

Faculty Contacts

Please note: Email is the best and most reliable way to contact the faculty who are listed below with any questions or concerns that you may have regarding the Honors Program.

Fall 2008 and Spring 2009:

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*Feel free to stop by and check out the **Honors Resource Room (Humanities 385)**, a space set aside for students who are members of the Honors Program. The Honors Resource Room houses a library of theses from past years, and it also is supplied with personal computer stations and other research resources. It provides a nice meeting space for Honors students to work individually on their projects or to share ideas, or plan upcoming events.*

What Is English Honors?

If you become part of the Honors Program in your junior year (or sometimes even in your sophomore year), you will join a relatively small community within the department's undergraduate population. Like you, the other members of this group are ambitious and interesting students committed to their own intellectual and academic development. In a seminar setting during the spring of your junior year, you will work closely with a faculty member to study a special topic and begin developing the research skills that you need to conduct work on an original project of your own. You will then join a group of thesis writers in your senior seminar; usually there are between 10 and 25 people in this class. Each member of that group will be writing an independent research or creative project in a field/genre of his/her choosing and on a topic of her/his own design. Whether critical or creative, these thesis projects should fall between 40 and 60 pages in length. The project will be an in-depth critical analysis of or creative response to a cultural issue, a theoretical issue, an author, a literary period/genre, or some other element of English Studies that intellectually stimulates and is particularly appealing to *you*.

Is the Honors Program Right for Me?

Students often hesitate to apply because they wonder if they are “right” for English Honors, if they are able to write a long research/creative project, or if they are “smart enough.” The truth is that most English majors are capable of doing the work required of Honors. The question you should be asking, then, is: *Is the Honors Program right for me?* There are many reasons why the English Honors Program may be a good match for you. Here are a few:

(1) Honors may be right for you if you want to pursue a question that may have been stimulated in a course you have taken or may have arisen out of your academic and intellectual experiences in another setting. Such an interest would be so stirring that you would like to spend a year reading, writing, and talking about it.

(2) You are interested in producing cutting edge, original research. The honors program will afford you the opportunity to design your own project so as to reflect and explore your own individual interests. Recent topics include a materialist and cultural study of the coca leaf; transgender theory and the cultural politics of the cult film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*; a cultural study of AOL’s instant messaging and its effects on the language of everyday communication; a literary study of race and gender in Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye*; a cultural study of the history of mannequins as a technology of gender in consumer society and in the feminist photography

of Cindy Sherman; and how mathematical tropes operate historically and conceptually in refiguring gender in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

(3) You definitely should consider the Honors Program if you want to go to graduate school. Honors theses will give you refined material for application writing samples, and they indicate that you have the ability both to do research in the field and to sustain a long project, two skills required in and expected of you *before* you enter any graduate program. Also, writers of honors theses develop more sophisticated senses of how to ask and explore a thematic or problem question. Graduate programs will take more seriously those candidates who not only write good compositions but who are *thinking* in original ways and who are *asking* interesting critical questions of literary and cultural texts.

(4) You get to work closely with a faculty member. If you're thinking about applying to graduate school, this may mean a better recommendation letter by someone who really knows you, your interests, and your work. You also will get an experience you do not often have in a class with 40 other students: Your faculty advisor will push you to work hard, so that you can learn your limits yet still have the freedom of doing an independent project that, in the end, is entirely reflective of you and your abilities.

Sequence of Courses in English Honors

Before you apply for English Honors in your sophomore or junior year, you are strongly advised to take the following core courses for the major: English 210 (Introduction to English Studies), English 205Z (Introduction to Writing in English Studies), and English 305Z (Studies in Writing About Texts). (Occasional exceptions may be made if your application is exceptional and you are currently registered for these courses.) Before you apply or soon after you are accepted into the program, you are also strongly encouraged to take English 310 (Reading and Interpretation in English Studies) so as to develop your skills working with critical theory and textual analysis. The Honors Program consists of a sequence of three courses:

English 399 Honors Seminar: Special Topic

In this course, you will be engaging in an intensive study of a special topic designed by the faculty instructor. The instructor and the content of this course vary from year to year. You will begin the process of developing those skills needed for the accomplishment of a research project. You will also decide on your general topic area and, with the help of the honors director, find a faculty advisor for the project. (*Note that, with the permission of the Honors or Undergraduate Director, 399 may be substituted with a 500- or 600-level course relevant to your thesis topic during your senior year.* In that case, students must work with the honors director independently to decide on a topic and an advisor.

