

ENGLISH 499: SENIOR PROJECT GUIDELINES AND DEADLINES

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course designed for senior English majors; its purpose is to provide a capstone for your work in the major and your specialization (if any). You will work on your own project--a senior thesis appropriate to your course of study or a creative writing project if you have specialized in creative writing--directed by a faculty supervisor. Along with your final thesis/project, you will be required to submit a reflective essay that examines how your project serves as a culmination to your course of study within the major.

The senior project is meant to be a culmination of your work as a major in the English Department, a meaningful and permanent record of your hard work. Over the course of the term, you and your supervisor will confer over revisions of your senior project. It's very important to stick to the schedule outlined below so that you have plenty of time to produce a portfolio you and your supervisor can be proud of.

Each term a different faculty member will be assigned the job of convening the English 499 students, projects, and supervisors. Though the course is listed on the Registrar's schedule as meeting MWF 8:30-9:20, this is in order to make sure all students are more likely to be available for one or more meetings of the entire group of Senior Project students for that term. There will be one meeting in the first week of term. Others may be added by the convener.

The focus of your thesis/project will be determined in consultation with your academic advisor and/or your faculty supervisor. Again, the thesis/project must be appropriate to your course of study and, if applicable, your specialization (for example, it would not be appropriate to propose a work of fiction if you have not taken the required creative writing courses, or a thesis subject in an area in which you have taken no courses). Projects in alternative media--for example, hypertext, digital multimedia, or film, among other possibilities--will be considered with approval of both the supervisor and the department chair.

Where appropriate and agreed upon by your supervisor, your final project may include revisions of, or work based upon, assignments from previous classes in the major. (For example, you might propose an expanded thesis based on a paper written in a genre course, or revisions of poetry written for a poetic forms course, and so forth). A portfolio of your final project will be kept on file in the department for assessment purposes; you will keep a copy for yourself.

Specific information about the length and format of your creative or scholarly project is listed below.

PREREQUISITES

This course should be taken in your final year of work in the major, so that you will have ample background and material to draw upon for your project. You should consult closely with your academic advisor about when would be the most appropriate semester (spring or fall) for you to enroll in the course.

COURSE GOALS

Your senior project will provide concrete evidence of your hard work and achievements as an undergraduate and should represent your very best work. In producing and presenting your thesis or creative writing project, you are expected to:

1. Demonstrate mastery of the techniques and habits of mind associated with the appropriate writing mode (professional, creative, scholarly).
2. Engage in all appropriate stages of an advanced-level major project in the appropriate area of English studies (see above), from proposal and research to finished project.
3. Reflect on and develop your own thinking, reading, research, and writing processes, understanding and delineating your strengths, challenges, purposes and goals.
4. Engage writing as a social, professional, and/or artistic process, demonstrating skills necessary to participate effectively in a community of writers and thinkers.

REQUIRED TEXTS :

These will be assigned by your supervisor, as appropriate for your individual project.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

This class provides an opportunity for you to take your first steps toward graduate or professional work in your area of study. It's important, therefore, to commit yourself fully to the work of the course. Your best efforts are expected. It is your responsibility to make certain your supervisor's specific expectations are clear; ask if you are uncertain.

It is a good idea if you have already made contact with your potential supervisor prior to the start of the semester.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Although all students pursuing the senior project in a given semester will meet as a group in the first week of the semester, English 499 is primarily a tutorial class, which means you meet individually with your faculty supervisor throughout the term according to a schedule you will establish with her or him. A typical schedule will conform to the following sequence of deadlines:

First week:

Initial meeting with all senior project students and that term's convener. Note that the convener may schedule more than one meeting during the term. Otherwise, all meetings are with the project supervisor at an agreed-upon time and place. In the first week of term, or even before the term, you should meet with your supervisor to establish the focus of project, the meeting schedule, assigned text(s), and any other details.

Second week:

Written proposal and plan of work prepared with supervisor and submitted to be on record with convener no later than the end of the second week.

By Term Break:

Rough draft of thesis/project due to supervisor for commentary and subsequent revision.

Seventh week:

(If project/thesis calls for "outside readers" – to be decided with supervisor – choose and contact faculty readers.)

Eleventh week:

(or as determined with supervisor)

Final draft due to supervisor *for approval*.

Twelfth week: (or as determined with supervisor)
(Final draft to any outside readers, if applicable.)

