

Department of English—Honors Program Guidelines

Introduction

The Honors Program in English gives senior English majors the opportunity to pursue independent work culminating in a substantial literary critical essay (for English path majors) or a significant body of creative writing (for Creative Writing Path majors). Through close collaboration over the course of a year with one or more faculty members, English honors students will refine and extend the skills they have developed throughout their time at Macalester and will complete a large-scale scholarly or creative project. An honors project fulfills the major's capstone requirement.

Requirements

The program is open to all senior English majors who have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.3 and a departmental GPA of at least 3.6.

Process and Deadlines

Students interested in applying for the English honors program should generate in the spring semester of their junior year, ideally by **March 1**, a short description of the research or creative project they wish to pursue. They should then discuss their project idea with a faculty member who would make a likely advisor. After consultation with a faculty member who agrees to advise the project, students compose a formal Honors Proposal, consisting of a narrative description of the project and a bibliography of primary and secondary materials (see below for a full description of the proposal). Students should revise the proposal as needed, in consultation with their prospective advisor, before final submission of the proposal to the department chair.

Students who are on campus in the spring semester of their junior year should submit completed honors proposals to the department chair by **April 20** of their junior year. Students who are on study away in the spring semester of their junior year should submit completed honors proposals to the department chair by **September 5** in the fall semester of their senior year.

The chair will circulate all honors proposals received by the above deadlines to the department's faculty honors committee, made up of two full-time English faculty members other than the chair. The faculty committee will review the proposals and will provide prompt (within ten days) feedback to students, with copy to the chair, that the proposals: 1) have been accepted without revision, or 2) will be reconsidered after revision, or 3) have been rejected. A proposal that requires revision (a very common outcome) should be revised by the student as quickly as possible (within one week) and then resubmitted to the chair, who will again pass the proposal on to the faculty honors committee, who in turn will promptly (within one week) render a final decision about the proposal, informing both student and chair.

Approved English honors projects will then follow the general honors timeline for the college; see "Honors Calendar" at the following site:

<http://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/honors.html>.

Note that no administrative means exist for students to do a project in one department but gain credit for it in another department, or to take on media or topics outside the range of our faculty's expertise. Faculty members are free to decline requests to supervise honors projects for any reason.

Course Credit, Workload, and Project Length

Students generally devote eight credits to their Honors Project, four in the fall and four in the spring. Most often, students register for ENGL 644 for four credits with their project advisor for both semesters of the senior year. However, because honors proposals cannot be approved by the time of spring pre-registration, a prospective honors student should pre-register for another course for the fall semester of the senior year and then, if the proposal is approved, drop that course at the beginning of the semester and add 644 in its place.

In certain cases, a project might include four independent study credits and a four-credit seminar that relates closely to the honors project. It is also possible to register an honors project for a maximum of ten credits, with the addition of two credits over January term. The precise packaging of credits can be left to the discretion of the student, the advisor, and the chair, but Honors Projects should be ambitious enough to reflect a full year's, or two 4-credit courses', effort (at least twenty-five percent of a senior's workload).

Most literature projects have been between 70 and 90 pages long, including bibliography and notes. Shorter and longer theses can also make sense, depending on topic and approach. Longer does not, in itself, mean better. Creative writing portfolios will vary in length, depending on their genre: a full year's work in fiction should be a novella, or a series of stories, or the start of a novel, totaling 75-125 pages. Creative nonfiction should be about 75-125 pages. A screenplay or play should be about 100-150 pages. A poetry project should be about 75-100 pages.

The Proposal

The proposal is a significant part of the project and needs to be fully developed for both literature and creative writing projects. All proposals should consist of a narrative project description of about 750-1000 words and an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary works.

For literature projects, the narrative description should include thesis, discussion of primary works and authors the project will consider, methodology and theoretical framework, significance of the argument, and a clear statement of the rationale and goals of the final project. The bibliography should consist of a substantial list of primary works as well as scholarly and critical works that will inform the project.

