

Guidelines for Preparing an Honors Thesis in the English Department

(approved 10/18/2024)

Mentor Selection

The process of matching Honors students with mentors is the same for all concentrations. Students should meet with the department chair, who will suggest two or three faculty members with interests and expertise related to the proposed project. Students might also ask English faculty members they've previously worked with for mentor suggestions.

Faculty realize that selecting a mentor is an important part of the research process. They are happy to help students work through this decision, and assume it will require repeated conversations with several different faculty members. Students shouldn't worry about "hurting the feelings" of faculty they've consulted when they select a mentor. Faculty are honored to direct a thesis, but don't take it personally when students decide another professor is a better fit for their project. Similarly, when faculty decline a request to mentor a thesis because of other commitments, students shouldn't take this as a personal rejection.

Ideally, the mentor will come from the student's concentration within the English major. However, since not all English faculty are aligned with a concentration and not all thesis projects fit precisely into one concentration, some mentor/student matches will cross concentrations. The department chair should be consulted when a student wishes to select a mentor who doesn't teach or research in the student's major concentration(s).

4980 Hours

Four of the eight 4980 hours required for the thesis can substitute for a course in the major, regardless of the student's concentration

- In Creative Writing, the four 4980 hours can be substituted for the 2000- to 4000-level English elective.
- In Literature, the four 4980 hours can be substituted for a 3000-level literature course.
- In Teacher Licensure, the four 4980 hours can be substituted for the elective 3000-level English course outside of concentration. (This is due to state licensing requirements.)

Senior Seminar

Honors students are required to take the senior seminar in the concentration(s) in English they choose to study. The 4980 thesis hours cannot be substituted for Senior Seminar.

Use of Thesis work in Senior Seminar

The Academic Honor Code prohibits "submitting, without prior permission, the same academic work which has been submitted in identical or similar form in another class in fulfillment of any other academic requirement at the university" <https://www.elon.edu/u/student-conduct/honor-code/>.

To comply with this policy, Honors Fellows from all concentrations who wish to include English senior seminar work in a thesis must receive prior permission from both the seminar instructor and the thesis mentor.

- Literature & Teacher Licensure:

The focus of English 4970: Literature Senior Seminar is determined by the instructor. It may or may not overlap with the topic that a student has already developed for an Honors thesis. In the case of an overlap, and with the approval of both the seminar instructor and the project mentor, a student may make partial use of work produced in the seminar in an Honors thesis. No more than 30% of the completed thesis can be work originally produced for the seminar. Students should not expect a seminar instructor to adjust the course to help them combine, incorporate, or substitute research generated for another program.

- Creative Writing:

Working on a creative writing honors thesis with a faculty member mirrors the artistic process that writers oftentimes engage in with other writers. After agreeing on a semester's goals, students submit their creative work to their faculty mentor, who then provides written and/or oral feedback on the submitted work. Most often students and faculty members meet weekly. The work submitted can be work originally submitted for other creative writing classes and then revised, it can be work that is revised week-by-week with the guidance of the mentor, and/or it can be work that was originally written for the mentor and then submitted to the wider audience of a class workshop. This mentoring model encourages revision with the end goal being a strong work of literary art. In all cases, the eight hours that comprise an honors thesis will involve a lot of back and forth between the student and faculty member and will lead to a substantial project that goes beyond normal requirements of the major.

Thesis Length

Minimum thesis lengths are:

- In Literature and Teacher Licensure: a multi-chapter thesis of at least 50 pages in length, excluding the works cited
- In Creative Writing: A Creative Writing student will preferably focus on one genre for the thesis, writing approximately 30 single-spaced pages of poetry or approximately 50

single-spaced pages of fiction or creative nonfiction. The work must be literary in nature. Each manuscript will be accompanied by a brief, self-reflective essay with bibliography.