

English 620:
The Senior Project in English
Procedures, Guidelines and Deadlines

The senior project is one of the most important pieces of work a student will accomplish at Allegheny; many see it as the culminating intellectual experience of a student's particular major. As such, it is crucial that you read what follows with attention and care, and begin to plan and prepare early. As you embark on your project in English, you will need to *propose a project* (see guidelines below); if you are approved, you will work with a director to bring your work to fruition. A proposal will require concerted early effort on your part to achieve, as well as motivation, foresight and scope. Students whose senior project proposals are not approved will complete their senior project requirements by designing an alternate project with their proposed director, a **project suited to that student's interest and abilities, typically embodying sustained attention to a single text, or small unit of texts**. Within these parameters, students will produce a research-based work of literary criticism aligned with or connected to **his or her project's subject**—a critical review of a particular work, a focused study of a specific literary tradition or author, an aspect of literary style, form, etc.—embodied in a sustained, focused analysis.

The Senior Project Proposal

You will need to secure a project director before beginning your project (see guidelines below). Once a director is secured, you must begin preliminary research. Through this research, you should be able to clearly articulate a planned topic and at this point begin writing the proposal. The proposal should set out the problem, question, or issue to be explored and should be *3-4 double-spaced pages in length*. Some thought should also be given to chapter divisions. *A preliminary annotated bibliography is required* and must be attached to your proposal. While the project may evolve, it is expected that (aided by your senior project board, in preliminary conference—the pre-project oral—and aided by further research) your final project will closely resemble its original shape.

Choosing a topic

We recommend that you select a topic with which you are familiar. The topic should reflect in some degree work you have already done within the English major. Some students find that an idea for the senior project originates in the junior seminar; however, this need not be the case. You may find yourself wanting to explore in more detail work done in one of your 300-level or 400-level courses. You may also wish to weave together ideas discussed in courses outside the department with material covered in one of your English courses.

Choosing a senior project director and second reader

It is your responsibility to seek out your director. Early in the semester prior to enrolling in English 620, you should ask a faculty member to direct your senior project. The decision to direct or not direct a senior project is entirely up to the faculty member. If you are at all in doubt about whom to ask, talk to your academic adviser or to the chair of the department about possibilities. *You must choose a director and get that person's approval by the time you register for English 620.* You (and/or your director) are then responsible for asking another member of the department to be second reader. (On occasions when faculty are unable or unwilling to accommodate requests, you should confer again with your director, then ask another department member to be second reader.)

Deadlines and Protocol

Proposals are due on *Friday of the ~~seventh~~^{eighth} full week of classes* in the semester prior to enrollment in English 620. You must submit copies to both members of the senior project board and make plans for the pre-project oral soon thereafter. It is your responsibility to arrange this meeting. During this meeting, the board will consider the academic promise and feasibility of the project, and students will not be able to continue work on the project until it has been approved. If your proposal is not approved, confer immediately with your director about the details of a directed course of study.

Basic Requirements for the Senior Project Itself

Drafting and Revision

You are expected to work with your senior project director during the drafting and revising of the project. Working in tandem, director and student typically establish a schedule for meetings and due dates for draft submissions and returns. The outcomes of such meetings and of written commentary should be reflected in your final project.

Deadline and submission

The senior project is due on the last day of the eleventh full week of classes, no later than 4 pm. Bound copies must be placed in the department mailbox (not campus mailbox) of each faculty reader. If you are using the Allegheny College Print Shop, you must make sure to submit your senior project in a timely fashion.

Research

Your project must consider previous scholarship and relevant material without being dependent on secondary sources for all substantive ideas. Senior projects are primarily

evaluated on your ability to refute, amend, or expand upon previously published arguments and on the facility with which secondary materials are integrated.

Organization

The project should have a clearly articulated organizational rationale. Reasons for section divisions should be made evident, and conclusions should go beyond a summary of the project's argument.

Documentation Style

Please follow current MLA (Modern Language Association) format.

Issues of Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics

The prose in the senior project is expected to be mechanically correct in all respects (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.), and to be of consistent quality throughout. The project must be proofread scrupulously. There will be no opportunity for revision or correction of errors after the project is submitted. Please be aware that projects suffering from a significant number of errors will be graded accordingly.

Length

While there is no required length, it is generally expected that projects will be 35-45 pages in length, not including documentation.

See Appendix One and Appendix Two (attached) for samples of the cover page and signature page, and Appendix Three for a sample project proposal.

The Senior Project Oral

Although the written essay is the most important determinant of your grade, the oral is a meaningful culmination of those efforts and can, depending upon its quality, raise or lower that grade by a partial letter grade. (For example, a "C" might become a "C-" or a "C+," depending on the quality of the oral.) You should arrive for the oral familiar with the objectives, claims, and details of your work, and you should arrive prepared to talk about them. While the emphasis in the oral will be on what you have written, discussion may range to include relevant issues, contexts, and sources not directly addressed in the project. In a highly successful oral, you will demonstrate that the written essay represents only a portion of what you have learned about your chosen topic.

