

**The English Department  
Spring '20**

**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
- \* **Hua Hsu**, Associate Professor of English
- \* **Michael Joyce**, Professor of English  
**Jean M. Kane**, Professor of English  
**Paul Kane**, Professor of English
- \* **Amitava Kumar**, Professor of English  
**Owen King**, Adjunct Assistant 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  
**Hiram Perez**, Associate Professor of English
- \* **Paul Russell**, Professor of English  
**Nina Shengold**, Adjunct Instructor in English  
**Tyrone R. Simpson, II**, Associate Professor of English  
**Rob Smith**, Visiting Assistant Professor of English  
**Erin Sweany**, Mellon Post-doctoral Fellow in English  
**Talia Vestri**, Visiting Assistant Professor of English  
**Susan Zlotnick**, Professor of English

*For a description of faculty members' interests see pp 15-16. If you are looking for a senior thesis advisor, this is a good place to start.*

- \* *On leave in Spring '20.*

**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.

## I. Introduction to Literary Study English Freshman Course Descriptions

### 101.51

Mr. Márkus

MW 10:30-11:45    CLS

#### **“What’s Love Got to Do with It?”**

This course focuses on representations of love (filial, parental, sexual, etc.) from antiquity to the present. By situating the selected works in their contemporary cultural and historical contexts, the course explores significant differences as well as possible continuities between past and present interpretations and representations of such basic concepts and institutions as gender, family, marriage, filial and marital duties, the private sphere, and sexuality. Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* serves as a chronological center for these investigations, but we will also discuss passages from the Bible and selected texts (representing diverse dramatic, epic, and lyric genres) by Euripides, Aristophanes, Ovid, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Shelley, Emily Brontë, and others. In addition, we will look at various adaptations (musical, theatrical, fine arts) of *Romeo and Juliet* as well as film versions.

### 101.52

Ms. Carter

MW 9:00-10:15    CLS

#### **Writing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and the Public Self**

This course looks at the problem of representing experience, one’s own or someone else’s, in the biographical/autobiographical mode. Whether we are investigating a writer’s own autobiography, or an author’s engagement with someone else’s narrative of failure or triumph, departure or arrival, we will ask the same questions: what motivates a person to tell his or her life story, or to investigate someone else’s, and how are these stories bound by both authors and readers to narratives of citizenship, belonging, and/or exclusion? What claims about the exemplary or excessive qualities of a life story are made, or are emulated, by its readers? In addition to critical consideration of biography and memoir in traditional media, your work in this class will include examinations of the fake memoir and the digital overshare; you will also be invited to curate a branded footprint of your own, using tools of new media.

### **English 170**

English 170, Approaches to Literary Studies, is designed as an introduction to the discipline of literary studies. While each section has a different focus (see descriptions below), they have a common agenda: to explore the concerns and methods of the discipline. Topics range from specific critical approaches and their assumptions to larger questions about meaning-making in literature, criticism, and theory. Assignments will develop skills for research and writing in English, including the use of secondary sources and the critical vocabulary of literary study.

Each section explores a central issue, such as “the idea of a literary period,” “canons and the study of literature,” “nationalism and literary form,” or “gender and genre” (contact the department office for current descriptions). Assignments focus on the development of skills for research and writing in English, including the use of secondary sources and the critical vocabulary of literary study.

As an introduction to the discipline, English 170 is recommended, but not required, for potential majors. It is open to first-year students and sophomores, and others by permission. Although the ideal sequence of English courses for first-year students interested in majoring in English is English 101 in the Fall and 170 in the Spring, 101 is not a prerequisite for 170. First-year students wishing to take English 170 in the fall semester must have AP English credit. Students should not take 101 and 170 during the same semester. Note that English 170 does not fulfill the Freshman Writing Seminar requirement.

**170.51**

Ms. Kane

TR 12:00-1:15 CLS

**Approaches to Literary Studies**

**Topic for 2020b: *Journeys of Transformation*.** The course investigates the journey as a representation of fundamental change. Not only a plot of movement through space, the journey acts as a figure for transformation in or disruption of physical, emotional, and spiritual states of being, in individuals and groups. We will focus on the status and function of the journey as a determinant of bodily character, identity, genre, plot, and history. Each unit will also address a philosophical framework, an interpretive issue, or an analytical practice important to literature as a discipline. Students will develop their skills through class discussion, short, directed assignments, and longer essays, including a research essay and an annotated bibliography. Primary texts will include Christine de Pisan's allegory *City of Women*, the verse romance *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Art Spiegelman's graphic memoir *Maus*, Edgar Rice Burroughs' original pulp *Tarzan*, Colson Whitehead's recent novel *The Intuitionist*, selections from Harriet Jacobs' memoir *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

ENGL 170 is *not* a writing intensive class, in that we will not focus on student writing during class time. The class *does* require college-level grammatical and writing abilities, and a desire to delve into theories of interpretation about texts.