English 498 Honors Seminar I: Developing and Writing a Thesis

This course introduces strategies for developing the thesis, whether critical or creative. The remainder of the semester is devoted to getting your individual projects not only under way, but quite far along. Over the course of the semester, you will develop abstracts for your thesis idea; write a prospectus that outlines the structure for your argument or creative project; find and begin working with faculty advisors; learn how to communicate your individual ideas and insights into a public presentation for a general audience; and complete the first chapter of your project.

English 499 Honors Seminar II: Thesis Writing

In this last course in the sequence, you will finish writing and revising your undergraduate thesis under the direction and mentorship of your faculty advisor. Toward the end of the semester, you will have the opportunity to present your original and innovative work to a general audience.

Applying to the Honors Program

When to Apply

Interested majors should apply to the English Honors Program in the Spring of their sophomore years, but applications are welcome through the Spring of one's junior year. Juniors who are considering the program should try to apply in the Fall before pre-registration for their Spring courses; then, you will be able to take English 399. Interested majors who are transfers from other institutions should take English 210 and English 305Z as soon as possible, and then apply to the program. Those wishing to write creative theses should take ENG 302Z sometime in their junior year. Any students who have questions about admission or requirements should contact the Honors Director to set up a meeting.

How to Apply

Applications for the Honors Program are now available online. Go to the main departmental website, and find the link to Honors on the Undergraduate Studies homepage. Or, you can go directly to the Honors page with the following URL:

<http://albany.edu/english/und/honorsprogram.htm>

Fill out your applications online. Be sure to fill out all of the required field boxes, and click the "Submit" button to send your application electronically to the Honors Director. You can cut-and-paste your writing sample into the text box at the bottom of the application, or you can email it under a separate

cover to the Honors Director (whose email is specified on the application) with your name and "Honors Writing Sample" in the subject line. All applications will be read by a committee comprised of the Honors Director and 2 to 3 other members of the English faculty.

What Kind of Essay to Include as a Writing Sample

With your application, you must include a writing sample, and it should represent your best critical work. This is the most important part of your application; and if it is judged by the faculty readers to be strong enough, the official GPA minimums and course prerequisites for admission to the Honors Program may be waived. (See details about acceptance into the program and about graduation for such exceptions below.) Your writing sample should be a close reading or a critically or theoretically informed reading of a primary literary or cultural text. Remember that thesis writers are first and foremost *original critical thinkers*, so avoid submitting summaries of literary texts or historical or textual overviews of changes in a theoretical concept. A revised version of an essay from a 300+ level English course usually proves to be the best representation of student writing. Those wishing to write a creative thesis should submit an additional writing sample that demonstrates ability to produce significant work in any of the creative genres: drama, poetry, fiction, or mixed media. Writing samples average from five to ten pages in length.

Requirements for Graduating with Honors*

To graduate with honors, students in the program complete 37 credits as follows:

English 205Z, 210, 305z, 310

English 399 or a 500- or 600-level course relevant to the thesis topic to be taken as advised during the senior year

English 498 and 499

15 additional credits in the major above the 200 level.

Fulfillment of the requirements for the honors program waives the English major's regular requirements. In order to graduate with honors, students must also maintain a GPA of 3.5 in English and 3.25 overall (see below).