Near End of term:

The Senior Project Presentation will take place near the end of term. It is a public event. Feel free to invite family and friends. More and more, this event has become deeply important to the English department's majors and faculty. It's the chance for our graduating seniors to share their talent and hard work, a way of summing up their time as an English major. Each year, attendees come away very impressed by the presentations--by the variety of subjects and approaches, the depth of insight, and the strength and beauty of the writing. Please take this important event as seriously as we do, by preparing well and being sure to fit your presentation to the time-frame you're given.

The English Department will be surveying English 499 students as part of its program assessment efforts. Completing the survey will take only a few minutes, it will help the Department improve its policies and procedures for future majors, and submitting a completed survey makes you eligible for a valuable prize.

By the last day of term:

No later than the last official day of term, submit the approved final project, along with the summative essay, via email to the supervisor and to the department chair (to be placed on file in the department).

The number of class meetings and interim deadlines will vary depending on the needs of your thesis/project, and will be determined by you and your supervisor. *You will need to agree upon and write up a project proposal and a schedule of work, to be submitted to the convener for the term by the end of the second week of the semester.*

GRADING

Your grade for this course will be reported by your project supervisor. For English department grading standards for scholarly projects and creative writing projects, see below.

MANUSCRIPT SPECIFICATIONS

Detailed information on the rationale, format, and procedures for scholarly projects and creative writing projects below. There is a sample of the ms. specifications for creative writing mss., and for scholarly project mss.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a serious academic crime. The university guidelines on such academic misconduct are available on the web at <https://www2.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/docs/acadhonesty.html>; if you have not already done so, make sure you read them. A student may be expelled from the University for plagiarism; specific penalties for plagiarism in this course will be determined by your supervisor. Don't be careless; don't follow a bad impulse. Talk to your supervisor if you have any questions or are having problems with your work.

MANUSCRIPT SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE SENIOR PROJECT IN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP

RATIONALE

The senior project is meant to be the culmination of your work in the major, and in particular, in your area of scholarly concentration, if any. It should represent the very best work you are capable of producing, and should stand as a strong and original contribution to the field of English Studies.

You should think about your senior project as a small monograph or short book, although it will not likely be that long. You may divide the project up into individual chapters or sections if that would be helpful. The important thing to remember is that the scope of this project is more ambitious than that of a typical term paper. At the same time as you will be able to go further than you would be able to in a typical term paper, however, it is important to remember that within that more ambitious scope you must also have a topic that is appropriate. As such, a comparison of all temptress figures in British literature or a history of the use of metaphor in lyric poetry may be beyond the extent of a one-semester project. It is perfectly appropriate to develop a paper that you began in another course, or to link and develop essays from more than one previous course, bearing in mind, however, that you will be doing more than simply producing an anthology of your best essays. The senior project is *not* a portfolio of your 3 or 4 best pieces from prior classes collated with no revisions. The senior project can bring together previous work but must develop it in new directions, beyond its previous form, demonstrating substantial revision.

Anyone who wants to produce a project that may fall outside of the realm of the traditional research/scholarly or creative writing project should speak to his/her faculty advisor and the department chair.

Whatever the provenance or constitution of your project, the first section of the project will be a separate personal essay in which you discuss your reasons for selecting your project topic, your successes and your struggles with that topic, how the topic relates to the rest of the work you have done within the major, and why your work in English studies matters to you.

Over the course of the semester, you and your supervisor will be conferring closely and discussing drafts and revisions. It is very important to stick to the schedule you have set up with your supervisor and that is broadly outlined on the attached syllabus. You will want to give yourself plenty of time to do your very best work.

FORMAT

Think of the senior project as a book. It is important to produce a manuscript that you would be proud to send to a graduate admissions committee, a possible employer, or a publisher. In other words, not only do you want to make sure that your writing is of the very best quality, but that the presentation of the manuscript is professional as well.

The length should be at least 35 pages (counting the five-page introductory essay). The manuscript must contain no typing, spelling, punctuation, or grammar errors of any kind.

Use a standard 12-point black font.

Make the margins 1 1/2 inches all around. Double-space non-fiction and fiction, beginning each new section halfway down the page, with that section's title centered (see sample below). Poems may be single-spaced and should be placed flush-left on the vertical and horizontal center of the page (see sample below).

Reproduce the prefatory pages exactly (see examples below) and include them in this order as part of your final copy (title page, permissions form [if you accept its terms], approval page(s), contents page, body). If you like, you may include a dedication page and/or an epigraph page before the body of the collection (center text and place it just above the center of the page).

Pages must be numbered, but don't begin numbering pages until the first page of the body.

Title your collection with an evocative phrase that indicates something important about the work.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The length or scope and mode of presentation for projects in alternative media must be approved by the supervisor and the convener.