**170.52**

Ms. Vestri

MW 1:30-2:45 CLS

**Approaches to Literary Studies**

**Topic for 2020b: *Romantic Selves*.** This course will take as its focus key works that characterize the period known as British Romanticism: William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mont Blanc," Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and John Keats's Odes. Common to these texts are questions about the subject and the self: How do we define identity? What directs one's place within the natural and social worlds? What is the nature of consciousness and self-construction? Our course will attempt to answer such un-answerable questions with two primary objectives in mind. On the one hand, we will cultivate facility with the terms of literary analysis, developing comfort with using the vocabularies, and implementing the conventions, of both prosody and narratology. On the other hand, we will develop some familiarity with major approaches to literary studies that have sprung up over the past century, including semiotics, formalism, deconstruction, new historicism, feminism, ecocriticism, and queer theory. Students will be challenged to approach each literary text through multiple critical lenses—including their own.

## II. Intermediate Studies

**205**

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

Study and practice of various forms of prose and poetry. Reading and writing assignments may include prose fiction, journals, poetry, drama, and essays. Not open to first-year students in the fall semester.

One 2-hour period and individual conferences with the instructor.

**205.51**

Mr. Smith

R 1:00-3:00 CLS

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

In this section we will focus on the short story. In a supportive workshop environment, we will discuss recently published short fiction, engage in creative writing exercises, address key elements of craft, and offer peer feedback. Stories will not be limited to traditional narrative styles to encourage innovations in form, including prose poetry. Special emphasis will be placed on characterization, language, narrative voice, and the rigorous revisions often necessary to achieve what Edgar Allan Poe describes as 'unified effect.'

**205.52**

Ms. Kane

M 1:00-3:00 CLS

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

This course will help students develop their basic skills in writing verse and short prose forms. The assignments focus on some of the fundamental elements of writing in these genres, and all students will be expected to experiment with both genres in their own work. (Scripts, genre literature, and illustrated work will not be covered or accepted as submissions.) In addition, literary analysis of published writing is a crucial aspect of the course. Later in the semester, students will have the opportunity to generate longer, self-directed assignments. We will discuss student work as well as other readings, which aim to expand writers' repertoire of models, techniques, theories, and structures. Responsible participation in the workshop, through comment and discussion of all assigned reading and punctual submission of manuscripts, is an essential requirement. Each student must also meet with me in an individual conference at least twice during the semester. At the end of the term, each student will submit a final portfolio, which must include at least one substantial revision.

**205.53**

Ms. Shengold

M 3:10-5:10 CLS

### **Introductory Creative Writing: First Person Singular**

There are countless ways to tell a story. First person narration engages the reader directly, whether the narrator's voice belongs to the author or a fictional character. Pairing first-person readings from different genres--memoir, essay, fiction, confessional and persona poems--we'll discuss each piece in practical carpentry terms. How did the writer construct it? What other choices are possible? During the first weeks of class, you'll read a wide variety of literary works and write short pieces in many forms, exploring the range of your creative voice. Later, we'll move into workshop mode, learning the skills of constructive critique and revision. You'll become close readers and sounding boards for each other's work, honing your editing skills and applying the same care and rigor to your works in progress. In conference with the teacher, each student will choose a manuscript to expand and refine as a final project.

**206.51**

Ms. Mark

R 1:00-3:00

CLS

**Intermediate Creative Writing**

**Topic for 2020b: *Crossovers*.** Students will read and write stories that rub up against traditional boundaries, leap over them, move them, and sometimes dissolve them. Taking to heart the lessons of permaculture, where the greatest energy lies at the borders, we'll investigate familiar dichotomies (fiction/fact, prose/poetry, text/image, high/low, comedic/dramatic, female/male, gay/straight, erotic/intellectual) and search for textual pleasures in a more fluid world. This section of Intermediate Creative Writing is both a seminar and a workshop: students will read the work of experienced practitioners, analyze what they've read, and apply what they've learned to their own work. Likely writers: Maggie Nelson, Carmen Maria Machado, Anne Carson, Justin Torres, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Audre Lorde, Zadie Smith, Claudia Rankine, James Baldwin, Jenny Zhang, Purvi Shah, Layli Long Soldier, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ocean Vuong, Ali Wong.

