A Guide to

Creative Senior Theses in English and American Literatures

(CRWR 701)

Academic Year 2015-2016
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Preparing to Write the Thesis: A Timeline

- **March of junior year**: You will be required to submit your proposal for a senior thesis just before Spring break. The proposal will ask you for a summary of your intended project and a list of three potential advisors for your work. (See list of advisors and topics at the end of this guide.) NB: All students, whether writing in the Fall or in the Spring, are required to submit a proposal at this time. All students will be notified of their advisor assignments before Banner registration for the Fall begins.

- **April of junior year**: If you plan to write your project in the Fall, register in Banner for your advisor’s section of CRWR 701. Talk with your advisor about your project and develop a reading list for the summer.

- **November of senior year**: If you plan to write your project in the Spring, register in Banner for your advisor’s section of CRWR 701. Talk with your advisor and develop a reading list for the winter.

- See the “Thesis Requirements” section of this guide for a complete list of deadlines and expectations. **Note that you must have at least a B+ average in creative writing seminars in order to go forward with a creative thesis.**
The Thesis Process

1. Choosing a Thesis Topic
   Choose a topic that interests you and that will continue to interest you over the course of the semester. Ideally, you will be able to draw on material that you have encountered in earlier classes, perhaps especially your creative writing seminars. The work on your thesis, however, needs to be original and new. It must not duplicate material that you have worked on in prior courses. Try to imagine what you’d really like to write: a sequence of poems, a few stories or novella, a play, a memoir or piece of creative nonfiction that may involve some research.

   Early on, you will wish to focus your topic so that it can be covered well in the limited time and space that you have. Creative theses in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, or drama will vary in length but must be original work. You are testing the waters, trying to find your own voice in the genre you have chosen, and where you presumably have some beginning expertise.

2. When to write the thesis
   If you intend to graduate in May, you have two options for scheduling a senior thesis: Fall or Spring.
   If you intend to graduate next February, you may also write a thesis in your “super senior” Fall.

3. Thesis length
   In fiction or nonfiction theses, approximately 30-35 pages is the normal range. For poetry, 12-15 poems, totalling about 20 pages of writing, is typical. A short play might be 30 pages in length.

4. Style
   Theses should be typed, double-spaced, with footnotes at the bottom of the page or at the end of the paper (if necessary in nonfiction projects). You may use double-sided pages if you wish. Please note that brief parenthetical citations included in your text are the MLA standard now. Footnotes are generally explanatory or discursive. Follow MLA style in preparing your “Works Cited” and “Works Consulted” lists.

5. Thesis Deadline
   The thesis deadline is not flexible. There will be a penalty of one third of a grade per day for late submission unless you provide a formal dean’s excuse by the deadline. The Fall thesis is due on Monday, December 7, 2015, and the Spring thesis is due on Monday, May 9, 2016. These deadlines have been designed partly to ensure that the faculty has time to schedule an oral for all students. Failure on a senior thesis may prevent you from graduating.

6. First Steps
Your first priority is to present a two-page, typewritten prospectus with a tentative bibliography (for nonfiction projects). Your prospectus should include a chapter breakdown for prose projects, if possible (sometimes this will not be relevant). The prospectus should also indicate the scope of your project. You should submit this prospectus to your advisor as early as possible in the semester; the deadline can be found in this guide. If you fail to meet this deadline you will receive a formal course warning.

After solidifying and narrowing your topic, you should prepare a general outline of your possible chapters or sections – whether in fiction or nonfiction, if relevant.

After that, it is time to start writing. Even if you are not finished researching, start writing what you know as soon as you can. The act of writing will bring your topic into sharper focus, and will help you understand what else you need to know in order to finish your thesis. You might end up discarding or completely revising this first draft, but the effort will not have been wasted. Rough drafts do not stop when writing begins; the two are closely related and dependent on each other. Expect to do many revisions.

