

Department of English

The E. Elizabeth Dana Reading Prize Submissions

Due June 4th

The Dana Prize is awarded to the student who undertakes and completes the best original reading program over the summer vacation.

The reading program is to be planned by you. It will, in most cases, grow out of work done in an English course, but the reading must be outside the work required for the course. It should, furthermore, be organized around some principle so that reading the works in connection with one another becomes a useful activity. For example, you might want to read most of the works of a single novelist or poet, or a number of works on the same theme or in the same genre, or perhaps a number of works which seem at least superficially to treat the same material (e.g., the city, the West, women's roles, family life in a certain period, etc.). A loosely organized program aimed simply at "filling gaps" would probably not seem sufficiently focused. There are any number of ways in which such a program might be organized, and you should follow your own interests, since the main reward of such a project should be the reading itself rather than the prize.

A prize-winning project will reveal your initiative, independent and original thinking, and critical understanding of the material. A reading list designed specifically to prepare you for writing the Senior Essay will seem less independent than a project which is not linked to some other goal. A project designed to help you answer some question or problem discovered in a course will show initiative (e.g., how do other dramatists of the period treat some of the same themes Shakespeare develops? What aspects of romanticism were modern poets reacting against?).

The first question most students ask about the reading list is "How long should it be?" Although a summer's reading should represent a substantial amount of work, the quality of the reading and critical thinking will clearly be more important than the amount read. A reading project on the pastoral elegy, for example, might list no more than 5-6 "longish" poems; but studying those poems in relation to each other and in relation to the context in which each was written could easily demand a summer's attention. A project on "all the novels of Charles Dickens" (or even a number of them) would involve reading more pages, but this project might in the end be less successful if the amount of reading did not allow you to read carefully and critically.

If you are interested in competing for the Dana Prize, submit a copy of your proposal and your reading list to the English Department Office by **3:00 p.m., Friday, June 4th**. Include your name, class, college box number and summer address. Send it as an attachment to: Tracey Sciortino <trsciortino@vassar.edu>. *Students who do not submit such a proposal in the Spring cannot be considered for the prize in the Fall.*

Early in the Fall, submit a list of the books you have actually read to the English Department Prize Committee. During October, members of the Department will talk with you about your reading. This meeting will not take the form of an "oral examination" but will offer you an informal opportunity to present your project, explain its nature, where it has led, what discoveries or conclusions you have reached, and what value you feel it has had. The interviewing committee will be most interested in ascertaining your sense of the coherence of your project, your ability to establish connections among the works read, and your incisiveness in talking critically and concretely about individual works.

Good luck with your project, and enjoy it!