

*Dear Junior English Majors,*

*It is time to consider (if you have not yet begun) how you would like to approach your senior English thesis. Congratulations! We know that this can be both an exciting and nervousness-inducing process, so we write to you now with some information meant to help guide your thinking, planning, proposing, and, eventually, writing, for a successful English thesis.*

*First, whether critical or creative, your thesis should comprise your best work brought to final form during the semester(s) spent working on your project. Your thesis may include revised developments of work first drafted in previous seminars or workshops, but it should consist mainly of new work drafted, researched, and revised during the project. Your thesis represents the culmination of your English major, and as such deserves to be carefully developed, intensively revised, and submitted with pride.*

*To ensure that your thesis meets departmental standards, we would like to remind you now, before completing your proposal, that writing a Bates thesis constitutes a full course per semester. This means three things: 1) you register for and earn one full course credit toward your Bates degree the semester (or each semester) you write your thesis; 2) your thesis proposal should consider the scope of a project that can be sustained and developed over the course of a semester (two at most); and, 3) you should plan to spend the same amount of time on your project each week that you would spend completing work for a standard class (ie: about 3 hours worth of “class time” + 7-10 hours worth of homework means you should be researching, writing, and revising for a minimum of 10-12 hours per week).*

*Finally, we wish to affirm that the Bates thesis is as much a process as it is a product. That is, the learning you will hone while composing your thesis will come not at the end of it all, but through the very doing of it all. Undertaking a project of this size requires not merely skills and smarts, but work ethic; developing your thinking, synthesizing your research, and revising your writing through multiple iterations, as demanded of an English thesis, will thus serve you far beyond your time at Bates. Sustaining inquiry in this manner will prepare you for any number of professional competencies: graduate research and writing, whether in the humanities or in med school or law school; communicating about your work process and timeline to future employers or publishers; developing habits to sustain a creative or artistic practice; learning to ask for help where and when you need it; receiving and incorporating critical feedback; and many more.*

*Following this letter, you'll find separate instructions for submitting either a critical thesis proposal or a creative thesis proposal. (Remember: you must complete the creative concentration courses to be considered for a creative thesis). Finally, note that all thesis writers in the English Department are provided with a black binder free of charge. If you have more questions, feel free to reach out to your advisor or to other professors in the Department.*

*All our best,*

*The English Department*

## **Writing a Critical Thesis Proposal**

**Proposal due date: April 2, 2024**

Dear critical thesis writers,

As the culmination of your work as an English major, the critical thesis is your opportunity to 1) reflect on what you have learned about scholarly inquiry in the discipline of literary studies; 2) consider the texts, topics, and methods of literary analysis *that you have encountered in your courses* that you wish to explore more deeply (if you've never taken a course on/related to the subject you're considering, it might not be the best choice); and 3) articulate for the Department a research question and project proposal that you will use to guide your thesis work.

Although your proposal does not yet need to have a narrowed, defined argument (that can only come after substantial research and writing) it *should* have a clear purpose and direction. The English Department reads critical proposals with the knowledge that your ideas will require room for development and transformation, but it may also provide feedback on your ideas, or even ask for revision in some cases, before approving your thesis plan. Once approved, the Department will assign your thesis to an advisor based, first and foremost, on faculty expertise in your proposed field(s), and, second, on distributing thesis advising as equitably as possible.

All critical proposals must contain a 400-600 -word description of your primary literary text(s), your project's topic with relation to your text(s), and your accompanying research question. You must also provide a bibliography of sources (scholarly articles, book chapters, or monographs and/or theoretical texts) relevant to your inquiry. Finally, when and where it is relevant to your proposal and research question, you should also include a description of the theoretical, archival, and/or other methodological approaches on which you plan to draw in your project (this is especially necessary if you would like to be considered for honors nomination – more information under Option 3 below).

*There are three options for completing a critical thesis. Please consider these options before composing and submitting your proposal in accordance with the guidelines above and the expectations below.*

### **Option 1 – A one-semester thesis**

You will write an article-length critical essay (*at least* 20 pages for a passing grade, but not much more than 30-35) in which you develop a focused argument by synthesizing your sustained close reading of the primary text(s) with outside, scholarly research in the field(s) of your inquiry. The essay should contain a brief introduction (approx. 3 pgs), a literature review (5-7 pgs), your critical analysis (15-25 pgs), and a conclusion (2-3 pgs).

### **Option 2 – Completing the thesis through a junior-senior seminar**

Rather than working as in an independent study, you may request to use a junior-senior seminar and its topic to help guide your thesis process. You will still write an article-length (20-35 -page) critical essay with the same requirements as in Option 1, but you will have the benefit of supporting discussion and readings from the seminar to help structure your research and thinking. Be advised: you will need the consent of the seminar instructor to move forward with this option. Students are expected to do all of the work of the seminar. Students meet both the seminar and the thesis requirements insofar as the department is concerned, but only receive college credit for the thesis. Note also that the seminar does not appear on the transcript. Students pursuing this option should note the title of the seminar on the questionnaire.