Grades

After the oral, you will be told whether or not you have passed. No letter grade will be given at this point. At the discretion of the director, you may receive written comments or be encouraged to meet with the director at a later date to discuss the project. After you

have left the room, the board members will discuss the grade, which will be made known to you only when you receive final grades for the semester.

Plagiarism

As in all other areas of your academic work, plagiarism will not be tolerated in the senior project. Plagiarism includes direct and indirect uncited use of any words or ideas other than your own. Using the words or ideas of another person without proper citation is a crime. All acts of plagiarism will be taken seriously, and all incidents will be reported to the Honor Committee. The Honor Code can be found in the Student Handbook and in the college catalogue (see <http://www.alleg.edu/academics/principles.html> .)

Policies on Extensions and on Lateness

Extensions

An important aspect of writing the senior project is learning to adhere to a strict deadline. You must make every effort to meet the deadline. If genuine need for an extension of the due date should arise, you must petition members of your senior project board in writing. After receiving a petition, the board will discuss its merits and submit a recommendation to the chairperson of the department for final review. Petitioners will be informed of action taken as speedily as possible. No second petition is permissible, and the petitioner may not bypass his or her board to seek the direct approval of the departmental chairperson.

Lateness

Late projects will be handled in the following manner: a senior project submitted after the deadline will be penalized by one whole grade on the college grade scale after the board has determined the final grade for the project (for example from “A” to “B” or “C” to “D”). If the senior project is not turned in by Tuesday at 4 p.m. following the Friday deadline, it will not be accepted. The lowest final grade after penalties have been imposed shall be no lower than a D, unless the quality of the project (according to the judgment of the committee) merits an F.

Goals and Procedures for the Double Senior Project

The English department has no prescribed procedures for double senior projects. Our common practice is, on the one hand, to follow as fully as possible our departmental procedures and expectations (outlined above), and on the other, to work with the other department as sensibly as possible.

Common practice

- In declaring a double major, you have already indicated which major is your graduation major. You have decided, that is, whether you'll be an English-History double major or a History-English double major;
- The deadlines for the proposal and the completed project will be those of the graduation major;
- You select a project co-advisor and a second reader in our department if English is listed as your graduation major;
- It is your responsibility to submit the proposal to all members of the board;
- A meeting is held near the end of the semester before the one in which you write the project. At least one reader from each of the two departments involved attends this proposal meeting. During this meeting you and faculty present agree on questions of methodology;
- It is your responsibility to see that all members of the board receive a copy of the completed project;
- Directly after the oral, a discussion follows among the board members regarding the grade.

Expectations about the content and methodology of double comps

- Ideally the project should be genuinely interdisciplinary, with literary-critical texts and/or interpretive tools complementing the work in the other discipline;
- You should demonstrate, both in the project and the oral, some clear sense of how these two disciplines usefully interact in the project;
- The double project makes substantial use of the literary-critical and interpretative skills acquired in departmental coursework by bringing these skills to bear on the primary texts on which the project is based;
- These primary texts do not need to be predominantly "literary" in a strict sense; the practice of close-reading can serve to illuminate a wide array of cultural texts.

General Goals of the Senior Project in English

Students completing a senior project in English should strive to

- put into independent practice the critical and interpretive skills cultivated in earlier literature classes;
- trace the trajectory of a literary question or issue through a text or set of texts, or articulate a new, demonstrably valid way of understanding those texts or text;
- find a subject for their project that is appropriately ambitious and yet properly focused;
- gain a thorough understanding of their subject;

- undertake successfully the challenge of arguing an interpretive thesis that develops over the course of 35-45 pages;
- research and analyze published criticism (secondary sources) that are relevant and up-to-date, and have those sources inform their own thinking in fair and persuasive ways;
- comprehend a variety of critical approaches to literary texts and employ self-consciously a critical methodology;
- assimilate their learning during the process fully enough to converse intelligently about their subject in the oral;
- organize and manage their independent work time effectively;
- take feedback from faculty constructively.

Skills students should be able to demonstrate in completing their project.

In completing the project, students should be able to

- scrutinize literary language carefully and infer interesting implications about the text;
- convincingly argue in the written document for the validity of their interpretations;
- demonstrate an awareness of the critical methodology they are employing and articulate the value and implications of that approach;
- gather textual evidence (both primary and secondary) in a well-organized way that advances their thinking in the project;
- talk about their subject in a poised and learned fashion;
- justify, on intellectual, theoretical and rhetorical grounds, the decisions they have made in constructing their project as they have;
- follow correctly the protocols of quotation, citation, and documentation, as described by the current MLA style manual;
- produce clean copy—avoiding spelling, grammatical or other mechanical mistakes;
- interact productively with their senior project advisor;
- revise their writing successfully.

