

Honors Program Guide

Everything you need to know about the Honors Program in English and in Creative Writing

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Overview of the Program

The English Department Honors Program allows both English and Creative Writing majors to deepen and enrich their knowledge of literature and writing beyond what would normally be required by the majors. The program is designed for strong, academically motivated students who wish to advance their skills in research and in writing. Students in the program complete a year-long senior thesis project. The current honors coordinator is Dr. Elizabeth Outka.

Eligibility

To be eligible for admission to the honors program, a student should have 18.5 or more units of completed work, a cumulative GPA of at least 3.3, and a major GPA of 3.5 or higher. A student must also have 3.5 or more units completed in the respective major with evidence of distinguished achievement. A creative writing thesis requires at least two of the 3.5 units be completed within the Creative Writing program, and the two classes would **not** include the intro to creative writing. In addition, all candidates are required to maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.3 and a major GPA of 3.5 while participating in the program. Please note that the honors program is distinct from Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society, which has a different set of eligibility requirements.

Applying to the Program

A student who wishes to pursue honors and who meets the GPA requirements will need to find a director willing to supervise their project and to submit a formal application and proposal in March of the junior year (deadline determined each year). The student should already have shown drafts of the proposal to the faculty member who will be directing the thesis. Applications for Creative Writing majors will also need review and approval by the Creative Writing Committee. Information meetings for qualifying juniors are held early in the spring semester. The Honors Program Guide lays out deadlines and requirements in detail.

Course Work

Honors candidates will follow the same set of course requirements as other English or Creative Writing majors. In addition, during the senior year, honors candidates will register for the following courses with their director:

1. ENGL or CRWR 498: Honors Thesis Research (fall semester, .5 units)
2. ENGL or CRWR 499: Honors Thesis Writing (spring semester, 1 unit)

Thesis Project

Honors candidates complete a thesis project in their senior year. Several types of projects are possible: (1) a scholarly thesis of about 30-40 pages focused on a key work or works; the thesis should engage with literary criticism and form an original argument. This option is open only to English majors and requires approval by a faculty director; (2) a creative writing thesis consisting of a collection of short stories, poems, or a section of a novel or play; for fiction or

non-fiction, about 50-100 pages are expected, and for poetry, about 30-60 pages. This option is open only to Creative Writing majors and requires approval by a faculty director in CW; (3) a combination thesis, consisting of a scholarly treatment of a particular subject (about 15-20 pages) combined with a related creative writing component (about 25-50 pages for fiction or non-fiction, and about 15-30 for poetry); this option may be open to English or Creative Writing majors but requires advanced permission from the department. If a student is expanding an earlier paper or project into a thesis, about thirty *new* pages of writing are required.

Typically, the student will complete the research for the project in the fall term of the senior year and will write the thesis in the spring term, though special circumstances will be considered.

Honors students are encouraged to apply for a summer research fellowship from the School of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office in the spring semester of the junior year, so they can work on the project over the summer.

During the spring semester, while the student is enrolled in Honors Thesis Writing, their director will meet with the candidate regularly. The thesis director's responsibilities will include the following: helping the student move from the proposal stage to writing; reading and commenting on several drafts of the project; for English majors, guiding the student in research methods and in matters of bibliography; and, finally, in consultation with the second reader, determining the grade and whether or not the candidate will receive departmental honors. Honors candidates will be expected to do at least six to eight hours of thesis-related work per week. Because of the time commitment involved, professors are encouraged only to direct one thesis project a year.

The thesis will be read, commented upon, and graded by the thesis director and a second faculty reader chosen by the thesis director in consultation with the student and the honors coordinator.

Candidates who earn two grades of "A-" or better on the thesis, and who have satisfactorily met all the other requirements, will automatically be granted departmental honors. Candidates receiving fewer than two grades of "A-" and no grade lower than a "B" on the Honors thesis, and who have met all other program requirements, will still be considered for honors by the thesis director and the second reader. If the director and second reader feel the project should not be awarded honors, the ENGL 499 or CRWR 499 course is converted to an independent study. Should there be a wide discrepancy in the grades, the coordinator will deliberate with the director and second reader to reach a consensus.