### **Option 3 – A two-semester honors thesis**

An honors thesis differs from non-honors in both breadth and depth. The honors thesis requires a sophisticated theoretical and methodological approach to your research and argument. You will

outline your rationale for your methods and approach to inquiry, which will accompany your literature review in a more substantial introduction (12-15 pages). Often divided into two or more chapters (each 20-30 pages, or the length of a short article), your subsequent analysis will draw on and further the methods and theory outlined in your introduction, before presenting a conclusion (5-7 pages) that reiterates not merely your argument, but also the stakes of your project with relation to the larger scholarly conversation taking place in your field(s). Students writing honors theses are also advised to remember that quantity is not a substitute for quality: an honors thesis requires not merely more writing, but *a more nuanced argument made through more refined writing*.

The Department must nominate students to the honors program, and there are two paths to this nomination. The first path is to articulate your interest in honors in your proposal. After doing so, the Department will determine if your proposal warrants year-long inquiry, and will preliminarily invite you to write an honors thesis. This entails successfully laying out your lit review and methods/approaches section in the fall term, alongside the majority (if not totality) of a full chapter. If your advisor determines that your work is of honors quality at that point, they will nominate you to the honors committee, and you will continue writing in Winter. (If your advisor determines that your work is not of honors quality, you will have the choice to write a two-semester thesis without the honors process, or simply to register for a different course in Winter.) The other path to honors nomination is via the invitation of the department – either following the submission of your proposal, or, if writing a thesis in fall, after completing work that is of honors quality. You may of course decline the invitation, but if you accept the subsequent process is the same as outlined above. All honors theses must be submitted in full by the Honors Committee deadline (usually mid-to-end of March), and defended to a committee of experts in the final two weeks of Winter term.

**After you have finished writing your proposal, fill out the thesis proposal questionnaire, attach your proposal to the questionnaire as a single.pdf document, and then... submit!**

## Writing a Creative Thesis Proposal

Proposal due date: April 2, 2024

Dear writers,

The creative thesis proposal is a moment for you to 1) consider how your creative writing has evolved thus far at Bates; 2) identify for the Department those authors and poets you have encountered along the way who usefully align with your current aims as a writer; and 3) articulate the sort of creative writing project that interests you at the moment of application.

In other words, the English Department reads creative proposals with the full knowledge that the project will likely transform in unexpected ways from this initial vision.

All creative proposals should fall between 300-600 words, on one or two pages, either single or double-spaced. If you have not yet completed the advanced workshop in your genre, we strongly recommend using this course to write your creative thesis.

### Two-semester thesis

If you are applying for a two-semester creative thesis, please complete this proposal and also include a five-page excerpt from your poetry or prose to use as a writing sample. (Poetry will be single-spaced, prose will be double-spaced). Students granted permission to begin a two-semester creative thesis are reminded that *continuance into the second semester is not guaranteed, and is based upon an excellent performance in the first term.*

### What is the form and genre of your proposed thesis?

In prose, writers may propose a collection of short stories or microfictions, a novella or part of a novel, a collection of essays, a memoir, or other creative nonfiction narrative forms. Poets may propose a collection of poems or epic poem written in one or many formal approach/es, including free verse. Students may also elect to propose graphic elements in their thesis. Students may propose a hybrid thesis, which aims to blur the genres, or a thesis which evidences the digital humanities. (For example, one writer recently completed a graphic memoir/biography hybrid which existed as a printed book manuscript and a digital book). In brief, give the Department a sense of your formal intention, with the expectation that it may change as you begin to write.

NOTE: It is not recommended to propose a thesis of multiple, divergent genres. The creative thesis is **a single creative project**, and it should showcase a singular vision. Students may, however, propose genre-bending and genre-differentiated work. A student might propose to write autofiction, for example, or they may propose a two-semester thesis writing a fiction thesis in one semester, and a poetry thesis in the next semester, if requisite writing workshops have been successfully completed.

### Influences

The Department also recommends that you provide the names of four or more writers or poets you have read whose work speaks to you—those novels, essays, poems, stories, plays which have thus far helped you develop as a writer. One of the benefits of a creative thesis, however, is the ability to create a personalized reading list, so you might also list certain writers you've always *hoped* to read, but haven't yet had the opportunity.

Lastly, we recommend that your proposal speaks as a student of the world outside the classroom. *What do you hope to remember, observe, explore and question in your creative thesis?*

**After you have finished writing your proposal, fill out the thesis proposal questionnaire, attach your proposal to the questionnaire as a single.pdf document, and then... submit!**