

## The English Department

### Faculty

**Mark C. Amodio**, Professor of English

**Peter Antelyes**, Associate Professor of English

**Heesok Chang**, Associate Professor of English

**Robert DeMaria**, Professor of English

\* **Eve Dunbar**, Associate Professor of English

\*\* **Leslie C. Dunn**, Professor of English

**Katie Gemmill**, Assistant Professor of English

**Wendy Graham**, Professor of English and Chair

**Jessica Greenbaum**, Adjunct Instructor in English

**Hua Hsu**, Associate Professor of English

**Jean M. Kane**, Professor of English

\*\* **Paul Kane**, Professor of English

\*\* **Amitava Kumar**, Professor of English

**M Mark**, Adjunct Associate Professor of English

\* **Zoltán Márkus**, Associate Professor of English

**Molly S. McGlennen**, Associate Professor of English

**David Means**, Visiting Associate Professor of English

**Tracy O'Neill**, Assistant Professor in Creative Writing

**Hiram Perez**, Associate Professor of English

**Zachary Roberts**, Adjunct Instructor in English

\* **Paul Russell**, Professor of English

**Nina Shengold**, Adjunct Instructor in English

**Erin Sweany**, Visiting Assistant Professor

**Tyrone R. Simpson, II**, Associate Professor of English

**Susan Zlotnick**, Professor of English

*For a description of faculty members' interests see pp 6-7. If you are looking for a senior thesis advisor, this is a good place to start.*

\* On leave in Fall '20.

\*\* On leave in Spring '21.

**Requirements for Concentration:**

A minimum of ten graded units plus 1.5 units of ungraded Intensive work. Three units must be elected at the 300-level, including at minimum of one taken in the senior year. No AP credit or course taken NRO may be counted toward the requirements for the major.

**Distribution Requirements:**

Majors are required to take two units of work in literature written before 1800 and one unit of work in literature written before 1900. Majors may fulfill the historical distribution requirement in one of two ways: by taking three courses focused on literature written before 1800, or two courses focused on literature written before 1800 and one course focused on nineteenth-century literature. Majors must also take one course that focuses on issues of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or disability. These courses must be taken at either the 200- or 300-level.

English majors who are members of the classes of 2020 and 2021 will be able to fulfill their major requirements in one of two ways:

- 1) They may elect to take 10 graded units plus 1.5 units of Intensives  
or
- 2) They may elect to take 11 graded units plus .5 units of Intensives.

The distribution requirements and minimum number of units at the 300-level will be the same for all classes.

**Recommendations:**

English 101 and 170 are strongly recommended as foundational courses, and students are also strongly encouraged to work from the 200- to the 300-level in at least one field of study. Acquaintance with a classical language (Latin or Greek) or Old English, German, or French is useful for the study of English literature, as are appropriate courses in philosophy, history, and other literatures.

**Further information:**

Applicants for English 209 (Advanced Creative Writing: Narrative), English 211 (Advanced Creative Writing: Verse), English 304 (Creative Writing Seminar), and English 305-306 (Senior Creative Writing Seminar), must submit samples of their writing *before* pre-registration; please check with the Department office for the exact date of the deadline.

**Correlate Sequences in English:**

The department offers seven correlates in English: Race and Ethnicity; Theory, Criticism and Transnational Studies; Poetry and Poetics; Literary Forms; British Literary History; American Literary History and Creative Writing. Further information on these correlates can be found below.