Your writing schedule will be developed in consultation with your advisor.

Remember that the writing of your ENAM thesis should reflect your own independent work. We expect that your advisor will provide you with constructive and helpful feedback on your drafts, but you should show your work to other students whenever possible, to get as much feedback as you can. It is not acceptable, however, to have other people (including parents, former teachers, other Middlebury faculty or students) do the important thinking, writing, and revising for you. All of the words in your thesis should be your own, unless they are included in quotation marks and a source is cited. You must provide a source for borrowed ideas as well as borrowed language. You will write and sign the Honor Code statement on your final essay, indicating that it is your own work.

7. Finishing the thesis

Give yourself at least a week to reread your final draft and to make final revisions, to refine your prose, to eliminate typographical and other errors, to check the accuracy and form of your citations, and to tighten your argument so that it is as clear as possible.

The final version of your thesis will have several components that appear in a logical order. Once you have compiled (and checked) your bibliography and have polished the thesis itself, you’ll need to create a title page, and, if you wish, a table of contents, acknowledgements, etc. In general these elements are included in the following order:

1. title page
2. acknowledgements (optional)
3. table of contents (optional)
4. thesis, with footnotes and/or endnotes if relevant
5. “works cited” and “works consulted” lists, if relevant
8. Submitting the thesis

On the Thesis Due Date (see this guide for deadlines), you must hand in two copies of your thesis to the ENAM Department Office, 306 Axinn, by 1 p.m. Since you need to turn in two copies, the department will pay for one photocopy if you take your thesis to Reprographics (FIC) to be copied. Put one copy in a black thesis binder. (We have a few available for your use in the department office, or you can buy them at the College Store.) The other copy should be at least stapled, but does not need to be in a binder. Reprographics has inexpensive and effective binding options available.

9. Evaluation of the thesis

ENAM senior theses are read by the project advisor and one other reader, who may be another ENAM faculty member or a faculty member from another Middlebury department. Your advisor will discuss possible readers with you, and will contact readers on your behalf. These two readers determine the thesis grade--into which will be factored your performance in the defense.

10. Thesis defense

Every thesis student will have an oral defense. You and your readers will discuss your thesis with you for about 50 minutes, commenting on aspects of the work, asking that you elaborate on things that could be confusing or undeveloped. A strong thesis defense may raise the grade on a thesis, particularly if points are clarified and elaborated on well; a poor one may lower it. The thesis defense is part of your project, and should be taken seriously. Preparation for the defense will be discussed with your advisor. Thesis defenses are generally scheduled within two weeks of the thesis due date.

11. Criteria for evaluation of the thesis

The following elements are essential for a successful creative thesis. You will have thought seriously about the scope and nature of your project and the demands of the genre: poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama. Faculty readers will evaluate each thesis on an individual basis, but they will consider all relevant components—and how well they are executed—in determining the thesis grade. Note that this list of criteria includes performance in the workshop and in the oral.

a. Scope and thoroughness: is the thesis appropriately focused and thoroughly considered? Has the writer taken into account the demands of the genre?
b. Thesis: in nonfiction theses, is the argument of the thesis clear and well supported by appropriate evidence? In fiction, is the story clear and movingly presented and well-written? In poetry or drama: have the emotional demands of the subject been embodied in concrete terms?
c. Organization: Is the structure of the thesis logical and convincing?
d. Methodology: does the thesis make appropriate use of other examples in the genre? Is the poetry, for example, aware of its status within a particular poetic tradition?
e. Writing: is the thesis written clearly and without distracting errors?
f. Validity: does the thesis make a defensible, convincing and illuminating contribution to the genre?
g. Originality: does the thesis offer something new—new material, an original comparison or angle, an insightful or creative of the material at hand?

h. Performance in the oral. How well does the writer defend his/her work, explain aspects of it, and elaborate on it?

