English 495: The Senior Course

Course Description

English 495 is the capstone course of the major. It is designed to give students the opportunity to research a topic or issue within a particular field or subfield of the discipline and write a journal article. The goals of the course are (1) to introduce the students to relevant research topics or issues, (2) familiarize the students with the critical conversations about those topics or issues, and (3) to provide the opportunity for students to undertake independent research projects that contribute to a conversation under the supervision of the instructor.

Course Structure

Because English 495 is designed to facilitate student research and writing, a significant amount of time during the semester should be set aside for the professor to mentor the students individually as they work toward and through multiple drafts of their research paper. Although individual classes will naturally vary, professors will typically allot from seven to ten weeks for an exposition of the disciplinary topic or issue, reserving the final five to eight weeks for student research and writing and for a number of individual mentoring sessions with the students as they work on their projects. The course topic or issue should involve the study of primary texts, the analysis of secondary criticism, and original research, which may include archival work.

Learning Outcomes

In English 495 students should

1. Gain a broader and deeper understanding of a particular disciplinary topic or issue.
2. Become familiar with the critical conversation about this disciplinary topic or issue.
3. With instructor supervision, develop sufficient competency in research and writing to make a contribution to the critical conversation about this disciplinary topic or issue.

Methods of Assessment

The culminating experience of the English major provides students the opportunity to be practitioners of literary criticism; to do so, students undertake research projects in which they present their work in two professional genres: a journal article and a conference paper.

1. **The Research Paper**
   
   Each student will develop an independent research project and craft an argument with the supervision of the instructor. Their projects will produce original and sophisticated pieces of literary criticism that situate their argument in the context of the critical conversation about the disciplinary topic or issue and are suitable for submission to an undergraduate journal (see the
attached list of undergraduate journals). Students should be encouraged to develop their project with a real audience in mind—a particular journal or a graduate admission committee, and follow the guidelines for length (generally between 15-20 pages) listed in their submission instructions. Students should substantially revise a complete draft of their paper in personal consultation with the instructor.

Instructors are encouraged to use the course rubric in evaluating the research papers. There should be correspondences between the rubric evaluation and the holistic grade assigned the paper. Instructors need to discriminate rigorously among unsatisfactory, average, and exceptional achievement to provide students with honest and accurate assessments of their skills.

2. The Oral Presentation
   Students should be invited to share their research orally with their classmates. There are many ways of incorporating oral presentations into the curriculum. Consider the function of conference papers for professional literary critics. Conference papers are often opportunities to share emerging research to colleagues for feedback. To model this function, students may be asked to present one or two points from the first draft of their research paper in the form of a 10-15 minute conference paper to their classmates. Presenting their research at this stage permits students to get feedback from their classmates about the strengths and weaknesses of their argument as they polish their final drafts, and it generates new ideas for handling rhetorical moves and sharing bibliography among class members. Conference papers sometimes are the culmination of a project. To model this function, students may present their research to their classmates in the form of a 10-15 conference paper instead of a final exam.

How English 495 fits in with the Other Core Writing Courses

English 495 completes the University's advanced writing requirement that students began in English 295. The writing project in this course represents a culmination of the skills and experience the students developed in the major. In English 295, students engaged with the critical conversation concerning a literary text, in 381-4 the critical conversation contextualizing an author's oeuvre, and in 495 the disciplinary conversation involving a network of texts, authors, and critics.

Periodic Departmental Review and Standardization of Grading

Every three years the course will be reviewed. The instructors of all of the sections will be invited to a mid-semester meeting in which the instructors will calibrate their scoring of papers with the course rubric. At the end of the semester, the instructors will evaluate their students’ papers using the course rubric, and they will submit their students’ rubric scores to the assessment coordinator to archive and analyze.
Agora: A Journal for Undergraduate Scholarly Papers
http://www.agorajournal.org/submissionguidelines.html
Lynchburg College
Length: 500-5000 words

Americana
http://amstudies.byu.edu/americana/
BYU
Length: Unspecified

Constellations: An Undergraduate Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/constellations/submissions/
University of Warwick
Length: 2500-6000 words

Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism
http://english.byu.edu/criterion/submissions.php
BYU
Length: 3000-6000 words (not including the bibliography)

Intersections: A Journal of the Comparative History of Ideas
University of Washington
Length: unspecified

The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English
http://web.usca.edu/english/oswald-review/
University of South Carolina, Aiken
Length: five to twenty-five pages

Sigma Tau Delta Review
http://wwwenglishorg/sigmatd/publications/index.shtml
Sigma Tau Delta: International English Honor Society
Length: no more than 3000 words

UCB Comparative Literature Undergraduate Journal
http://ucb-cluj.org/submissions/
UC Berkeley
Length: 15-60 pages

Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric
http://cas.umkc.edu/english/publications/youngscholarsinwriting/guidelines.asp
University of Missouri-Kansas City
Length: 10-25 pages

For descriptions of some of these journals, see:
http://unl.libguides.com/content.php?pid=207791&sid=1732413
Writing Sample Requirements for Several Graduate Programs

BYU, English MA: a formal research paper of 20 pages.

UC Berkeley, English PhD: a critical or scholarly writing sample of no more than 20 pages.


University of Indiana, Bloomington, English MA/PhD: a representative critical essay of 15-20 pages.