**View courses from the 2020-21 Vassar College Catalogue.**

**Courses That Fulfill English Major Requirements  
For Academic Year 2020-21**

**pre-1800, pre-1900, Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality (REGS)**

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Requirement Fulfilled</u>
214 Process, Prose, Pedagogy	
219 Queer of Color Critique	REGS
222 Early British Literature	pre-1800
225 American Literature, Origins to 1865	pre-1900
228 African American Literature	REGS
229 Asian-American Literature, 1946-present	REGS
230 Latina and Latino Literature	REGS
235 Old English	pre-1800
236 <i>Beowulf</i>	pre-1800
237 Medieval Literature	pre-1800
240 Shakespeare	pre-1800
245 The Enlightenment	pre-1800
248 The Age of Romanticism	pre-1900
249 Victorian Literature	pre-1900
256 Modern British and Irish Literatures	
257 The Novel/English after 1945	
262 Postcolonial Literatures	REGS
270 New York Stories	
271 Reviewing Shakespeare	
272 What Makes a Collection?	
282 Vassar Critical Journal Intensive	
284 Writing Medicine Intensive	
288 From Pamphlets to Zines: A Self-Publishing Workshop Intensive	
302 Adaptations	
319 Race and its Metaphors	REGS
320 Studies in Comparative Literature	pre-1900
328 Literature of the American Renaissance	pre-1900
330 American Modernism	REGS
340 Studies in Medieval Literature	pre-1800
342 Studies in Shakespeare	pre-1800
345 Milton	pre-1800
350 Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Literature	pre-1800
351 Studies in Nineteenth-Century British Literature	pre-1900
352 Studies in Romanticism	REGS, pre-1900
357 Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature	
365 Virginia Woolf	REGS
375 Feminist Disability Studies	REGS
380 Then Whose Negro Are You?	REGS
381 Visions and Revisions of the Fall	
387 The Research Intensive: Sources, Methods, Processes	

\*As course topics change, so do the requirements they fulfill. Therefore, this list is only applicable for the 2020-2021 academic year.

## Correlate Sequences in English

The curriculum in English presents a broad array of courses representing a variety of subjects—literatures from different periods of history and geographical locations, genres, and approaches or methods of study. Given the scope of the discipline, the correlate sequences we offer allow students to tailor their programs to individual interests within the discipline while maintaining a broader understanding of the contexts surrounding that area of focus.

Here are the correlate areas:

1. Race and Ethnicity
2. Theory, Criticism and Transnational Studies
3. Poetry and Poetics
4. Literary Forms
5. British Literary History
6. American Literary History
7. Creative Writing

These correlates are designed to articulate coherent plans of study that build from a foundation in introductory and intermediate courses to great depth and complexity in advanced courses. Students are advised, then, to try to take the courses in sequence, beginning with either English 101 or 170 (or both), moving on to 200-level courses, and concluding with 300-level seminars. Each sequence offers a number of courses from which the students must elect six to complete the sequence.

The correlate sequences are defined, in part, to suggest intellectual compatibilities between literature and other disciplines. Students majoring in Africana Studies or Women’s Studies, for example, will find that the correlate in “Race and Ethnicity” supplements and extends their work in the major. At the same time, because these correlates articulate issues and areas of interest within the discipline, English majors will discover in them useful guides for developing a sequenced and coherent plan of courses to fulfill the requirements in the major.

Since many of the courses in the English Department are topics courses that change from year to year, we cannot list all the courses that, in any given year, may be applied to correlate sequences. If you wish a special topics course to count towards one of the correlate sequences, you should check with the associate chair to make sure that course is appropriate for the correlate sequence you are pursuing.

### 1. Race and Ethnicity

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two of the following: English 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 251, 252, 253\*, 262, 286
- At least one of the following: English 319, 326, JWS 350, 370

### 2. Theory, Criticism and Transnational Studies

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least one of the following: English 217, 317
- At least one of the following: English 218, 252, 256, 257, 262
- At least one of the following: English 320, 331, 362, 370

### 3. Poetry and Poetics

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two of the following: English 211, 222, 236, 237, 248, \*249
- At least two of the following: English 304, 315, 345, 352, 355

#### **4. Literary Forms**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two of the following:
- English 207, 209, 211, 215, 216, 217, 240, 241-242, 247, 255, 256, 257, 262
- At least two of the following: English 304, 315, 317, 325, 326, 329, 342, 345, 352, 355, 362