GRADING CRITERIA FOR THE SENIOR PROJECT IN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP

The final project for this course is part of the evidence of the student's progress in the English curriculum. As such, it is taken seriously by the convener, the instructor, and the student as the product of a professional in the field. What follows are expectations for particular grade levels for such a project (realizing, in each case, that the particular requirements of the particular project will inform the grading process).

An A project is consistently excellent professional work. It has no mechanical errors; its writing is clear, direct, vivid, and graceful, free of clichés or generalities. It explains itself—that it, it reveals clearly and fully its significance within and to the field. It shows a full awareness of relevant scholarship or other work in the field, and uses this scholarship in appropriate and relevant ways in the project. It takes its place within existing scholarship, yet distinguishes itself from that scholarship.

An A project is often separated from a B project by several things: the fullness of the detail and discussion; the sharpness of the points made; the originality of the view, outlook or position taken; and the consistency of the insight and language. A B project therefore is a very good project, consistently exceeding the basic requirements of the course.

A C project largely fulfils the requirements of the course, but does little to go further. It is coherent, makes valid points, may be interesting, has some appropriate detail, and has relevance to the field. Its language is clear, and largely avoids mechanical error.

D and F projects are usually so for a number of reasons. They may have faults in language, expression, or logic; they may be very general, providing little evidence to support their assertions; the assertions may be vague; they may misuse or ignore appropriate scholarship.

MANUSCRIPT SPECIFICATIONS FOR SENIOR PROJECT IN CREATIVE WRITING

RATIONALE

The senior project is meant to be a culmination of your work in the creative writing specialization, a collection of the best writing you've produced, creating a meaningful and permanent record of your hard work.

FORMAT

You should think of the Senior Project as a book, even though it probably won't be as long as that. Be careful to produce a manuscript that you would be proud to send to the admissions committee of a graduate writing program or to a publisher. In other words, be very careful not only with the writing but also with presentation. The portfolio can take many forms: a single essay (creative non-fiction), a collection of essays, a group of poems or stories, a novel (or part of a novel), a full-length or partial play or several one-acts, a full-length or partial screenplay, or a combination of these things. Anyone who wants to produce a kind of writing that falls outside these categories should speak to his or her faculty supervisor. The works included may be revisions of previously written work, brand new work, or a combination of the two.

Whatever the makeup of your collection, the first piece will be a personal essay in which you discuss any or all of the following topics: your reasons for writing, your aesthetic, why creative writing matters to you. This essay should be at least five double-spaced pages long.

The length should be at least 25 pages for a collection of poetry, at least 35 for a collection of fiction, and at least 35 for a combined collection of fiction and poetry. Don't forget to add the five-page essay to your count.

The manuscript must contain no typing, spelling, punctuation, or grammar errors of any kind.

Use a standard 12-point black font.

Make the margins 1 1/2 inches all around. Double-space non-fiction and fiction, beginning each new section halfway down the page, with that section's title centered (see sample below). Poems may be single-spaced and should be placed flush-left on the vertical and horizontal center of the page (see sample below).

Reproduce the following prefatory pages exactly and include them in this order as part of your final copy (title page, permissions form [if you accept its terms], approval page(s), contents page, body). If you like, you may include a dedication page and/or an epigraph page before the body of the collection (center text and place it just above the center of the page).

Pages must be numbered, but don't begin numbering pages until the first page of the body.

Title your collection with an evocative phrase that indicates something important about the work.

CREATIVE WRITING GRADING STANDARDS

Evaluating a work of creative writing isn't merely a matter of preference or opinion. There are objective, impartial standards. In general, when any kind of writing fails to succeed, it's because of overwriting or underwriting. This isn't as simple as it sounds, though, because until you've had a lot of practice, it's hard to figure out what's too much, what's not enough. Students eager to improve their writing should keep up with the reading assignments, speak up in class, see me in conference, and pay close attention to my marginal comments on their manuscripts. Here are a

few criteria to distinguish one grade classification from another.

The A Writer

The A writer exhibits all of the following virtues and none of the vices of the B and C writer.

The writing has no significant grammar or punctuation errors.

The writing is clear, direct, vivid, and graceful. It isn't burdened by clichés or generalities.

The writer's voice is natural, exhibiting an engaging persona.

The writer's senses and powers of observation are wide open, and he/she creates powerful mental pictures in the reader's mind. Details are well-chosen and fully described. He/she doesn't "leave things to the reader's imagination."