For creative writing projects, the narrative description should include details about the genre(s) in which the student will work; discussion of, and rationale for, the formal elements of the project, such as plot, character, setting, dialogue, and so on; consideration of the project's relationship to published creative works that the student is engaging or has been influenced by; and discussion of scholarly works that inform the project. The bibliography should include related primary works as well as a number of scholarly sources that pertain to the literary histories, genres, media, and formal elements relevant to the project.

Students drafting honors proposals should study the sample proposals that the Department provides. See the English department coordinator for those samples.

The Honors Committee and Defense

After an honors proposal has been approved, the honors student should work with his/her advisor to identify two additional faculty members who, along with the advisor, will make up the student's honors committee and conduct the honors defense. The committee should be in place by early spring semester of the senior year (ideally sooner) and should consist of: the Honors advisor, one other member of the English department, and either a faculty member from outside Macalester College who is an expert on the project's topic or a faculty member from another department at Macalester.

After the honors thesis has been read by the committee members and the student has made any revisions they deem necessary, students will defend the thesis in mid-late April (see timeline below). The defense is an oral exam normally conducted by the three members of the student's honors committee. The defense may, at the student's request, be open to invited students and faculty or to all interested attendees. It is the student's responsibility to schedule the defense.

The defense generally lasts 60 to 90 minutes. Usually, the student first delivers a brief description of the project and a narrative about its origins and development, and then responds to questions about the project from the committee members. Immediately after the defense, the committee members confer to decide whether to grant the project Honors and then, also immediately, inform the student of the outcome.

Possible outcomes of the defense include: 1) Honors granted with no revisions, 2) Honors granted with revisions to be completed by the deadline for submission of complete honors projects to Academic Programs (see timeline below), and 3) Honors not granted. Note that the awarding or withholding of honors is separate from the evaluation of the project itself, which will be graded by the advisor.

Role of Honors Advisor

The faculty advisor will help the student: develop a large-scale thesis or creative plan, work through the process of writing a large-scale literary investigation or creative project (for example, by expanding a traditional 20-page literary research essay or a short series of poems), refine research and writing methods, and identify relevant sources and readings. The advisor will also facilitate communication with the other readers of the project.

Honors Timeline

A typical schedule will be as follows:

- 1) **April 20** of the junior year – Submission of the honors proposal to the chair by on-campus junior English majors.
- 2) **September 5** of the senior year - Submission of the honors proposal to the chair by senior English majors who were on study-away the previous spring.
- 3) Beginning of fall semester of the senior year - The student and advisor together work out a concrete calendar of work for both semesters. They may, for example, plan to meet every two weeks, with specific tasks to be accomplished by each meeting.
- 4) Fall of senior year – The faculty advisor and student work to identify two outside readers for the project (one of whom will be from outside the department).
- 5) Approximately October 1 of senior year – Working title of the project due to the Department chair, who will forward the names of all honors candidates and their advisors, along with project titles, to the Dean of Academic Programs.
- 6) Approximately March 20 of the senior year – The student and advisor jointly evaluate the progress made to date and inform the chair whether or not the project will continue. The chair, in turn, will inform the Dean of Academic Programs.
- 7) Beginning of April – The completed project is submitted to the advisor and the two readers.
- 8) Approximately April 5 – Student must submit 100-word abstract and final title of the project to Academic Programs. Student should also inform chair of the final project title.
- 9) Mid-April – An oral examination is conducted by the three-person committee of readers.
- 10) Approximately April 27 – All oral exams must be completed, and honors advisors must inform the department chair of the outcome of all defenses; the department chair will then furnish to the Dean of Academic Programs the names of all majors who have successfully defended and will be graduating with honors.
- 11) Approximately May 2 – Final Honors project, including revisions requested at the defense (if any), must be submitted by the student to Academic Programs.
- 12) Early May – Honors students present their work at the annual Spring English majors’ luncheon (optional).

Note: For students graduating in December, the above deadlines move up by a semester. See “Calendar for Students Graduating in December” at <http://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/honors.html> for further details.