#### **5. British Literary History**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170, 222
- At least two of the following:
- English 215, 235, 236, 237, 240, 241-242, 245, 247, 248, 249, 255, 256, 262
- At least one of the following: English 340, 341, 342, 345, 350, 351, 352

#### **6. American Literary History**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least one of the following: English 225, 226
- At least one of the following: English 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 251, \*252, 253
- At least two of the following: English 326, 328, 329, 330, 331

#### **7. Creative Writing**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two literary courses in the genre or genres of focus
- At least three of the following: 203, 205, 206, 207, 209, 211, 304, 305-306
- At least one course in the correlate must be taken at the 300 level

\* Courses that may be counted when the topic is appropriate.

## The Faculty

The following list of the English department faculty suggests its range and vitality, and it reveals hidden talents and interests. Members of the department have described themselves in terms of their intellectual interests—the subjects they study and teach and the areas in which they have directed tutorials and guided independent studies. Please consult this list when you are selecting an advisor, a tutor, or looking for a faculty member to sponsor Independent Study or Field Work.

**Mark C. Amodio:** Old and Middle English poetry and prose; oral theory; history of the English language; literary theory; linguistics; Old Norse language and literature; Renaissance drama and poetry; Milton, Orwell; film and literature.

**Peter Antelyes:** American literature, Jewish Studies, comics and graphics novels, film, and music.

**Heesok Chang:** Twentieth-century British and Irish literature; literary modernism; critical theory; rhetoric; media and visual studies.

**Robert DeMaria:** Milton; Seventeenth-century literature; Eighteenth-century literature; history of media; history of language; lexicography; biography.

**\*Eve Dunbar:** Nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American literature; Women writers of color; Science-fiction cinema.

**\*\*Leslie C. Dunn:** Early modern literature, including Shakespeare and women writers; feminist literary and cultural studies; literature and music; literature and medicine; and disability studies.

**Katie Gemmill:** Eighteenth-century and Romantic literature in England; contemporary screen adaptation of the literature of these periods; queer studies; gender studies; feminist theory and the body; literature and the environment; poetry and poetics.

**Wendy Graham:** American Literature; American Culture, emphasizing issues of gender and sexual nonconformity as well as the relationship between fiction and the emerging social sciences (psychology, anthropology, museology, sociology, biophysics); Literary Decadence, Pre-Raphaelitism, and the notion of “sister arts”; literary and critical theory; African-American literature.

**Jessica Greenbaum:** Poetry writing; autobiographical, narrative lyrical poetry; modern and contemporary poetry; form in poetry; feminism, humanitarianism, and social critique in poetry; contemporary poetry in relation to Jewish texts.

**Hua Hsu:** Transpacific/Asian American literature; 20th Century American literature and culture; literary transnationalism; philosophies of race and ethnicity; American historical fiction; protest literature; autobiography and genre; film and music criticism.

**Jean M. Kane:** Post-colonial literatures; modern and contemporary British literature; imperial discourse; women’s studies; creative writing.

**\*\*Paul Kane:** American and British literature; poetry; literature and the environment; Australian and other post-colonial literatures; literary theory and criticism.

**\*\*Amitava Kumar:** Reportage; essay-form, both in prose and film; literatures describing the global movement of goods and people; memory-work.

**M Mark:** Twentieth-century literature; contemporary literature; postcolonial literature; modern South Asian literature; modern Irish literature; literary modernism; drama; literature and film. Creative writing: fiction and literary nonfiction.

**\*Zoltán Márkus:** Early modern literature, especially drama; Shakespeare studies; European drama; cultural, literary, and performance theory.

**Molly S. McGlennen:** Native American literature, Native American Women and Feminisms, Native American Urban Experience, Native American literary theory, Ojibwe literature and identity, Contemporary Ethnic poetry, Poetry writing.