**Prerequisite: open to all students who have taken English 205, or by permission of the instructor.**

**206.52**

Mr. Smith

T 1:00-3:00

CLS

**Intermediate Creative Writing**

**Topic for 2020b: *Writing Nature*.** Throughout time, the ways in which humans interact with the environment has yielded some illuminating narratives. In this section, students will develop their own approaches to nature writing by engaging with the works of both creative writers and eco-theorists. Class time will be concerned with discussing published stories and memoirs, uncovering historical and recent advances in ecocriticism, writing exercises, and workshopping student pieces in a supportive manner. Topics/themes will range from climate change to the metaphoric role of animals in literature. Readings will feature such writers as Lynn White, Barry Lopez, Rene Dubos, Yi-Fu Tuan, Paul Shepherd, Mary Shelly, Greg Gerrard, Charlene Spretnak, Robert McFarlane, and Rachel Carson.

**Prerequisite: open to all students who have taken English 205, or by permission of the instructor.**

**206.53**

Ms. Shengold

W 1:00-3:00

CLS

**Intermediate Creative Writing**

**Topic for 2020b: *Dialogue Forms: Building the Scene*.** This class examines character, action, and dialogue through the building block of the scene. We'll do close readings of selected scenes from classic and contemporary fiction, plays, and screenplays by such writers as Grace Paley, Denis Johnson, Jesmyn Ward, Colum McCann, Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill, Maria Irene Fornes, Sam Shepard, Diana Son, Waldo Salt, Dee Rees, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and John Patrick Shanley. You'll write scenes in each of these literary and performance forms, moving from short exercises to more sustained pieces and a longer final project that you'll expand and revise in intensive workshop sessions, honing your editorial and revision skills. Acting experience is not required, but students should be willing to read their own and others' work aloud in a supportive workshop environment. The class will culminate with an informal reading performance of students' short fiction, one-act plays, and short screenplays.

**Prerequisite: open to all students who have taken English 205, or by permission of the instructor.**

**209.51**

Mr. King

F 3:10-5:10

CLS

**Advanced Creative Writing: Narrative**

Development of the student's abilities as a writer and reader of narrative, with particular emphasis on the short story.

**Writing samples are due before pre-registration. Check with the English office for the exact date of the deadline.** One 2-hour period and individual conferences with the instructor.

**211.51**

Mr. Kane

T 3:10-5:10

CLS

**Advanced Creative Writing: Verse**

This course aims to develop and enhance the student's abilities as a writer and reader of poetry. Particular attention will be paid to poetic form and the resources of verse. Interested students should submit writing samples via email attachments to: [kane@vassar.edu](mailto:kane@vassar.edu).

This course also includes a .5 Intensive: English 386.51, *Vassar Poetry Review*, for those interested in publishing their work. Non-majors as well as majors welcome.

**Writing samples are due before pre-registration. Check with the English Office for the exact date of the deadline.**

One 2-hour period and individual conferences with the instructor, plus 1-hour Intensive, T 5:10-6:10, for those enrolled in 386.51.

**214.51**

Mr. Schultz

TR 10:30-11:45

CLS

**Process, Prose, Pedagogy**

(Same as MEDS 214) An exploration of the intersections among language, form, genre, and medium, this course aims to deepen your appreciation for and understanding of multimodal authorship. To do so, we focus our critical gaze upon one of the more experimental periods of textual production: literary modernism. Together, we consider selections of poetry, short fiction, the novel, woodcut narratives, autobiography, letters, manifestos, essays, and film produced by a diverse range of authors such as Mina Loy and Djuna Barnes, Mu Shiyong and Mikhail Bulgakov, Max Ernst and Zora Neale Hurston—as well as more canonical figures like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Samuel Beckett. Our discussions center on the ways in which writing emerges from its immediate historical contexts, and also how genre and medium look beyond their present moment, revising models inherited from the past and anticipating future forms of expression. Ultimately, this course helps us to better analyze and construct arguments about distinct types of texts through the sustained practice of close critical reading and recursive writing, and to sharpen our ability to facilitate dialogue about complex ideas and various modes of communication.

**218.51**

Ms. Vestri

MW 12:00-1:15

CLS

**Madwomen in the Attic**

(Same as WMST 218) In 1979, feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar articulated a crucial point that was, at the time, shifting the terrain of literary studies: “The poet’s pen,” they remark, “is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis.” Male gender, in other words, had somehow become a necessary requirement for creative genius. No robust critical architecture existed by which to understand and appreciate work written by female authors, especially those of the Victorian period, for the predominant hermeneutics of analysis had not only been produced by male writers but remained *about* them as well. Since the publication of *Madwoman in the Attic* and other feminist critiques of the 1970s and 1980s, scholars have expanded the horizons of literary studies to address the many ways that women’s voices make meaning, both inside and outside the textual body. What work remains left to do? What value is there, in other words, in examining an exclusive heritage, or sisterhood, of women’s literature? In this course, we will engage writing by British and American female-identified authors to explore the obstacles and successes involved when women pick up the pen. Authors studied in this course may include Mary Wollstonecraft, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Christina Rossetti, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), Michael Field (aunt-niece pair Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper), Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Angela Carter, Zadie Smith, Jamaica Kincaid, and Alison Bechdel.