Undergraduate Research Symposium

Honors candidates should present their work at the Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium, typically held in April.

Timeline for the Honors Program

Sophomore year

If you already know you're interested in the honors program, and you have a strong academic record, arrange a meeting with the honors coordinator to discuss how you can prepare for your project.

Junior year

The honors coordinator will contact eligible juniors, typically during the spring term. Students who have an interest in the program but who are not contacted should arrange a meeting with the coordinator to discuss the program and to consider eligibility.

Juniors should . . .

- *attend the honors information meeting. The honors coordinator will email the date and time to qualifying junior majors.
- *consult carefully the "Getting Started" section, the "Writing a Project Proposal" section, and the "Completing the Application Packet" later in this guide.
- *develop a thesis project and meet individually with a possible thesis director and/or the honors coordinator. For Creative Writing majors, project approval must also be given by the Creative Writing Committee.
- *in February or early March, give director a draft of the thesis proposal. (see detailed descriptions of the proposal later in this guide).
- *submit the application packet to the honors coordinator by March deadline and ask thesis director to submit an email of support.
- *consider applying for a summer research fellowship from the School of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office (applications are usually due in February—check deadlines early); <http://as.richmond.edu/student-research/summer-research/>.
- *attend the presentations of the senior honors candidates at the Undergraduate Research Symposium, usually held in April.
- *register for ENGL or CRWR 498: Honors Thesis Research (.5 units) for the fall term of the senior year. Students should be sure to register for the section of 498 that is tied to their director.

Senior year

Fall term:

Seniors should . . .

- *early in the term, in consultation with their director, prepare a research or writing plan for the semester with deadlines.

- *take ENGL or CRWR 498: Honors Thesis Research (.5), completing all the major reading and research for thesis project. Meet regularly with director.
- *register for ENGL or CRWR 499: Honors Thesis Writing for the spring term. Students should be sure to register for the section of 499 that is tied to their director.

Spring term:

Seniors should. . .

- *early in the term, in consultation with director and the honors coordinator, ask an additional professor if they would be willing to serve as the second reader for the project. Give the reader a 2-3 page summary of the project and, for English majors, ask them to review your working bibliography. The second reader does not read versions of your thesis until the draft deadline in the spring.
- *take ENGL or CRWR 499: Honors Thesis Writing.
- *meet with director regularly, and in addition, do at least six to eight hours of thesis work each week.
- *by mid-January, in consultation with the director, set up a writing plan for the semester, with deadlines. In late March or early April (exact deadline TBD), submit a full draft to your director and the second reader. Taking their comments into consideration, plan to revise again and submit your polished thesis to your director and second reader by 5pm on the last day of classes.
- *apply for an oral presentation slot for the Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium (deadline usually mid-February) <http://as.richmond.edu/student-research/symposium/> and then present work at the Symposium in April. **You should have at least one practice session at the Speech Center before the Symposium; the honors coordinator will provide you with all the details.**
- *by the end of April, send the library your final thesis, along with the required forms, and send both your director and the honors coordinator the final thesis as well. You will be presented with bound copies of your thesis at the English Department's graduation ceremony.

Completing the Program: Tips and Deadlines for Every Stage

As you may have heard, completing a long essay or major creative writing project can be challenging. But as you may not have heard, it can also be the most exciting and rewarding part of your major. Delving deeply into a topic you love, thinking carefully about complicated questions, and pushing your writing well beyond anything you've ever done, all lie at the heart of a rich and vibrant college experience. The process of writing a thesis might not be easy, but it also need not be a burden or a chore if you approach it in the right way. This guide is designed to help you at each stage of the process, distilling the experiences of the department faculty who have also tackled long writing projects.

Getting Started

*You need to start thinking about a project in your junior year (or even in your sophomore year, but don't worry if you didn't), as you'll need to submit a proposal in the spring term.