In addition to the criteria listed above, the ENAM faculty will consider at least two other factors when determining your thesis grade: the inherent difficulty of the topic and the nature and the writer’s awareness of the genre and its potential.
Thesis Requirements and Deadlines
2014-2015

I. Form

Thesis: The thesis should be 30-35 pages long, including footnotes or appendices where relevant. The title page should be prepared according to the example provided in this booklet. One copy of the thesis should be bound in a black thesis binder; the other copy must be stapled, at least, but need not be bound; you must submit both copies. The department will pay for one copy if you have it done at Reprographics (FIC). Two copies of your thesis must be submitted to the ENAM Department office, 306 Axinn, by the deadline.

II. Deadlines

No alterations to this deadline schedule will be made except in extraordinary circumstances. Unless otherwise noted, all deadlines fall at 1 p.m. on the stated day. You will NOT be able to turn in your thesis to Campus Security or to leave it outside the ENAM department office or in faculty mailboxes after hours. You’ll have to turn it in the next day, and it will be considered late. Be aware that there is great demand for the use of college printers at these deadlines. Don’t wait until the last day to print.

Extensions will not be granted for computer breakdowns. You are responsible for learning all of the correct procedures for backing up your writing and for avoiding computer viruses. Be sure to save your work in at least three distinct places.

A. Prospectus and Bibliography: Turn in to advisor. Students failing to meet this deadline will be placed on course warning.

Fall Theses: Friday, October 2, 2015
Spring Theses: Thursday, February 25, 2016

B. First Section: Turn in to advisor.

Fall Theses (at least 15 pages): Friday, October 30, 2015
Spring Theses (at least 15 pages): Friday, March 25, 2016
C. Full Rough Draft: Turn in to advisor.
   
   Fall Theses: Monday, November 23, 2015
   Spring Theses: Monday, April 25, 2016

D. Submission of Final Copies: Turn in to the ENAM Department office, Axinn 306, by 1 pm.
   
   Fall Theses: Monday, December 7, 2015
   Spring Theses: Monday, May 9, 2016

III. Grading of Theses; Thesis Defense

   You and your advisor will select a second reader for your thesis. (Your advisor will contact potential readers for you.) Your thesis advisor will schedule the thesis defense. After the defense, readers confer about a grade and your advisor will write you a letter summarizing the readers’ responses to your work. Theses are normally graded within the regular grading period of the semester in which they are written.

   Performance in the oral defense will be a factor in the determination of the thesis grade.
Joint Thesis Requirements

The senior work of joint majors must demonstrate in a single project an integration of the two majors that the student has elected. The project will be jointly advised by a faculty member from each of the two relevant departments, and these faculty members and an outside reader will evaluate the thesis.

Joint majors are required to draw up, in consultation with the supervisor of ENAM Senior Creative Work and their advisors, a contract describing the requirements for their senior thesis. Such a contract will specify deadlines, citation form, and any other requirements for joint senior work that have been agreed upon by advisors and student. (For example, students writing a joint creative thesis in ENAM and a language department may be required to utilize sources in multiple languages; there may be required workshops in both departments; there may be criteria for evaluation in addition to those for the ENAM creative thesis itemized above.) This contract must be submitted to the supervisor of ENAM Senior Creative Work by the end of the first week of classes.

For students who are joint majors in ENAM and Theatre and who wish to pursue a joint project that involves directing or acting, senior work will normally comprise two full-credit classes, ENAM 0708 and THEA 0708. These classes should wherever possible be taken in the same semester, with the understanding that a central goal of the joint major is the thorough integration of both aspects of the major. A single-credit, single-semester joint project remains an option for those who wish to pursue a joint thesis that does not include a practical component such as acting or directing.
The River Runs to Jordan
A Novella

Edward Smithson
Funding Sources (SRPS)

Awards: Up to $1600 (April 15 or Oct. 1 deadline) and up to $350 throughout the academic year as funding permits.

