

ENGL 497 – Senior Thesis Seminar COVID-19 Edition
Spring 2020, Hendrix College

Dr. Alex Vernon
office hours: 11:00-12:00 MWF; 9:30-11:00 Thurs; by appt.
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Research is formalized curiosity.
It is poking and prying with a purpose.

—Zora Neale Hurston



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1	Wed, 22 Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Introduction • Brief class on your project
2	Wed, 29 Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close readings of two passages (3 full pages each) • Model Essay TBA
3	Wed, 5 Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture/response of two critical sources (3 full pages each) • Model Essay TBA
4	Wed, 12 Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No submitted assignment. • No class. • Meet with second reader.
5	Wed, 19 Feb	Literature Review due (≈ 4 pp and \geq five sources) <i>or</i> Opening Section(s) due (≥ 8 pp beyond any included lit review pages)
6	Wed, 26 Feb	Opening Section(s) <i>or</i> Lit Review (whichever you did not do last week) By Friday, 28 Feb, you should have met with 2 nd Reader at least once
7	Wed, 4 Mar	Essay Shape due (3-4 pp)
	Mon, 9 Mar	Thesis Symposium: 4-6 pm, Murphy Seminar Room
8	Wed, 11 Mar	No class. Individual conferences Tues-Friday.
9	Wed, 18 Mar	COVID-19 LIFE ADJUSTMENT WEEK
	23 - 27 Mar	Spring Break
10	Wed, 1 Apr	No class. Writing Week.
11	Wed, 8 Apr, 2:10	<i>First Draft due</i> to instructor, 2 nd Reader, and assigned peer by email. Peer's two-page feedback due to instructor and writer by email at 4:00.
12	Wed, 15Apr, 2:10	<i>Second Draft due</i> to instructor, 2 nd Reader, and assigned peer by email. Peer's two-page feedback due to instructor and writer by email at 4:00.
13	Wed, 22Apr, 2:10	Final Essay Due! Celebrate with family.
14	Wed, 29 Apr	Freedom! No class. Attend to all the things you've neglected.
15	Tues, 5 May	Oral Defense

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Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide you the opportunity to demonstrate your skills as a literary scholar, the skills you have honed as English majors over the past few years of undergraduate study. This demonstration takes the form of the standard method in the field: the interpretive essay. Your general knowledge of literary history, your ability to interpret texts, and your skills at research and writing will all play a significant role in this project; the project will in turn enhance that knowledge and those skills. The course also allows you to investigate in depth a topic of interest that you may have not otherwise had the chance to pursue. The course becomes the culmination of your time as an English major.

Your completed thesis must demonstrate rigorous engagement with secondary materials, either critical or theoretical (and possibly both), and an awareness of its relationship to an existing critical community. Consider the thesis as an opportunity to make a real contribution to the scholarly conversation on your chosen topic. The ultimate task is to offer an interpretation of your primary text(s), to locate that interpretation stands in relation to existing interpretations, and to present that work to your peers and members of the faculty.

In the first part of the course, you will submit writing regularly. We will discuss your progress, address problems you might be experiencing, and review models of critical work. Because writing is a process of revision, we will incorporate peer review and individual consultations.

In the latter part of the course, you will submit a complete draft to the class for feedback, present your current state of research to peers and faculty at the Thesis Symposium, submit your final thesis, and complete a 20-minute oral defense of your work (Reading Day).

You will work with both the course instructor and your Second Reader. These individuals jointly decide your grade for the final essay. The instructor determines your grade for the rest of the course requirements. This course fulfills the English major capstone experience requirement, and grants W2 and UR Odyssey credit (if you attain a “C” or higher).

Senior Thesis Goals

1. The thesis essay will present an original, compelling argument. It must at once explicate the issue and appreciate its complexity. The thesis must also make a case for its own significance: Why does this matter? An audience unfamiliar with the text or the approach should still be able to follow the argument.
2. The thesis will engage secondary and critical sources in substantive ways. Instead of dropping occasional supporting quotations, it should make those sources an integral part of the line of argumentation and inquiry. The sources should be discussed.
3. The thesis will demonstrate command of its own methodology (including its limitations).
4. The thesis will show familiarity with the other pertinent and important scholarship.
5. The thesis will place its subject in a larger aesthetic, cultural, and/or historical context.
6. The thesis will be well organized, solidly and compellingly argued, and gracefully written, free of grammatical errors and stylistic gaffes.
7. The thesis will demonstrate mastery of the MLA style in terms of format, documentation, citation, and other matters.