*But how, you might think, should I come up with a topic? We suggest you first pay attention to what you love. Do you find yourself more drawn to poetry, novels, plays, films, or some combination? What courses, authors, issues, and styles most appeal to you? Do you have a piece of work you'd like to expand? If you're an English major, you might consider what period draws you in—the vibrant literary production of the Renaissance? The radical politics and new literary forms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? The upheavals of nineteenth-century America? The more modern challenges of the twentieth or twenty-first century? If you're a Creative Writing major, you might consider the forms and genres you're most drawn to, and what themes and perspectives you most want to explore. Remember, you will be spending a considerable amount of time on your project, so you need one that will sustain your interest. If you can't find something you're excited about exploring, are you sure you want to write a thesis?

*Once you've started to narrow your topic, go talk to faculty members who specialize in the area you're considering. We can often help as you shape your ideas, suggesting directions you might explore or other elements you might consider. Once you have settled on a topic or idea, you'll need to ask an appropriate faculty member if they would be willing to act as your thesis director. The sooner you ask, the better. Creative Writing majors must consult with the Creative Writing faculty.

*You should also start writing about different possibilities (and as you'll learn, it's never too early to start writing). If you put yourself in front of your computer at regular intervals to write about all your possible ideas, you might be surprised to find how quickly a topic starts to form. Even if you start with "Okay, I have no idea what to write about. . .," you may find you can quickly move on from there, but only if you keep sitting down regularly to allow your brain to consider the possibilities.

*Finally, you might also do some preliminary research to get a feel for possible topics. You might check with the library to learn about different archival collections or research possibilities that we have either here at UR or somewhere nearby. You can also apply for A&S [research grants](#) if you need to visit a particular archive or library during the academic year.

Writing a Project Proposal and Creating a Preliminary Bibliography

(spring term, junior year; fellowship proposals usually due mid/late February; honors program application due in March)

*You might be asking yourself the very question we all ask when starting a big project: How can I possibly know what I want to say before I've even started writing? How can I describe a project that does not yet exist? And yet, you will need to write a project proposal, both for your application, as well as for the summer research fellowship, if you decide to apply. So how should you begin? If you've followed the steps above, you should already have a good sense of direction, even if you don't have the final shape of your project decided. You will find, however, that being required to write a description can quickly help clarify the contours of your project. Of course, we expect those contours may change—the description is just your preliminary ideas. But struggling to shape those ideas into a coherent form is a key part of the process. Once you have a proposal, it's easier to start researching and/or writing, and once you start researching and writing, it will become easier to shape future descriptions of your project (which you'll be doing as you go along).

*If you decide to apply to the honors program as well as for a summer research fellowship, you will need two project descriptions:

-For the [Summer Research Fellowship](#), you need to complete an online application that describes the [project](#) and how you will approach it over the course of the summer; you should follow the format they provide in the application. If you have previously received summer funding and are applying for a second or third fellowship, you'll complete a slightly longer form.

-For the honors program, you need a **project proposal** that describes the project and also lays out how you will approach the work for the entire year, rather than just the summer.

Your **project proposal** should have the following parts, which should together be an absolute maximum of 1500 words:

- **AIMS:** As concisely and precisely as you can, describe your project and the questions it seeks to explore. For a CW project, describe the genre and approach you might take.
- **BACKGROUND/SIGNIFICANCE.** What work has been done in this area, either in literary criticism or in literary works? (Provide citations from relevant sources). Is there a controversial idea you propose to address or missing information you propose to provide? What might your project contribute? How might your work fit into existing work?
- **PROJECT APPROACHES/METHODS.** Describe your plan for approaching the project: how will you start the research/background reading? What will you study first? How do you plan to keep track of your materials and ideas? Are there

particular interpretive frameworks you'll use? How, at this point, do you envision the organization of the final project?

- **PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY.** This bibliography should include at least ten sources, including your primary texts. You should include a mix of articles and books. Please note, however, that at this point, you need not have read these materials. Your thesis director should be able to help steer you to appropriate sources—and better yet, to places like the MLA Bibliography where you might find your sources. If you're planning a creative writing thesis, this bibliography might include works you would consult for background information or works from which you might take inspiration.

Applying for a Summer Research Fellowship

(February, junior year)

For a full description of the summer fellowship application process, go the UR web page <http://as.richmond.edu/student-research/summer-research/>. Applications are typically due in mid-February. You will also receive support (typically up to \$500) to purchase supplies or for travel for your project if needed. Please note that while we recommend applying, the Fellowship is *not* a requirement for the honors program.