** Students who matriculated into UAlbany prior to 2004 must complete the graduation requirements for Honors listed in the Undergraduate Bulletin that was in effect in the year of matriculation. Some slight differences may exist, then, in the requirements listed above and those that pertain to your particular case. Be sure to review your updated DARS audit from English Advisement upon acceptance into the program, and bring any questions and concerns about graduation to the Honors Director who will help you choose the appropriate course sequence.*

A Note on GPA

Students are required to maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.50 in English courses and a minimum 3.25 overall in order to graduate with honors.

Students accepted into and continuing with the Honors Program who do not have the GPA minimums can still complete a thesis project and share in this opportunity for independent research. However, those students will not receive an "honors" designation on their diplomas or transcripts. Those students also must complete the requirements for the regular English major; English 498 and English 499 would then count as electives for the major. Such exceptions for admission to the program are determined on a case-by-case basis by the Honors Director and the other faculty members of the Honors Committee.

How Do I Start Developing an Original Thesis Project? Some Suggestions for Students Before Their Thesis Year

Because your thesis is not a directed reading but an independent research project, it is of the utmost importance that each of you generates your own reading lists and research agendas. But since few of you have definite plans for what your thesis will be about, it makes the most sense that your first task—before the Fall semester when you begin writing your thesis—is to identify your major interests in this thing called English Studies. How do you do this? There are three ways:

(1) If you already have a definite textual interest, you can begin by identifying and pursuing a problem that interests you in that text. Try to frame that problem in the terms of a “why” question. For instance, why does “preference” seem so problematic or frustrating in Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener”? Why do handbags play a central role in the fashion system through which many women construct their identities today, as is seen on television shows like *Sex in the City*? Why is Wallace Stevens obsessed with the image of the poet as teacher? Narrowing your problem question often results from finding and tracing a trope that you can focus on in a text or series of texts, such as Walt Whitman’s recurrent images of hands (to denote touch, affect, even masturbation) or the recurrence of disabled and housebound figures in the fiction of William Faulkner.

(2) If you are unsure of a primary text or a set of primary texts that you wish to focus on, you often can begin developing a topic by first identifying your general interest. Identify a genre that you are drawn to: poetry, fiction, film, critical theory, *belles lettres*, autobiography/ memoir, etc., or some combination thereof. Get a little more specific: a particular national literature (U.S., British, Irish, Canadian, West Indian, South African)? a particular literature representative of an identity group (queer, black, women's, Chicano/a, Cuban-American, Korean American, exile writers from the Indian Subcontinent)? a particular type or period of literature (modernist, contemporary, Victorian, medieval, early modern, colonial)? You can go through the same gambit of questions for filmic texts, cultural texts, philosophy, nonfiction prose, etc. But *you and only you* can take that first step and identify what you like enough to devote (yes, devote) a good 10 to 12 months of your life to reading, thinking, talking, and writing about. **Reflecting on past courses that you have had at university can be a good way of going about this stage of identifying your point of interest.** Do not limit yourself to thinking only about English courses. Through cultural studies approaches to texts, there is a place at the English table for critical analyses that intersect with what you might have been introduced to in sociology, anthropology, history, LACS, foreign language, Africana, and other humanities and social sciences departments. *If you have even a slight sense of what your thesis might be, you should begin registering for courses in or outside the English Department whose topics will “feed” your thesis and expose*

you to more texts in your related field. If one fits your interests and potential topic, consider registering for a graduate course in the fall of your senior year.

(3) Identify something that you are *uncomfortable with, something that bothers you and that you think deserves some critical attention.* This could relate to literature. For instance, you may be irked by the equation of realism with historical fact, or the degree to which literature is presumed to *reproduce* history or to *represent* a political voice. So, perhaps you would be inclined to write a thesis about the relationship between history and literary representation. Or, you might be irked by something a bit more generally cultural in scope. For instance, you might be appalled by the current political climate, domestic or international. So, perhaps you want to spend one year thinking, reading, and writing about neoliberalism, or the so-called "war on terror," or the governmental infractions of the right to free speech. There is probably a project fit for an English Studies thesis in those irritations: a little discourse analysis, a little cultural studies, and you are well under way to a critical analysis of a cultural problem.