**David Means:** Creative writing; fiction and poetry; modern fiction.

**Tracy O'Neill:**

**Hiram Perez:** Immigration and Diaspora, Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Literature, African American Literature, Asian American Literature, Feminism, Queer Studies, Film, Popular Culture, Psychoanalysis.

**Zachary Roberts:** Nineteenth-century American literature; realism and American realism; history of the novel; literary impressionism; literature and the visual arts; aesthetics and theories of representation; Henry James; American cultural criticism.

**\*Paul Russell:** Twentieth and Twenty-first century prose fiction, especially Joyce, Woolf and Nabokov; Dickens; Queer Studies; Mormons.

**Nina Shengold:** Creative writing in multiple genres; fiction; creative nonfiction; playwriting; screenwriting; hybrid performance forms.

**Tyrone Simpson, II:** Urban literature, cities and ghettoization, autobiography, critical theory, cultures of US imperialism.

**Erin E. Sweany:** Old and Middle English languages and literatures; philology; history of medicine; health/medical humanities; posthumanist, New Materialist, and feminist approaches to language and literature study.

**Susan Zlotnick:** Victorian studies; gender studies; the novel; working-class literature; the intersections of history and literature; independent projects welcome.

\* On leave in Fall '20.

\*\* On leave in Spring '21.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Area Requirements

#### **Does English 226 (American Literature, 1865-1925) count as a pre-1900 course?**

No. Although the course covers material from the latter half of the nineteenth century, it deals substantially with literary modernism. English 225 (American Literature, Origins to pre-1900) does satisfy the pre-1900 requirement.

#### **Can area requirements be covered by courses taken JYA or during summer session?**

Yes, with approval from the associate chair. In order to receive pre-approval, make an appointment with the associate chair; bring with you a course description from the college or university catalogue and a copy of the syllabus. Once you return to Vassar (or via e-mail) you will need to provide copies (scans/pdfs) of the written work you completed.

### Credit Questions

#### **I received an AP credit in English. Does this count towards my English major?**

No. Your AP English credit does not count as 1 of the 11.5 credits you need to complete the English major. However, *it does count towards your total college credits* (1 of 32 needed to graduate).

#### **My English JYA credits appear in my transcript as ungraded work. Will they count towards the major, even though the departmental requirements state that 10 of the 11.5 required units must be graded units?**

Yes. As long as your JYA credits are approved English credits, they will count towards your English major.

#### **Can any of the English credits I have earned at other schools, either JYA or during summer session, count as a 300-level credit?**

Generally speaking, no. However, the associate chair will take into consideration certain cases, such as courses with heavy writing and reading requirements offered at Cambridge and Oxford Universities, where the student can demonstrate that the course in question and the work produced for it are comparable to that of a 300-level English class at Vassar. Any student petitioning for 300-level credit must show their written assignments to the associate chair. Also, no more than one course taken at another institution can qualify.

#### **Can a Vassar course I have taken outside of the English department count towards my major?**

Yes, under the following circumstances:

You can count any course that has been cross-listed with the English department or if it has been approved by the associate chair to count as an English credit. The quickest way to find out if such a course will count towards your major is to ask the instructor, since she or he is responsible for petitioning the department for such approval.

#### **Before declaring my English major, I NRO'd an English course. I did well in the class and received a letter grade for it on my transcript. Can this course count towards the major?**

Unfortunately, no. Even if you received an "A" for the course, the non-recording option counts towards the quota of your allowable nongraded units. Your transcript may show a letter grade for the course, but our records will indicate it was elected as NRO.



## **Independent Study and Field Work**

### **How do I apply for English 298 (Independent Study), 399 (Senior Independent Study), or 290 (Field Work)?**

Permission to elect Independent Study and Field Work is granted by the associate chair, but you first must find a faculty sponsor. If you wish to do 298, 399, or 290 and you don't know who would be an appropriate sponsor, consult the associate chair first. Occasionally, a request for Independent Study or Field Work requires permission of the chair after consultation with the associate chair.