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Course Requirements/Expectations

- (1) Final Papers: Your final paper will be a 20-25-page original work of literary analysis, using the current MLA style (page count includes Notes but not Works Cited). This is the standard manuscript length for professional journal articles in the field. The paper must demonstrate your authority in the field through substantive use of published scholarship, and it should make an original and compelling argument and contribution to the criticism. *Essays with egregious grammar or MLA documentation/style problems will receive an F.*
- ~~(2) Drafts: Full drafts will be read and commented upon by your classmates. You must be prepared to introduce your draft to the class, and to respond to the questions and comments of your peers.~~
- (3) Draft Feedback: You will provide detailed pages of feedback on peer drafts, and we will describe the appropriate parameters of the review at each stage.
- (4) Other drafts and writings, as noted on the syllabus: These writings will also be subject to peer review. Always submit one printed copy and a copy (print or e-) to your second reader. No late work will be accepted. Plan your life accordingly. You should be writing regularly and frequently—ideally every day, certainly every other day. In the process, you will produce about 30 pages of writing. Some of this will end up in the final version; much of it will not. Learning what the thesis is really about—and so what belongs in it—is one of the most difficult but most necessary tasks you will perform this semester.
- (5) Punctual attendance at every class meeting. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Two late arrivals will equal one absence. Your final grade will drop a full letter grade for every unexcused absence beyond the first.
- (6) Active class participation. Come to class with your marked up copy of that day's text. Be prepared to listen to what others have to say, as well as to contribute to the discussion. This course is a seminar; its success depends on your willingness to engage with the material and with each other. Typically, we will be discussing each other's writing; feedback can be critical but it must be respectful and productive.
- (7) Thesis Symposium: Prior to completing the first full draft, you will present a brief synopsis of the direction of your project to your peers and faculty (5 minutes), and will field questions and comments.
- (8) Oral Defense. On Reading Day, you will “defend” your thesis to three faculty members over a 20-minute conversation. We will prepare for it in class ahead of time. See below.

Assignment Descriptions

Close Readings: Select two passages that you intuit will have significance for your analysis. At this point in your career as an English major, you should understand what it means to close-read a passage ([here is a very brief refresher](#)); focus here on your observations and the questions they generate, particularly of elements that are strange, contradictory, or otherwise striking (and especially if they only become striking by virtue of your close observation). **Each close reading should be a full three pages.** Please include a photocopy of the passage. A passage is typically understood as a delineated moment, such as a paragraph or a dialogue, less than a full page (although a rich paragraph can clearly go over a page).

Article Capture/Response: From the several sources that you have collected and begun to study, choose two for this assignment. For each, begin by representing the article's analysis fairly and sympathetically. Quote its key language, but otherwise capture it using your own. Then respond in whatever way you find most productive. By respectfully disagreeing, by putting it in conversation with another article, by imagining how you might use it in your thesis, etc. **Each capture/response should be a full three pages.**

Literature Review: Depending upon your primary text, there might or might not be a great deal of direct scholarship (professional, peer-reviewed books or essays with your text's title or creator in its title). Remember that available criticism can take a number of forms, from book and film reviews to interviews to scholarly analysis and argument. If there are many scholarly articles, you will have to select wisely. For this assignment, tell a story about that body of criticism. For example, literary criticism of William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* tend to divide into camps depending on their judgement of Temple Drake and Janie Crawford, the respective female leads. By *story*, I mean that your review is a narrative, that it has a frame—it is not simply conjoined paragraphs each about a separate source. Your approach might require you to take a slightly different tack: If you are making an argument about genre, consider using this space to capture various perspectives about genre in ways pertinent to your investigation. **Approximately four pages and at least five sources.** Note that if the overall approach leans heavily into theory, your final thesis must still demonstrate a certain command of the direct scholarship about your text. Also note that this Literature Review might not become a section of the final thesis, which could very well find another way to integrate this knowledge (such formal sections can be ungainly).

Opening Section(s): Draft **the first eight pages (or more)** of the thesis. This will consist of the introduction and the first body section—or a large part of it—and potentially a second body section (or a part of it). An introduction for an essay of this length will not be a single paragraph. Aim for 1.5 to 2.5 pages. An introduction for an essay of this kind must pique curiosity, suggest significance, and establish the approach or terms. A roadmap of the thesis's structure is not necessary now (or ever), but you might find it helpful at this stage. Note that these must be eight original pages—if you plan to incorporate your four-page literature review into the opening sections, this assignment should reach at least twelve pages. Don't forget that a smart essay title and perhaps an epigraph can relieve pressure on the work an introduction must do.