In the spring and the summer you will want to identify your point of interest. And then you will want to do what you should all be doing as thinking, university-educated, ambitious individuals: **read**. Rather than rely on a shared reading list, you should *follow your bliss*. If you dig modernist poetry, read around in some modernist poets. Pick up some Stevens, read some Pound, pore over Moore. If you dig

African-American literature, and you've read a lot of contemporary stuff but you want to read what was written before the twentieth century, do a little on line research for names of black American authors from the nineteenth century. Pick up some of the magazine fiction by Pauline Hopkins; check out Paul Lawrence Dunbar; see what all the fuss is about Charles Chesnutt's Reconstruction novel *The Marrow of Tradition*. If you feel like you really want to do something on representations of gays in the media, spend your summer watching classic films like *Prick Up Your Ears* to the politically correct television show *Will and Grace*. Read John Waters' books on trash cinema, read Samuel Delany on public sex in Times Square theaters.

Cast your net wide: Identify a general interest. Then, go to the library, browse Borders or Book House or Dove and Hudson, or do keyword searches on Amazon. The more you read, the more you can refine that reading into a thesis.

An Exercise to Identify Your Interest and Develop a “Problem Question”

Sit down and write a paragraph or two in which you identify a possible topic for your thesis project and begin the process of narrowing down your topic. The points that you will want to identify before you write this exercise are:

(1) a subfield of English Studies that most interests you. Cultural studies or literary studies would be the two main rubrics. Then, go a step further and identify a historical period (or periods) and a genre (literary, cultural, or media). For this example, we’ll say you are really drawn to modernist fiction authored roughly between 1910 and 1930 in Britain—which includes books by authors such as E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, H.G. Wells, Wyndham Lewis, Elizabeth Bowen, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Ronald Firbank.

(2) a few general issues that are especially pressing and of interest to you in this field. Your thesis often will develop out of creating sophisticated links between related issues. For instance, you may be irritated or intrigued by the representation of women in Edwardian fiction. You also might be fascinated by how this fiction depicts struggles with economic changes.

(3) any links you can articulate between your key points of interest. In our example, you might intuit that the fictive representation of women owes to shifts in gender roles accompanying economic or industrial shifts between the wars.

(4) a possible primary text or two. If you are working in cultural studies, you may specify a particular text/venue (such as AOL, Radio Martí, *Jane, Adbusters*) or you may specify a type of media (country music, comic books). For literary studies, specify which author(s) or what text(s) are of the most interest to you. In both fields, the more specific you are, the further along you are. But don’t feel like you are obligated or tied down to those choices. Theses can change over time. For our example, let’s say you are drawn to Virginia Woolf’s novels, especially *To the Lighthouse*, and you’ve read *A Room of One’s Own*.

(5) how the issue you identify (#3) plays out in the text. You’re intrigued by how the character of Lily, the artist, is a hanger-on in the bourgeois world of the vacationing Ramsay family. Could we say she has found her own room?

(6) concepts or recurring “ironies” running through all of the above. For instance, how does Woolf throw into question our presumptions about identity by highlighting passivity, leisure, notions of belonging? Does she challenge class-specific ideas about the artist? Or, consider the metaphorical “nugget of truth” and the fish swimming in water, two specific images from *To the Lighthouse*. How do those images work together, or against one another, in articulating an idea of women’s intellectual activity?

Once you’ve sat down and thought through steps 1–5, try to formulate a problem question. In our example, that might be: What does Woolf contribute to the fictional *representation* of women as cultural producers in the early twentieth-century?

What does it mean for her female artist-figures to be withdrawn from, or on the borders of, other forms of production—such as industry? Your problem question should try to answer the following questions: Why does this project matter not just to you, but to a general reader? How does it allow your critical perspective and reading of this text to enter an ongoing conversation among scholars and citizens about a larger set of issues?