**226.51**

Ms. Graham

MW 12:00-1:15

CLS

**American Literature, 1865-1925**

This course provides exposure to a diverse group of American authors who wrote between 1865-1925 but who belong to no school. True, some were realists, naturalists, or modernists, but these terms do not apply to all. The one term that defines the period is ‘difference’ (read variously as contention, invidious comparison, change, diversity, gender dissidence). This course will simulate the great rupture between nineteenth-century prose styles and those of the twentieth century, but you will be mindful of the earlier radical streak in American fiction. Works studied are drawn from such authors as Henry James, Chopin, DuBois, Gilman, Wharton, Dreiser, Pound, Eliot, Stein, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Hurston, and Toomer.

**228.51**

Mr. Simpson, Ms. Tucker

TR 10:30-11:45 / R 4:00-6:00 CLS

**African American Literature**

**Topic for 2020b: *From the Page to the Stage: Turning Black Literature into Black Drama.*** (Same as AFRS 228 and DRAM 228) This course will explore the expressive possibilities of 20th century black literature by means of critical reading, critical writing, and critical performance. Students will examine key works in their historical context, paying attention to the criticism and theory that have shaped their reception (Hayden, Giovanni, Brooks, Hurston, Baldwin, Morrison, Johnson, Whitehead). They will then attempt to transform parts of these texts into scenes as informed by past and present theories of performance and theatre making. Their work will culminate in a public performance of the pieces they have conceived. Tyrone Simpson, Shona Tucker.

**236.51**

Ms. Sweany

MW 10:30-11:45 CLS

**Beowulf**

(Same as MRST 236) In this class we will explore the poem *Beowulf* through its original articulation in Old English, a variety of translations, and its critical scholarly history. While *Beowulf* has long been read as a heroic poem, it is largely elegiac while also dealing with many aspects of early medieval culture including: inter-cultural contact, gender, monstrosity, and religion. This class will explore both how all of these themes appear in this poem via Old English and how they have been grappled with by translators and scholars. This class will incorporate a substantial amount of translation work and therefore knowledge of Old English is a prerequisite.

**Prerequisite: English 235 or demonstrated knowledge of Old English, or permission of the instructor.**

**247.51**

Ms. Gemmill

TR 1:30-2:45 CLS

**Eighteenth-Century British Novels**

**Topic for 2020b: *Miss Behavior: Transgressive Women in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century British Fiction.*** (Same as WMST 247) The focus of this course is eighteenth-century English fiction that features “girls gone wild,” women who violate the stringent social codes dictating their behavior in this period. We will read a range of critical texts—some contemporary to us, and others contemporary to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century writers on our syllabus—to learn what constituted “misbehavior” for women, and who was making the rules. Conduct books, educational treatises, periodical literature, pamphlets and political writings give us a cultural context, and prepare us to examine how fiction writers were reflecting and reshaping codes of conduct for their own social, political and artistic ends.

Because the act of writing itself often constituted misbehavior for eighteenth-century women, texts by women differ considerably from those by men with regard to topics, style and genre. In the first half of the course, we see male authors diversely imagining female cross-dressers, “female husbands” (a contemporary term for women who sought to partner with other women), prostitutes, witches, sadists and pleasure-seekers. In the second half, we see women writers working in two literary modes—the gothic, and the novel of manners—to respond to oppressive societal concerns about femininity and modesty. Students leave this course not only with a strong sense of the cultural history of female comportment in eighteenth-century England, but also having looked closely at how these pervasive social codes interacted with literary form to shape the fiction of the period.

**257.51**

Mr. Chang

TR 3:10-4:25 CLS

**The Novel in English after 1945**

**Topic for 2020b: *The Dystopian Novel.*** This semester we will read novels and short stories that re-envision their respective Novels as imminent Dystopias, beginning with Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) - founding narratives that establish the polar ends of the genre. Other texts include: Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Doris Lessing’s *Memoirs of a Survivor*, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, Octavia Butler’s *Bloodchild*, an assortment of stories by Shirley Jackson, J.G. Ballard, Philip K. Dick, Ken Liu, Rebecca Roanhorse, and selected episodes of *Black Mirror*.