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Essay Shape: My own drafting process is essentially linear in that I begin with the beginning and write to the end (albeit with rewriting, revising, moving, deleting, adding, reconceiving, etc., happening all the while). But as I draft the opening sections, I also have an eye toward the overall structure. I need to know in the most basic terms where the writing is headed—*What will the next section concern? What is it all building up to?*—even if I also understand that the structure, both the next section and endpoint, are not set in stone. For this assignment, compose a narrative of your anticipated structure. What will be the basic structure of your thesis? What passages, secondary sources, and ideas do you imagine addressing in each? I imagine this assignment will consist of a series of subheadings/topics with a paragraph or three describing each. **Approximately four pages.**

Thesis Symposium: We will discuss this task as the event approaches. The gist is this: With your Lit Review, Opening, and Shape assignments completed, you are more than ready to present your progress and plan in public. Each of you will have 5 minutes to present orally the thesis as it currently exists and receive feedback from faculty members and other students. PowerPoint, handouts, or other aids are authorized.

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Grading Seminar work: 30% Final Thesis: 70%

Seminar work will be graded as follows:

Regular submission of weekly assignments, compelling revision of those assignments toward drafts, insightful and challenging commentary on others' draft work, and thoughtful participation in conferences and class discussion will earn a grade in the "A" range.

Regular submission of weekly assignments, substantive revision of assignments toward drafts, engaged commentary on others' draft work, and thoughtful participation in conferences and class discussion will earn a grade in the "B" range.

Spotty submission of weekly assignments, limited revision toward drafts, and/or superficial commentary on others' draft work and participation in conferences and class discussion will earn a grade in the "C" range or below.

Oral Defense

At the end of the semester, you will complete a 20-minute oral defense of your thesis. The exam consists of a committee of three faculty members, led by your Second Reader. The committee members will have varying levels of familiarity with your work. You will begin by summarizing the argument and significant findings. You will end by reflecting on your time in the major. The exam is a conversation, not a faultfinding expedition. Remember that you set the terms for the conversation. The exam serves the following purposes:

- 1) to give you a final opportunity to demonstrate ownership over your work, as well as a chance to receive feedback that will supplement the written comments;
- 2) to require you to reflect on the work you have done; and,
- 3) to function as your final experience in the major, and thus as a summation of your career.

The grade for the exam will be one of the following: a check minus, a check, or a check plus, where a check indicates general competence on the part of the student with regard to familiarity with her own work, ability to communicate that work to others, and willingness to respond to questions or observations about the work; a check minus indicates an inability to demonstrate these qualities; and a check plus indicates a strong ability to demonstrate these qualities.

A check minus will lower the grade that has been given to the written thesis (by consensus reached between the first and second readers) by a fraction of a grade (i.e., B becomes B-); a check will leave that grade as it is; and a check plus will increase that grade by a fraction (i.e., B becomes B+). This system ensures that the final grade for ENGL 497 is primarily weighted toward your written work, while still enabling us to place value on your ability to communicate your work orally and to think on your feet.

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Academic Integrity

Each student in this course is expected to follow the principles set out in the Hendrix Catalog under “Academic Integrity.” Any work submitted in this course must be your own work. Passing off another’s work as your own—whether you have directly quoted from it or not—is called plagiarism; this is also known as academic theft and is a serious offense. You **must** acknowledge all material that you consult, even if you do not directly cite it. Online sources are no different from any other. **Plagiarism can affect your permanent academic record.** If you are unsure about how to acknowledge a source, please consult a writing handbook, such as the MLA Style Manual, or contact me to discuss further.

Course Accessibility

If you have a physical, psychiatric, or learning disability that affects your ability to access course materials or complete coursework, please let me know early in the semester. You’ll also want to contact Julie Brown in Academic Support Services (brownj@hendrix.edu), who organizes accommodations here at Hendrix. I’m committed to making this course fully accessible to all its members. If any barriers to your participation in this course arise, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can work things out.

Essay Format

All submitted essays and written work must follow the MLA style:

MLA format: 12 point font with serifs. 1” margins all around. No cover sheet. No folders. Attach pages with a staple (unstapled papers will not be accepted). Page numbers must appear in the upper right corner of each page except the first (use “Insert Page Number”; do not do this manually on every page!). All papers must have a title and a “Works Cited” section. Note that MS Word often has 1.5” left margin, and often inserts an extra space between paragraphs. You will have to change these.

Exceptions to MLA format: Single-space the name/course/date/professor information on the first page. 1.5-space for block/indented quotations. If you have room, add your entire “Works Cited” section at the bottom of your last page. Footnotes are preferred to endnotes.

MLA documentation: MLA calls for parenthetical documentation. Consult any recent English handbook, the *MLA Handbook* in the library, or an online guide. *Rule of thumb:* *Given the context of the surrounding passage and the bibliography listing, include the absolute minimum amount of information necessary within the parentheses.*

Printing: The final essay for grade must be printed single-sided. You may print all other writings double-sided.