Generally, an Independent Study is not considered an Intensive, since the aim of the Intensives is collaborative learning. If you can organize a small group of students, you may be able to find a professor willing to participate in a student-designed Intensive. Be mindful, however, that professors arrange their teaching schedules a year in advance. Further, all Intensives must be approved by a college committee. That means that you would need to plan ahead of time and make a commitment to the professor/course.

### **What kinds of Field Work will the department sponsor to oversee?**

The project must fall clearly within the scope of our concerns as an English Department. Projects involving a student's work in television, radio, or advertising, for example, are best referred to either the American Culture Program or the Department of Sociology (which offer courses in those fields).

You are required to submit a written proposal. The proposal should address the relevance of the project to your work as an English major (or work in English courses) as well as outline clearly and specifically your duties on the job.

Field work can count as an Intensive, but you must consult the associate chair to get it approved.

## Credit for Summer Classes

We recognize that the covid-19 semester has disrupted many an English major's plans. While we want to help you get back on track, we have to acknowledge that there are certain hurdles to satisfying requirements for the English major, especially beyond the halls of peer institutions and online. It is going to be a bit challenging to receive credit for summer work as an English major.

Once you satisfy the registrar's requirement for at least 28 hours of instruction, preferably over the course of 6-weeks, and at an accredited institution, you have to check out our departmental rules. As a general matter, summer classes do not have enough reading and writing assignments. Usually, they are not on a par with what we offer here at Vassar.

That is why many schools ask us to sign pre-approval forms, essentially promising you credit for the work you perform over the summer. It's just not that simple.

We view these forms as promissory notes. At the earliest opportunity, preferably before you take a class, share the syllabus with either the chair Wendy Graham ([wegraham@vassar.edu](mailto:wegram@vassar.edu)) or the associate chair Eve Dunbar ([evdunbar@vassar.edu](mailto:evdunbar@vassar.edu)).

Why do we ask for a syllabus? We should be able to gauge the quality and quantity of readings from the course syllabus, whereas the course description gives little to no indication of breadth. One way to think about this is, "how many books am I assigned in a typical English class at Vassar?"

At the end of the summer, you *must* scan the essays you wrote for the course and send these as email attachments to one or both of us. We expect to see about 20 pages of essay writing (*exclusive* of moodle posts, journal entries, tests, or presentations). That might take the form of two short essays and a long essay or two 8-10 page papers. If you can convince a professor of a summer course to let you write longer papers to satisfy our requirements, you can discuss that with one of us.

You may be able to find a creative writing course, if you're interested in that subject, which would allow you to write however much you wish and qualify for credit as a substitute for English 205 or 206. We would still hope to see some reading assignments, and you would still be *required to submit* the syllabus and written work to us at the end of the summer.

All work must be taken for a **grade**! Send transcripts to the registrar Colleen Mallet ([comallet@vassar.edu](mailto:comallet@vassar.edu)).

### **Is there a Creative Writing Program at Vassar?**

While there is no separate program for creative writing within the Vassar English Department, we offer an array of creative writing courses. Students should begin with English 205: Introductory Creative Writing, which may be taken in either A or B semester of sophomore year. It is designed for sophomores, though others may enroll. English 205 serves as a prerequisite for English 206, which is also usually offered in both A and B semesters. One section of 206 may be designated as a poetry section for those students who wish to work exclusively in that form.

The department also offers English 209, Advanced Creative Writing: Narrative, and English 211, Advanced Creative Writing: Verse, that are open to both majors and non-majors. Students who wish to be considered for these courses must submit a writing portfolio prior to the beginning of pre-registration; please check with the English office for the exact due date. A portfolio should consist of 15 to 20 pages of fiction or 6 to 8 poems.

Creative writing courses are not open to first-year students in the Fall semester.

A writing portfolio is also required admission to the following creative writing courses: 203, 209, 211, 304, and 305-306. Please check with the English office for the exact due date. English 305-306 is open only to seniors.

