.

Writing Resources

- Check out our Library Guide <http://libguides.wvu.edu/english496>
- Purdue has a useful website on MLA style at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/>. You can find “Basic In-text Citation” at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/> and “Basic Works Cited” at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/05/>.
- The Writing Center is available for writing assistance in Colson G02. You can drop in or call for an appointment: 304.293.5788

Oral Presentations

You will give two oral presentations, one around midterm and another at the end of the semester. In the first one, you will present your ongoing research to our class. In the second, you will present your work at a public conference. You are welcome to invite friends and family to this event.

Classroom Environment and Policies

Academic Integrity: The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code

http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code.

Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Social Justice: The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Emergencies or Health Crises. If you have an emergency or serious health problem in the course of the semester, you or your family should contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me and authorize arrangements. Please reserve the Dean's services for emergencies.

ECampus

You will upload most of your written assignment on ECampus. Occasionally I will ask you to bring printed material to class, so we can work on hard copies. If you have not used ECampus, please dedicate time early in the semester to familiarizing yourself with it. Feel free to ask me questions.

On due dates, you will need to upload the assignment **before** class time.

Readings are linked on the syllabus and also available to download from ECampus. On days when we are reading an electronic text, be sure that you print the text, take detailed notes, and/or have an e-copy in class.

MIX

I will communicate with you through MIX. Please check your email frequently.

Schedule

**This class is guided by individual research and writing methods. If it will improve our lives, I may make occasional adjustments to the schedule.

- Tues. Aug 19 Introductions and Syllabus
Exploratory Essay Assignment
Scheduling the Conference
- Thurs. Aug 21 **Bring at least two quotations from this speech to share with class. What do you think the main message is?**
- Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize Speech (handout)
http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/morrison-lecture.html
- Tues. Aug 26 Discussion of topics. What are viable questions to pursue?
How do you transform a topic into a research question? What is a scholarly source? How to summarize an article.
Bring to class a typed paragraph (approx. 300 – 400 words) describing topics of interest to you and possible research questions.
- Gregory Petsko, "Open Letter to SUNY, Albany," *Inside Higher Ed* 22 Nov 2010. <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/11/22/petsko>
- Gordon Hutner and Feisal G. Mohamed, "The Real Humanities Crisis is Happening at Public Universities," *New Republic* 6 Sept. 2013.
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/114616/public-universities-hurt-humanities-crisis>
- Thurs. Aug 28 What is a research prospectus? What is an annotated bibliography?
How to summarize a scholarly conversation.
- [Julianne Chiaet](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/novel-finding-reading-literary-fiction-improves-empathy/), "Novel Finding: Reading Literary Fiction Improves Empathy," *Scientific American* 4 Oct 2013.
<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/novel-finding-reading-literary-fiction-improves-empathy/>
- Tom McKay, "Psychologists Find a Surprising Thing Happens to Kids Who Read Harry Potter," *Arts.Mic* 30 July 2014.
<http://mic.com/articles/95236/psychologists-find-a-surprising-thing-happens-to-kids-who-read-harry-potter>

Tues. Sept 2 **Bring to class a summary of a scholarly article.** Include the bibliographic entry for that article. (See sample on ECampus) How to create an annotated bibliography.

Thurs. Sept 4 **Meet in the WVU downtown library. Room 136 (downstairs)**

DUE: Five-page exploratory essay

Tues. Sept 9 Discussion of exploratory essays and research questions.
Questions about annotated bibliography.

Optional Creative Writing Reading: GEORGE SINGLETON (fiction): Tuesday, Sept. 9, 7:30 p.m., 130 Colson

Thurs. Sept 11 **DUE: Annotated bibliography (five sources minimum)**

Optional Creative Writing Reading: KELLY MOFFETT (poetry; MFA alum): Monday, Sept. 15, 11 a.m., 130 Colson

Tues. Sept 16 Writing about your research and creating a workable thesis.
Strengthening sentences and creating strong paragraphs

Naomi S. Barron, "How E-Reading Threatens Learning in the Humanities," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 14 July 2014.

http://chronicle.com/article/How-E-ReadingThreatens/147661/?cid=cr&utm_source=cr&utm_medium=en

Thurs. Sept 18 **DUE: Research Prospectus.** Preparation for the oral presentation

The prospectus should include a concise summary of your project; at least three research questions you intend to pursue; and the main scholarly arguments about your subject. Refer in the prospectus to at least **two** scholarly sources.

Optional Creative Writing Reading: MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL (fiction): Thursday, Sept. 18, 7:30 p.m., Robinson Reading Room

Tues. Sept 23 Writing day—no class. I will be in my office during class time.

Thurs. Sept 25 **DUE: First three – five paragraphs of your draft**

Tues. Sept 30 **Bring to class an outline for 10-page draft**

Thurs. Oct 2 **DUE: 10-page draft of research paper and revised outline.**

Tues. Oct 7 No class—individual conferences

Thurs. Oct 9 No class—individual conferences

Tues. Oct 14 **No class—fall break**

Thurs. Oct 16 **DUE: Final 10-page research paper**
Proofread several times and read your work outloud.
Preparation for Oral Presentations

Optional Creative Writing Reading: MARIANNE BORUCH (poetry; Sturm writer-in-residence): Thursday, October 16, 7:30 p.m., Robinson

Tues. Oct 21 Oral presentations

Thurs. Oct 23 Oral presentations. Revising your prospectus.

Oct 24—last day to withdraw from a class

Tues. Oct 28 Oral presentations
Developing a new thesis statement

Thurs. Oct 30 **Due: Revised Prospectus**

Tues. Nov. 4 **Election Day—no class**

Thurs. Nov 6 **Bring revised thesis statements and outline**

Tues. Nov. 11 No class--Individual conferences

Thurs Nov 13 No class--Individual conferences

Tues. Nov 18 **DUE: 20-page draft of research paper and outline (staggered)**

Thurs Nov 20 Workshop drafts

Thanksgiving Break

Tues. Dec 2 Editing and Organization. Preparation for Conference

Thurs. Dec 4 Writing Workshop and Final Thoughts

TBA **Conference Presentations**

Final Essay Due by Friday, Dec. 12 at noon