Applying to the Honors Program

(due in March, junior year)

*The application packet for the Honors Program should be turned in to the honors coordinator in March, and it should include the following three items:

- 1) A completed application form (form is at the end of this guide and on-line on the English Department's web page).
- 2) The thesis proposal along with a preliminary bibliography (see above for description).
- 3) A Banner copy of your transcript (unofficial is fine)

In addition, your proposed thesis director should send an email of support for your project directly to the honors coordinator.

Your thesis proposal will be reviewed by members of the English Department, and the honors coordinator will notify you within two weeks whether or not the Department has approved your application.

Pursuing Summer Research

(summer before your senior year)

* If you are awarded a research fellowship for the summer before your senior year, you'll be paid to do research on your thesis. Such fellowships are a great way to jump start your project and to do lots of the heavy reading and thinking that may be harder to do in the rush of the semester. Even if you don't have a fellowship, you can still begin some of this work.

*Time speeds by in the summer, so it can help to begin with a clear plan, laying out goals, with various deadlines for different stages of your reading and research. You should consult with your faculty director and give them a written plan by mid-May.

Pursuing Honors Thesis Research

(fall term, senior year)

*As with the summer, it's important to start the fall term with a research plan. Through ENGL or CRWR 498, you'll be earning credit this semester to complete the background research and reading for your thesis. You may also want to start writing parts of the thesis while new ideas are fresh in your mind. However you decide to handle the research, you need to set some kind of schedule—otherwise, once the flurry of the term starts, with all the deadlines in your other courses, your research might get ignored.

When you have all the syllabi for your other classes, you might look for the windows when you have fewer assignments due. Then, schedule some deadlines for your research on those lighter weeks.

*How you set research goals is up to you and your director, and they often depend on the project. You might already have a great sense of the books you need to read or the films you need to watch or the writing exercises you should do, or you might be working on a thesis where the work itself will turn up more novels, poems, documents, memoirs, etc. that will demand your attention. Think of ways to divide your project into sections, or your research into different areas, and figure out how you're going to get everything read by the end of the term.

*Take notes on your primary sources, because you won't remember everything you read. It's often helpful to make a document with key quotations from your primary sources, perhaps divided into various categories. It can be very useful to have such a document as you start to shape your ideas.

*For research projects, take notes on articles and books, and be sure your notes do not copy language from these sources unless the language is in quotation marks. (It's easier to plagiarize without meaning to when you read an article in October but don't write about it until March). Get in the habit of summarizing in your notes how you might use the book or article in your thesis—how does it relate to your project?

One caution: Until you have a good sense of the argument you plan to make, be cautious at this stage about reading too many articles and books on your topic (versus primary sources). Especially as a beginning researcher, it can be hard to formulate your own ideas when you have everyone else's ideas swimming around your head. You might be better off drafting parts of your thesis and holding off on some of the secondary sources until later. Ask your director.

*Consider meeting with the resource librarian for the Humanities.

*Throughout the term, remember to meet with your thesis director on a regular basis. Your director can often offer helpful suggestions and could save you from time consuming mistakes.

*The honors coordinator will work to get the honors students together at several points during the year for informal meetings to discuss progress and offer support.

Writing your Thesis

(spring term, senior year)

*Our best piece of advice? **Get a regular writing schedule and follow it.** It may be better if you can do short, daily sessions of 1-2 hours, or perhaps 3 times a week for 2-3 hours, rather than marathon sessions of 8 hours once a week. It takes time to get into a project, and too much time away will (a) stress you out, because it will be nagging at you, and (b) make it hard to remember what you've already written.

*Early in the term, give your director a set of deadlines. By a specific day in mid-February, you might plan to submit 15-20 pages, and by a specific day in mid-March, another 15-20 pages. The department will select a day in late March or early April when you will submit a full thesis draft to your director and to the second reader. They will read this draft and offer comments within 1-2 weeks. Your final revision is due to your director and your second reader the last day of classes. This is the version that will be graded. Setting deadlines—and keeping them—is the best way to spread out the work and to avoid last minute panics (see the section below on “The Final Stages” for more information on final deadlines).