**285.51**

Ms. Dunbar

MW 1:30-2:45

CLS

**Resistance Literature: Protest, Activism, and American Literature**

In 1926 the African-American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois declared, “all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists.” These were and continue to be fighting words for many writers who value “craft” over ideology. But does the distinction matter? Should it? Can a text be well-crafted and move us to (want to) change the world? At some level, these are rhetorical questions. American literature is rife with stories, novels, poems, and essays that have incited or speak to the necessity of our fighting for significant shifts in American culture. Thus, this course examines how US-based writers have used their art to right/write the world otherwise. Topics covered may range from abolition, the climate crisis, food justice, Civil Rights, #BlackLivesMatter, gender equity, #MeToo, and prison reform/abolition. We will work between the genres of realism and the speculative (utopic/dystopic) in the hopes of thinking about how literature has and continues to allow us to see and be the change we need.

**II. Intermediate Intensives****284.51**

Mr. Chang

W 1:30-2:30

INT

**New York Stories**

“New York had all the iridescence of the beginning of the world.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald. For this intensive, we will read stories – novels, short fiction, journalism, memoirs – set in New York City. We will visit, and in many cases, attempt to conjure, the vanished places where the stories were set. Only by haunting these physical sites and recreating them through the virtual technologies of history and literature will we get to see not only what the authors saw, but what they saw that wasn’t there, and what was there they didn’t see. Your main mentored assignment will entail constructing a walking tour for your classmates centered on the author’s real and imagined life in the city. Texts might include: Teju Cole’s *Open City*, Chang-Rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*, Paula Fox’s *Desperate Characters*, Joseph Cassara’s *The House of Impossible Beauties: A Novel*, Truman Capote’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, Patti Smith’s *M Train*, Thomas Pynchon’s *Bleeding Edge*, Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*, Luc Sante’s *Low Life*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “My Lost City” ... you name it. We will devise the syllabus together.

Class meets every other week, including, depending on funding, three or four daylong trips to the city. No prerequisites; open to sophomores, juniors and seniors.

**287.51**

Mr. Márkus

INT

**Reviewing Shakespeare**

This course has a double objective of developing the students’ understanding of a selected Shakespeare play performed in New York City as well as enhancing their analytical and writing skills by learning how to write theater reviews. At the beginning of the semester, we decide on viewing a selected production of a Shakespeare play in New York City (funding for travel and theater tickets is available from Vassar College).

This intensive exercise has the following assignments:

1/ At the beginning of the semester, students read assigned studies on the selected Shakespeare play as well as on issues and methods of analyzing stage performances. In preparation of viewing the play, the students write an analytical paper about an assigned topic of the play and its stage history.

2/ After having viewed the play, each student collects 5-10 reviews about the stage production and writes a “review of reviews” with special attention to the methodology and structure of the discussed review articles.

3/ As the culmination of the preparatory work listed above, the students write their own review of the stage production.

The course will include a trip to New York City.

**290 a or b.**

**Field Work**

INT

Field work is open by special permission of the associate chair, and is usually offered for one-half unit of credit. Field Work projects are sponsored by individual faculty members in the department. Students interested in Field Work should see page 30 for further details on the requirements.

**Independent Study**

Independent Study is open by special permission of the associate chair. Independent Study is intended to supplement (not duplicate) the regular curricular offerings by defining special projects in reading and writing under the direction of an individual faculty member. **The prerequisite for Independent Study at the 200- or 300-level is 2 units of 200-level work in English.**

Application forms for Independent Study are available in the English department office.

**298 a or b.**

(1/2 Unit)

Open by permission of the associate chair. 1 unit of credit given only in exceptional cases.

**399 a or b.**

(1/2 Unit)

**Senior Independent Work**

Open by permission of the associate chair. 1 unit of credit given only in exceptional cases.

### III. Advanced Courses

#### 304.51

Ms. McGlennen

R 1:00-3:00

CLS

#### Senior Creative Writing Seminar

Study and practice of various forms of prose and poetry for experienced creative writers.

*Special Permission.*

**Writing samples are due before pre-registration. Check with the English office for the exact date of the deadline.**

Open to juniors and seniors in all departments with permission of the instructor.

One 2-hour period and individual conferences with the instructor.

#### 306.51

Mr. Means

T 3:10-6:10

CLS

#### Senior Creative Writing Seminar

Advanced study and practice of various forms of prose and poetry. This is a year-long course open to students from all majors. *Special Permission.*

**Writing samples are due before pre-registration. Check with the English office for the exact date of the deadline.**

#### 326.51

Mr. Perez

T 3:10-5:10 / R 3:10-5:10 Film Screening

CLS

#### Challenging Ethnicity

An exploration of literary and artistic engagements with ethnicity. Contents and approaches vary from year to year.