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APPENDIX ONE: COVER PAGE

TITLE OF SENIOR PROJECT

By [Author]

A Senior Comprehensive Project in English
Submitted to the Department of English at Allegheny College
By [Author]
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree
[Date]

APPENDIX TWO: SIGNATURE PAGE

TITLE OF SENIOR PROJECT

By [Author]

A Senior Comprehensive Project in English
Submitted to the Department of English at Allegheny College
By [Author]
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree
[Date]

Professor [Director] _____

Professor [Second Reader] _____

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code
and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the college community as a whole.

_____[Author's Signature]_____

[Author's Full Name: Printed]

APPENDIX THREE: SENIOR PROJECT PROPOSAL

Senior Project Proposal

Director: Professor Quinn

Second Reader: Professor Lockridge

The American Dream?: The Borders of Social Class and Gender in the Latino/a American Bildungsroman

For my senior project I am interested in writing a comparative analysis of the semi-autobiographical novels How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents by Julia Alavez and Drown by Junot Diaz. Both of these novels take place first in the Dominican Republic under the shadow of Dictator Rafael Leonides Trujillo Molina and then in the United States; in addition, both novels trace their central protagonists' immigration journeys from the Dominican Republic and the cultural, linguistic, and personal confusion of making such transitions. In fact, these novels are coming of age stories in which the characters must not only deal with the regular trials of adolescence but must also live their adolescence while trying to understand their identities as immigrants in the United States. Other similarities include both novels' non-traditional structure; for example, the stories are not told in a linear, chronological time line. In addition, both novels shift their points of view so some of the narrative is told in third-person omniscient while some of it is told by one of the central characters in first person.

However, while both novels are about immigrant experiences, they are also radically different about how they represent and portray these experiences.

Alvarez's novel deals with the immigrant struggles of an educated, upper-class family forced to flee the Dominican Republic and it explores how they lose their class-status and social position once they move to the US. Diaz's novel is about a poor, working class family in the Dominican Republic and the fact that their emigration to the United States is an act of desperation to try and access more job opportunities and a better way of life. My central questions in comparing and contrasting these two novels about Dominican Republic immigrants are: to what extent does the class status of immigrants in her/his home country affect how they will be received and assimilated into American society and culture? And to what extent is gender related to how the immigrant experience is portrayed?

My plan is to approach these two questions from a new historicist and feminist perspective, and in particular to use Gloria Anzaldua's ideas about borders, which she defines as both geographic and cultural, to think about how these two novels understand and explore the intersection of social class and gender in immigrant experiences. Anzaldua defines "the border" as a place for misfits, a place, literal and metaphorical for those who are rejected from dominant society. She considers this to be a very violent and traumatic psychic and physical space. I hope to use this idea of the border to consider how social class and gender inform the ways in which Alvarez and Diaz's characters understand themselves, their place in their adopted countries and simultaneously how they are defined and understood by the larger "Anglo" culture.

What I am most interested in is seeing how these two texts try to portray the trauma of being an immigrant while at the same time offering very distinct and oppositional views of life in United States in comparison to life in the home

country. In particular, while Alvarez's novel seems to suggest that the immigrant always feels like an immigrant even if she is educated, fluent in English, and seems to have acquired middle-class success and the "American Dream," Diaz's novel seems to question any fixed distinctions between immigrants and the poor, on the one hand, and working class Americans in the United States on the other. It seems that for Diaz there is no American Dream if one is poor, forgotten, and uneducated and that the real trauma is that there's not that much distinction between being poor and disadvantaged in the United States or in the Dominican Republic. And in both cases, the notions of assimilation and success, of the "American Dream" are questioned and complicated. Both of these novels define immigration as a border experience, a crossing over from one thing into another and this crossing over is dangerous, traumatic, and often violent. I'm interested in seeing how this crossing over is further complicated if social class and gender are taken more explicitly into account.

I plan on doing some general research about the Dominican Republic during the dictatorship years in addition to reading about Alvarez and Diaz's place in the Latino/a American literary canon. I also plan to do some reading about the genre form of the bildungsroman, since I think both of these novels are experimenting with the conventions of the coming of age story within the context of the immigrant experience. In terms of my writing plan, I hope to re-read both novels over break and begin my preliminary reading as well. I think that my first chapter will attempt to set up the basic questions I'll be working out in the project, in particular my theoretical frame-work and then offering my overall argument(s) about how I think these two novels are interacting with each other. I plan to have a

chapter about the ways in which these two texts use and experiment with the coming of age story in relation to immigrant experiences they represent and portray, a chapter about how these novels explore social class, and a chapter about how they engage the questions of gender in the coming of age/immigrant experience story. Finally my conclusion will try and think about the extent to which what Alvarez and Diaz offer as insights about these questions is still pertinent to our understandings of immigration and the American Dream.