Independent study in creative writing is also available for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, subject to the ordinary rules for independent study in the English department, and English majors may elect to undertake a creative thesis.

All of our creative writing courses include study of established authors as well as in-class consideration of student work.

Vassar sends many graduates on to MFA Programs in Creative Writing. Recent graduates have studied at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Columbia, NYU, University of Montana, University of Massachusetts, Washington University, University of Wisconsin, University of Texas, Brooklyn College, and University of Arkansas. Notable writers who have attended Vassar include Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elizabeth Bishop, Muriel Rukeyser, Mary Oliver, Jane Smiley, Erica Funkhauser, Elizabeth Spires, Carole Maso, Keith Scribner, Curtis Sittenfeld, Adam Ross, Amber Dermont, Jesse Ball, Aimee Friedmann, Miranda Beverly-Whitmore, Joe Hill, and Owen King.

## Planning Your Senior Year

Students should begin planning their senior year well in advance. As a part of this process, there are a number of questions you should ask yourself.

For example: How do my various courses connect with each other? What is my trajectory through the major and how might the senior year serve as a capstone for it? While the department hopes that students will sample the rich diversity of its offerings, the department also strongly encourages students to work up from the 200-level to the 300-level in at least one field.

Do I want to write a thesis? If so, what kind of preparation do I need?

If you decide to enroll in English 300 and write a critical (or creative thesis), you should make sure that you have adequately prepared yourself for undertaking the project. Take coursework in your chosen field before you write the thesis. Consider how your JYA experience, or courses taken in other departments might support/anticipate the work you want to do on your thesis. In the semester before you write the thesis, talk to both your major and thesis advisor about the kind of work you might be able to undertake independently over the summer or during winter break.

The senior thesis is ungraded and counts as a full unit Intensive, despite the fact that it is not an exercise in collaborative learning. As a department, we want to encourage students to undertake a demanding and fulfilling research/writing project.

In the future, we may offer a collective thesis preparation Intensive for .5 units. At present, the Independent Study, which may well involve thesis prep, does NOT count as an Intensive. The Intensives are a new learning initiative, and we need to get them off the ground before making exceptions.

Here, again, is an opportunity for a group of students to petition a professor to supervise a .5 unit thesis prep Intensive. Again, this would have to be organized 6-9 months in advance due to college oversight and teaching schedules.

Do I want to apply for the one-semester Creative Writing Seminar or the year-long Senior Creative Writing Seminar? Students wishing to apply for any of the senior writing courses should prepare themselves by taking the writing courses offered at the 200-level.

If you choose, in lieu of English 300, you can enroll in a 300-level seminar during your senior year. (One unit of 300-level work must be taken senior year.)

The department encourages English majors to think imaginatively about these and similar questions and to seek advice from their major advisers as well as their course instructors.

## **Creative Work in the Senior Year**

### **What exactly is the Senior Creative Writing Seminar (English 305-06)?**

The Creative Writing Seminar is a course in reading and writing like all other courses in the department; it is not solely a “writing workshop.” Reading is drawn for the most part from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to provide examples of various types of writing: fiction, poetry, and nonfiction outside of literary criticism. Class time is divided between discussion of this reading and discussion of student writing.

### **Who can take the Senior Creative Writing Seminar and how can I apply?**

This course is open only to seniors from all majors. To be considered for admission to English 305-306, you need to submit two copies of samples of your writing; please check with the English office for the exact date. Try to submit samples of the kind of writing that you think you may want to concentrate on in your senior project. However, it is more important that you submit writing that you feel best shows your abilities than to predict what you will write in this year-long course. If you are interested in writing fiction, you should submit one or two completed stories; if poetry, a number of poems; if literary nonfiction, an extended prose piece, and so on. You may also wish to submit a variety of pieces (poetry and prose). You should not submit traditional critical essays (papers), although papers that veer toward literary nonfiction are a possibility. Feel free to use samples of writing you have done for other courses; that is, you need not write something new for this process. The names of students selected for English 305-306 will be posted outside the English Office. Enrollment is limited to twelve students.