**Topic for 2020b: *Racial Melodrama*.** (Same as AFRS 326) Often dismissed as escapist, predictable, lowbrow or exploitative, melodrama has also been recuperated by several contemporary critics as a key site for the rupture and transformation of mainstream values. Film scholar Linda Williams argues that melodrama constitutes “a major force of moral reasoning in American mass culture,” shaping the nation’s racial imaginary. The conventions of melodrama originate from popular theater, but its success has relied largely on its remarkable adaptability across various media, including print, motion pictures, radio, and television. This course investigates the lasting impact of such fictions as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Fannie Hurst’s *Imitation of Life*, the romanticized legend of John Smith’s encounter with Pocahontas, and John Luther Long’s *Madame Butterfly*. What precisely is melodrama? If not a genre, is it (as critics diversely argue) a mode, symbolic structure, or a sensibility? What do we make of the international success of melodramatic forms and texts such as the telenovela and Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain*? How do we understand melodrama’s special resonance historically among disfranchised classes? How and to what ends do the pleasures of suffering authenticate particular collective identities (women, the working-class, queers, blacks, and group formations yet to be named)? What relationships between identity, affect and consumption does melodrama reveal?

#### 341.51

Mr. Márkus

W 1:00-3:00

CLS

#### Studies in the Renaissance

Intensive study of selected Renaissance texts and the questions they raise about their context and interpretation.

**Topic for 2020b: *Sex and the City in 1600: Gender, Marriage, Family, and Sexuality in Early Modern***

***London*.** (Same as MRST 341) This course explores everyday life in the rapidly expanding early modern metropolis of London at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. We pay special attention to religious, social, legal as well as informal control mechanisms that influenced issues of gender, marriage, and sexuality in various layers of London society. We anchor our investigations in a handful of plays by Beaumont, Chapman, Dekker, Ford, Jonson, Marston, Middleton, Rowley, and Shakespeare, but also explore other literary and non-literary texts. By situating our early modern texts in the cultural and historical contexts in which they were written and performed, we will be able to appreciate the historical differences as well as the occasional continuities between early 17th century and early 21st century interpretations and representations regarding such basic cultural and social issues as citizenship, class and gender difference, political agency, race and ethnicity, urbanization, and subject-formation.

#### 345.51

Mr. DeMaria

F 10:30-12:30

CLS

#### Milton

Study of John Milton’s career as a poet and polemicist, with particular attention to *Paradise Lost*.

**350.51**

Mr. DeMaria

M 1:00-3:00

CLS

**Studies in Eighteenth-century British Literature**

Focuses on a broad literary topic, with special attention to works of the Restoration and eighteenth century.

**Topic for 2020b: *Origins of the Periodical Essay*.** Although periodical publications got started in Europe shortly after the invention of printing, there was in England such a vast increase in their numbers and importance during the British Civil Wars (1642-60) that it's reasonable to think of that period as giving rise to periodical writing in its modern form.

In the later seventeenth century periodical publications became important vehicles for a new kind of writing aptly called the periodical essay.

Among the most important eighteenth-century practitioners of this form were John Dunton, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Eliza Haywood, Samuel Johnson, and Oliver Goldsmith. This course will examine the periodical writing of these authors in the context of the newspapers and journals for which they wrote: *The Athenian Oracle*; *The Review*; *The Tatler*; *The Spectator*; *The Female Spectator*; *The Gentleman's Magazine*; *The Rambler*; and *The Bee*, among other. There will be several meetings of the class in Special Collections, and students will be expected to write on an early journal or periodical writer, making use of the original publications.

**351.51**

Ms. Zlotnick

M 3:10-6:10

CLS

**Studies in Nineteenth-Century British Literature**

Study of a major author (e.g., Coleridge, George Eliot, Oscar Wilde) or a group of authors (the Brontës, the Pre-Raphaelite poets and painters) or a topical issue (representations of poverty; literary decadence; domestic angels and fallen women; transformations of myth in Romantic and Victorian literature) or a major genre (elegy, epic, autobiography). **Topic for 2020b: *The Brontë Sisters*.** (Same as WMST 351 and VICT 351) The aim of this course is two-fold: a detailed study of the major works of Anne, Emily and Charlotte Brontë as well as an examination of the criticism that has been written about the sisters' novels and poems. We acquaint ourselves with the different critical lenses through which the Brontës have been viewed (e.g., biographical, feminist, historicist, postcolonial) in order to explore the ways in which the meaning of the Brontë sisters and their writing has changed over time. Primary texts include *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, *Wuthering Heights*, the Brontës' poetry, and Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