The writer takes the reader in surprising, but surprisingly appropriate, directions.

The writer presents particularly apt insights into the people, places, and situations of the world around us, telling us things we didn't know or didn't know we knew.

The writer shows an especially well-developed control of diction, sound, and rhythm.

The writer does not engage in self-praise and has no axe to grind, but implicitly acknowledges that there are no easy solutions to our most interesting problems. Instead, he/she honors the complexity and mystery of human life.

THE B WRITER

The B writer exhibits all of the following virtues and none of the vices of the C writer.

The writer has found a good idea and developed it nicely, avoiding the familiar and easy.

The writer's voice is natural but, at times, opaque or awkward.

The work is carefully structured, proceeding logically from one part to the next. Parts can't be rearranged without doing harm to the work. The writing is generally vivid, with some lapses. The dialogue is strong dialogue. The figures of speech are, for the most part, apt.

Grammar and punctuation are free of major errors (fragments, comma splices, run-ons, weak grammar).

THE C WRITER

The C grade means that the work is adequate, that it satisfies the requirements of the assignment.

The major problem of the C writer is that the writing is overly general. Even a few of the following problems can result in a C grade.

The writer hasn't fully explored the material and/or the best methods for presenting it. The central idea may be stale or not fully developed.

The work feels like a promising first draft in which the writer hasn't fully thought through the material, carefully shaped it, or polished the writing.

Some aspects of the work may be overly familiar (tired theme, stereotypes, cliché, etc.).

The writing is functional but lacks a clearly defined voice.

The writing itself is awkward at times, making it seem as if the writer has struggled to put words on paper. Often, the writer tries for "literary" instead of natural language. Not enough attention has been paid to sound and rhythm.

Instead of creating a mental picture by appealing to the senses, the writer merely tells the reader what to think. Details are lacking, not fully described, or merely generic.

The writing is often burdened with abstractions, generalities, awkward personifications, adverbs, uneven diction, and wordiness.

SAMPLE PAGES

The following pages provide a formatting model for the Senior Project. Follow the models (and the guidelines described above) exactly. In order to pass the course, you must submit (via email) a properly signed and formatted senior project on the day it's due. Please note that the release form is voluntary and need not be included if you do not accept its terms.

[SAMPLE TITLE PAGE]

TITLE CENTERED AND
IN CAPS 1/3 DOWN THE PAGE

by

Name (Initial Caps)

Permanent Address
Permanent Phone

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Bachelor of Arts in English/Creative Writing
Creighton University
2500 California Plaza
Omaha, NE 68178

Graduation Month/Year

[SAMPLE PERMISSIONS PAGE
Print One-Third Up from Bottom of Page]

I give permission to the Creighton English Department to use my work in the form of classroom handouts and in not-for-profit publications used in the instruction of students in English courses. I understand that I retain full control of the copyright for my work, that no one will profit monetarily from its use, and that my work will not be included in any commercially produced textbook or other publication without my permission and without payment.

[Typing your name on the line above constitutes a legal signature.]

[SAMPLE APPROVAL PAGE
Prepare one for each reader.
Center horizontally and vertically on page]

[1/3 down page]
This senior project has been read and approved by

[five blank lines]

[Name & Date]
Senior Project Supervisor

[Type the senior project
supervisor's name on the line
above.]

[SAMPLE APPROVAL PAGE

Prepare one for each external reader. Note that external readers are optional.

Center horizontally and vertically on page]

[1/3 down page]

This senior project has been read and approved by

[five blank lines]

[Type the reader's name and date on the line above.]

[SAMPLE CONTENTS PAGE
Center flush-left vertically and horizontally on page]

CONTENTS

Title.....#

Title.....#

Title.....#

Etc.....

[SAMPLE BODY PAGE--FICTION/NON-FICTION]

Title

Print the title of each piece at or slightly above the middle of the page. Center it and capitalize key words. Do nothing else to it, unless you've quoted the title of something else in your own title. For help on capitalization, check [*The Elements of Style*](#).

Hit three returns and begin typing your story. Double-space but don't add extra space between paragraphs (in other words, follow this model). Print the text with a ragged right margin (not justified). Don't mix typefaces, use an overly distinctive one, or use color.

Don't illustrate your manuscript. Print the page number on each page. A collection without page numbers will not be approved.

[SAMPLE BODY PAGE--POETRY]

Title
Center the poem
vertically
and horizontally,
with a justified
left margin,
unless this
changes the poem's
formal properties.
Don't center
individual
lines of poetry. The left
side of the poem should
be even (like these lines),
not ragged.