### **What is the Creative Writing Seminar?**

The Creative Writing Seminar is a one-term course open to juniors and seniors from all majors. To be considered for admission, you need to submit samples before pre-registration.

### **What other creative writing courses are open to seniors?**

All the 200-level writing courses are open to seniors. Seniors may also elect to write a creative thesis (English 300).

## **Rumors and Queries**

### **Do professors in the department keep secret grade books?**

Some do and some don't. But even if a professor keeps a private entry of grades for papers, exams, oral reports, participation, and so forth, it functions more as a memory aid than an official record. Since your final grade will be determined by your performance over the course of the semester—taking into account factors like effort and improvement—the professor's written comments on papers will provide an index of how you are doing.

### **Why don't professors in the English department put grades on papers?**

This long-standing practice in the English department is based on the theory that an English course is a conversation. The conversation takes place in class among students and teachers; it takes place in conferences and e-mail; and it takes place in the dialogue between a student's paper and a teacher's response. The placement of a grade on the paper puts an end to this part of the conversation. A student paper is not an exam but is rather an opportunity for the student to speak on a particular subject. The instructor's response is not a grade, but it is an informed response to what the student has said.

### **Whom should one ask about graduate study in English?**

The chair of the department and the associate chair are available by appointment to discuss graduate school plans and applications for post-graduate grants. It also makes sense to talk to junior faculty about their more recent experiences of graduate school.

## Guidelines for Requesting Letters of Recommendation

Every academic year, members of the English department write hundreds of letters of recommendation for students and former students. This is, of course, a part of their work as teachers and mentors, and students should not be shy about asking for recommendations. However, faculty members take considerable time on the task; write in detail and make every effort to present a candidate in the best possible light. They write different letters, of course, for each individual, and they write letters designed for a variety of applications, including graduate school, law school, medical school, summer fellowships, traveling fellowships, study abroad programs, prizes, employment prospects, and internships. Students, therefore, should do what they can to give faculty the time and information needed to write successfully on their behalf. Here are some guidelines, adapted from those issued to undergraduates at Harvard:

- \* Give at least three, preferably four or more, weeks notice for any request. Even if you know that the instructor has a letter already on file, do not assume that it can be changed and quickly printed. Letters may need significant revision to fit a particular purpose.
- \* Include a written statement of the due date and whether it is a postmark or a receipt date.
- \* Provide a written description of the purpose of the letter and/or a copy of instructions intended for the person writing. If there are multiple letters for different purposes, provide a description for each (e.g., graduate school, law school, traveling fellowship).
- \* Make sure to provide the instructor with your statement of purpose or letter of intent for each application. This statement is crucial to the success of your application, and it is essential for your instructor to read it when writing on your behalf. If your instructor is willing to work with you on the statement, you should certainly take advantage of the opportunity.
- \* Offer to provide copies of class papers and of any other papers directly relevant.
- \* Fill out any forms as completely as you can. Do not expect the person writing for you to fill out any information that you yourself know.
- \* Offer to provide a copy of your transcript (an unofficial one is fine) and a CV.
- \* Offer to have an individual conference about the reasons for your application(s). At the very least, explain these reasons either by including a written statement or by including a draft of your project or statement of purpose submitted with your application.
- \* Include fully addressed envelopes for each letter and affix sufficient postage.
- \* Make certain to fill out any waiver request, either yes or no. This is easily missed.
- \* Do not email requests for letters along with attachments. Print out everything and give or send all materials to the person whom you are asking to write for you. In other words, don't expect the person writing for you to print out your work or to visit a web site (unless strictly required by the party receiving the letter).
- \* Never assume that a letter can be faxed or e-mailed at the last minute. This puts unacceptable constraints on the person writing on your behalf.