**352.51**

Ms. Gemmill

R 10:30-12:30

CLS

**Studies in Romanticism**

Intensive study of Romantic-era texts with the option of pursuing a select group of writers under the rubric of a specific genre, methodological approach, topic or theme. This course aims to deepen students' expertise in one or more of the topics covered in English 248. **Topic for 2020b: *What's Queer About Romanticism?*** (Same as WMST 352) Why is it that the most influential and ambitious work in queer studies has rarely emerged from the field of Romanticism? The Romantic period has often been mischaracterized as a "seemingly asexual zone between eighteenth-century edenic 'liberated' sexuality...and the repressive sexology of the Victorians," but in reality, this brief cultural moment in England produced a range of queer figures, both historical and literary: from Anne Lister, whose diary records hundreds of pages in code about the sex she had with women, to the Ladies of Llangollen, who openly cohabited with the support of English high society, to the myth of the modern vampire, a deeply sexualized and often queer figure. Given the richness of this terrain, why are queer studies lagging behind in Romantic circles? In this advanced seminar, we address this underdeveloped area of scholarly research through our reading of primary and secondary texts, our class discussion, and our critical research projects. Reading theory and criticism from Romanticism studies and adjacent scholarly fields, we ask ourselves—what is queer about this literary-historical moment that has not yet been accounted for? We will focus primarily on the poetry of the period, but also attend to some prose genres, including the diary and the essay. We will also watch some screen adaptations, including *Mary Shelley* and HBO's *Gentleman Jack*.

**380.52**

Mr. Simpson

M 3:10-6:10

CLS

**English Seminar**

**Topic for 2020b: *Then Whose Negro Are You? On the Art and Politics of James Baldwin*.** (Same as AFRS 380)

When interviewers sought out some sense of James Baldwin's ambition, the artist often responded, "I want to be an honest man and a good writer." The forces constellated around Baldwin's career made this hardly a simple declaration. The issue of becoming a writer was an arduous task in itself, so much so that Baldwin felt he had to leave the United States, particularly his adored Harlem, to do so. Getting in the way of his artistry was the nation's troubled negotiation

with its own soul: the US was trying to figure out what it wanted to be—an apartheid state? A nuclear dreadnought? A den of prudish homophobes? An imperial power? A beloved community? A city on the Hill? This course looks at all things Baldwin, or at least as many things as we can cover over a four-month period. It certainly indulges his greatest hits—his essays, *Notes of A Native Son*; his novel, *Giovanni's Room*; his play, *Blues for Mr. Charlie's*—and several other writings both published and unpublished. It does so with an eye toward understanding Baldwin's circulation as a celebrated author and a public intellectual both in the mid-twentieth century and the present day.

**383.51**

Ms. Vestri

T 1:00-3:00

CLS

**Sibling Theory**

(Same as WMST 383) What role do siblings play in literature (and in our lives)? Are these characters secondary, incidental, merely complements to a protagonist—the organizing central consciousness—of a novel? Do they appear in poetry only as companions or sidekicks? Or, perhaps, do sibling relations offer a different set of tools for cultivating ways of knowing and being in the world that extend beyond, and even counter, the idea of a single, autonomous self?

In this course, we will investigate the kinship of brothers and sisters in British and American fiction and poetry from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To inform our literary explorations, we will look at recent feminist and queer critiques of scholarly thinking about the family, kinship, and marriage, critiques that have at times turned to siblinghood as an alternate locus for the development of identity, culture, ethics, and politics. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, we will explore research in fields such as gender studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis, history, and sociology to help us inquire how siblinghood acts as a form of networked and collective existence, and how these networks confront previous paradigms of the family that are structured as reproductive, patriarchal, and linear.

Fictional texts for the course may include, but are not limited to, *Antigone*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Franny and Zooey*, *Atonement*, and *The Royal Tenenbaums*, which we will read in tandem with feminist and queer scholarship (e.g., Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Leonore Davidoff, Juliet Mitchell) that challenges prior twentieth-century theories on kinship (Freud, Lacan, Levi-Strauss).

### III. Advanced Intensives

#### Senior Year Requirements

The College requires a special exercise to distinguish the work of the senior year in one's major. In the English department, that requirement takes the form of English 300, Senior Tutorial, or enrolling in at least one 300-level course in the senior year.