*Consider starting a writing group with 1-2 other students as a way to follow your schedule and meet your deadlines. Writing groups usually meet regularly (once a week or once every two weeks). You can exchange sections of writing and do peer critiquing, but even more important, you can exchange writing plans for the coming week and say what you did during the previous week. Such groups help you to schedule your time, and they allow you to see the progress you're making (or not making). Also, they can offer valuable emotional support through a long project.

*But when, you might wonder, should I start writing? Sooner than you think. Only rarely do we know what we want to write until we write it, so the sooner you get to writing, the better. With long projects, it may not be possible to start at the beginning and write through to the end. You may not know what you want to say, so writing an introduction or first chapter at the early stage might not be your best strategy. It's often a good idea to begin writing the section you're most excited about, and then work out from there.

*For English major projects, your eventual introduction will likely be longer than a paragraph. With a 30+ paper, you'll usually need 2-3 pages to introduce your topic. Think of the introduction as a short section.

*At the end of every writing session, write yourself a short note about what section/paragraph/passage/scene/issue you'll write about in your next session. Sounds simple, but it's a great strategy to get yourself back to your computer. Half the battle in a long project is getting yourself to sit down and write, and it's easier to do that if you have a plan in place.

The Final Stages: Finishing the Thesis

The Full Draft

A full draft of your thesis will be due in late March or early April (the honors coordinator will tell you the exact date in the early spring once it's set by the Department). This should be as polished a draft as you can write, and for English major projects, it should include endnotes and the bibliography. You'll give a copy of this draft to your director and to your second reader. They will comment on this draft and return it to you within one or two weeks.

The Final Revision

The final revision of your thesis will be due by 5pm on the last day of classes in the spring; as much as possible, you should address the comments made on your draft. You should give a copy of the revision to the director and the second reader. The reader will not offer additional comments but will read this revision and consult with your director on the grade.

Submitting your Thesis

Once the happy day comes, and you've finished the final version of your thesis, you'll need to follow some specific steps to complete the process, following the guidelines sent by the library.

The title page: For all your final copies, please use the title page template provided by the library.

The library copy: The library will need an electronic copy of your thesis, usually as a PDF file, by the end of April, as well as an abstract. Sometime during the year, the library will send you specific directions about how and where to submit your copy. Since the directions sometimes change from year to year, we haven't included those documents here. You'll also have to make some decisions for the library about what readers you'll allow to view your work (UR readers only? World-wide access?) and whether to register formally a copyright for your thesis. The department STRONGLY suggests that you limit on-line availability of your thesis to "campus only" access; if you go on to graduate school, and you ever decide to publish part of your thesis, on-line availability could hamper your chances of getting the work published in print form. You should also consider adding a five-year delay to the on-line access. If you're doing a creative writing thesis project, consult with your director on whether to make the work accessible at all.

Final Copies: Send your final revised project to your director, your second reader, and the honors coordinator.

Please let the honors coordinator know as soon as you've submitted the final library copy, and the coordinator will then inform the registrar's office.

Application Form for the Honors Program
English and Creative Writing

BASIC INFORMATION

Name of applicant _____ UR ID _____

Email address _____

Date of application _____

Name of Honors Project Director _____

Title of Honors Project _____

Honors Program in ____ English ____ Creative Writing

Anticipated graduation date (semester/year) _____

If you're studying abroad in the semester you apply, check here: _____

QUALIFICATIONS FOR ADMISSION

Total course units completed: ____ Units currently taking this semester: ____

Units completed in English major: ____ English Units currently taking: ____

Units completed in Creative Writing major: ____ CW Units currently taking: ____

Current GPA overall ____ Current GPA in major ____

A Complete Application Packet Will Consist of the Following:

1. This application form
2. A thesis proposal and preliminary bibliography (see Honors Guide).
3. A copy of the student's transcript (unofficial copy from Banner is fine).
4. An email of support sent directly to the honors coordinator from the student's proposed thesis director.

Student signature

Date

Submit application packet to honors coordinator (Dr. Outka) as email attachment or hard copy.
Students are responsible for reading and understanding all the regulations of the honors program.