Your problem question is where you would like to *conclude* your exercise. Although it will develop out of a narrowing of your interests, it will also begin to open your project and provides a point where your thesis advisor may suggest ways of expanding your project. For instance, in our example, your thesis advisor might suggest you research women in the British economy and consider how that historical vantage frames other women writers' address of cultural and literary production as an *economic* phenomenon. Like Woolf, the poet Mina Loy wrote a lot about the role of women in Edwardian British society, but she had a much different view. To get a sense of the historical and aesthetic lay of the land, you might look at Loy's manifestoes and her poems about women's sexuality and how reproductive liberties create economic and aesthetic freedoms that level the ground between men and women.

General Timeline for Writing the Thesis*

Fall (while registered for English 498)

September	Development, refinement, and proposal of an original thesis topic
Early October	Send an abstract about your project to your prospective faculty advisor
October	Intensive research on your topic
Early Nov	A brief prospectus that gives a section-by-section "plan" for your project as a whole
Nov and Dec	Draft your first section and continue research on your other sections
December	Turn in to the Honors Director your first installment of approximately 20 pages and a progress report from your thesis advisor

At the end of the Fall semester, you will receive an "S" or "U" for English 498. Only students who have successfully finished all of the requirements for English 498 and have been judged by their advisors as making sufficient progress will be permitted to register for English 499. Students who receive a "U" will be dropped from the program and will be responsible for all the remaining requirements of the English major in order to graduate.

The Winter Holiday

Dec – Jan	Complete the first draft of your thesis and submit to first reader by January 31.
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Spring (while registered for English 499)

February	Revise thesis
Late February	Submit thesis draft to a second faculty reader <i>(Note: The involvement of second readers in the process of writing will vary.)</i>
March	Revise according to comments from first and second readers and then again for style and grammar.
Mid-March	Early deadline for completing your thesis draft to qualify for the Presidential Award for Undergraduate Research**
Early April	Write introduction, complete revisions, and finish all textual apparatuses (footnotes, works cited, table of contents, images, charts, etc.)
Mid-April	Submit finished thesis to your advisor and your second reader
Late April	Opportunity to present your thesis in a public forum, such as a conference panel or an Honors reception or an English Studies roundtable <i>(The venue will vary from year to year)</i>
Last day of classes	Submit to the Honors Director your finished thesis, with any minor revisions (typos, formatting, etc.) requested of you by your advisor and/or your second reader

Please note:

**Actual dates will vary from year to year, and fixed deadlines may be set by the Honors Director or the Director of Undergraduate Studies that vary from the timeline. This schedule, though, is intended to provide prospective and incoming English Honors students with a rough idea of the process and timeline of thesis writing.*

***Honors students who wish to be considered for the Presidential Award must complete and revise their projects earlier than usual. You still will have an opportunity to continue to work on and revise your thesis, to your own and your advisor's satisfaction, until the final due date. If your project is eligible for other departmental awards, in mid-March you should tell your thesis advisor that you are interested in her nomination, based on a specific and completed portion of your thesis.*

Checklist for the Final Draft

All finished versions of Honors theses should:

- (1) be clean, unmarked copies;
- (2) be laser printed on acid-free 8 ½ x 11 paper;
- (3) be written in an appropriate academic font with appropriate margins (usually 1 ½ inches on the left side to leave room for the binding, and then 1 inch on top, bottom, and right sides)
- (4) consistently use MLA format for all citations and for the works cited list. (If your advisor prefers another format, such as Chicago, you can use that one.)
- (5) be spiral bound or press-bound (as can be done at a professional print shop like Kinko's or Shipmates).
- (6) have a cover page with the following information (include verbatim what's written in bold, and fill in the info where the brackets are):

[Thesis Title]

[Your Name]

Submitted for Honors in English

University at Albany, SUNY

Directed by [Your Advisor's Name]

[Date Submitted]

All finished theses will become part of the library in the Honors Resource Room. Although it is not required, you should consider making copies of your thesis for your primary advisor and your second reader, who have helped you develop your project.

In order to receive a grade for English 499 and graduate with honors, you must turn in the final version of your thesis project by the date specified by the Honors Director.

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