**Description of English 300:** All senior English majors should consider taking this intensive. The tutorial should reflect and extend the intellectual interests you have developed in your earlier course work. The tutorial itself involves working with an individual faculty member to produce a long paper (approximately 10,000 words or 40 pages). The project may consist of a sustained critical essay or a series of linked essays, or one of several alternatives, such as primary research in the Special Collections department of the Library, a piece of translation, a work of dramaturgy, a work of fiction, a collection of poems, or a scholarly edition of a particular work or group of works.

#### 300 a or b

##### Senior Tutorial

INT

Preparation of a long essay (40 pages) or other independently designed critical project. Each essay is directed by an individual member of the department. *Special Permission.*

#### 386.51

Mr. Kane

T 5:10-6:10

INT

##### English Seminar

**Topic for 2020b: *Vassar Poetry Review*.** This Intensive (.5) offers students writing poetry the opportunity to revise and prepare their work for publication in the *Vassar Poetry Review*, while also learning about the principles and processes of publishing, including design, editing and printing. An issue of the *Vassar Poetry Review* will be published at the end of the semester, with students involved in all phases of the project. Those enrolled in English 211 (Advanced Creative Writing: Verse) will be given preference, but the class is open to any qualified students, whether majors or non-majors. Enrollment limited to twelve students. *Special Permission.*

**Courses That Fulfill English Major Requirements  
For Academic Year 2019-2020**

**pre-1800, pre-1900, Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality**

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Requirement Fulfilled</u>
214 Process, Prose, Pedagogy	
216 Modern Drama: Text/Performance	
218 Literature, Gender, and Sexuality	Race, Ethn.
219 Queer of Color Critique	Race, Ethn.
222 Early British Literature	pre-1800
226 American Literature 1865-1925	Race, Ethn.
227 Harlem Renaissance / Precursors	Race, Ethn.
228 African American Literature	Race, Ethn.
235 Old English	pre-1800
236 <i>Beowulf</i>	pre-1800
237 Medieval Literature	pre-1800
240 Shakespeare	pre-1800
247 Eighteenth Century British Novels	pre-1800
248 The Age of Romanticism	pre-1900
255 Nineteenth-Century British Novels	pre-1900
256 Modern British and Irish Literatures	
257 The Novel/English after 1945	
285 Resistance Literature: Protest, Activism, and American Literature	Race, Ethn.
287 Reviewing Shakespeare	
326 Racial Melodrama	Race, Ethn.
329 American Literary Realism	Race, Ethn.
340 Studies in Medieval Literature	pre-1800
341 Studies in the Renaissance	Race, Ethn., 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	Race, Ethn., pre-1900
352 Studies in Romanticism	pre-1900
355 Twenty- and Twenty-first Century Poetry	
357 Studies Twentieth Century Literature	
380 Then Whose Negro Are You?	Race, Ethn.
381 Fanny Howe	
382 James Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i>	
383 Sibling Theory	Race, Ethn.

\*As course topics change, so do the requirements they fulfill. Therefore, this list is only applicable for the 2019-2020 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.

**\*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.

**\*Michael Joyce:** Writing in all its forms as a contemplative, hybrid, transgressive, healing, and translative art including autofictions, multimedia, imagetexts, proselpoems, and so on.

**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.

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

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

**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.

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

**Talia Vestri:** British Romanticism; eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; poetry and poetics; Victorian novels; history of marriage and the marriage plot; kinship and family studies; queer theory; film studies.

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

\*On leave in Spring '20.

## 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.

#### **What about English credits taken over the summer at another institution? Do they also transfer as ungraded work; do they count towards my major?**

Yes. But this work must be pre-approved by the associate chair of the department. In order to get pre-approval make an appointment to see the associate chair; be sure to bring the catalogue course description and a copy of the syllabus. Once you return to Vassar, you must provide copies of your written work. The registrar requires that summer classes meet for at least 28 hours of the compressed semester.

#### **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.

### **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.

### **English 300: The Thesis**

#### **B term deadlines:**

All students writing a critical senior thesis during b-term must meet two departmental deadlines: the first for a working title, due **February 12, 2020**, and the second for the final draft of the thesis, due **May 6, 2020**.

Within the first three weeks of the term in which you are writing the thesis, but no later than **February 12, 2020**, you must submit to the department office a typed sheet of paper with the following information: your name, your email, your thesis advisor, and the working title of your thesis.

Students and their individual advisors are responsible for determining interim deadlines for the drafting of the thesis. Some advisors ask that you submit a few pages each week; others may request that you submit completed chapters or sections during the semester. Whatever you do, be sure to have a discussion with your advisor early in the thesis process about interim deadlines so that you know what your thesis advisor expects.

## **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.