Overview: SRPS is designed to support senior research projects, and these may be relevant for some creative nonfiction theses. For 2015-16 the upper limit is $1600; however, the average award is about $500. Expenses are reimbursed (see the approved expense types below) and must occur after your application is approved. Prior summer expenses may be reimbursed in October only if an application is submitted for preview prior to beginning the project.

Selection: Funding will be awarded on the basis of the quality of the application and the availability of funds. Preference will be given to students who do not have access to funds in their major departments. You may receive only one award from the SRPS. Students who will have senior status during their project dates may apply. If you have questions about whether you are eligible please contact the Undergraduate Research Office (URO).

If your research involves human subjects, such as interviewing or testing, it must be approved by the Institutional Review Board: http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/resources/irb

Funding notification will be emailed by early May or mid-October. Otherwise, rolling applications are reviewed each Monday.

Reimbursement: Reimbursements for expenses incurred require receipts and a completed reimbursement summary form. This form should be checked and signed by your advisor or the departmental coordinator, and submitted to the URO. You will only be reimbursed for activities that were approved in your SRPS application.

Approved SRPS Expenses:

Note: Generally funding will be limited for applications with one large expense ($1600 for airfare or a piece of equipment, for example).

Supplies- needed to conduct research. Some equipment purchased shall remain the property of Middlebury College for future use by other students.

Travel to conduct interviews, fieldwork, or research- save all travel related receipts and keep track of all mileage ($.40 per mile).
Compensation of research subjects- compensation as a gift certificate from a College facility such as the Grille or the College Store is preferred. However, arrangements can be made to pay small cash stipends (up to $10 each) with the appropriate documentation.

Photocopying of research materials (not thesis proposals or completed theses)- a receipt must accompany reimbursement requests for photocopy expenses.

Please note that requests to purchase computer programs, technological resources, books or media need to be checked with LIS to see if the college doesn't already own or is willing to purchase for general use. All non-consumable resources will remain property of the college and need to be turned in to URO at the completion of your project.

Because they are limited, these funds are intended to support the conducting of research, rather than the presentation of research results. Students looking for funding to attend an academic conference should apply to the Academic Conference Travel Fund.

Please contact URO if you have reimbursement needs that are not listed above.

More information can be found at http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/resources/uro/funding/srps
Senior Thesis Advisors

Creative Writing Faculty to Advise Your Project

When you propose your project, you’ll have the opportunity to express your preference for an advisor. You may not get to work with your first choice, however, as we will take workloads of faculty into account when assigning advisers.

David Bain – Students and I work together on their nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, in that order of preference -- personal essay cycles, memoir, literary reportage, nature or environmental writing; short stories and novellas; personal or narrative poetry. Usually weekly meetings suit us. One or two semester projects as warranted.

Timothy Billings — My own MFA is in poetry, so I normally advise only poets—particularly those whom I know well from class and who are willing to work diligently on developing a coherent portfolio of revised poems over the course of a term—but on rare occasions I advise students working on short fiction, as well. I’m also happy to advise students doing translations or multi-lingual work.

Robert Cohen – I am happy to advise any student writing creative prose, and will work with the student to devise a writing and feedback schedule that works for him or her.

Karin Gottshall -- I look forward to advising students working on creative theses in poetry or essays on contemporary poetry. My interests as a writer and instructor include the prose poem, surrealism, magic realism, and the ecstatic.

Kathryn Kramer – I work with students on novels, short stories, memoirs and various combinations thereof, including some poetry. I usually like to meet every other week and am happy working with either essay- or thesis-length work, although an essay needs to be fairly well planned out ahead of time, I find.

Carolyn Kuebler – I would be happy to work with students writing fiction -- including short stories, novellas, and novels -- or narrative nonfiction. I enjoy a broad range of literary styles and forms. Students should be sure to save time for revision and can expect to meet weekly or biweekly to discuss their progress.

Jay Parini – I’m interested in working with poets in particular. For creative theses, I expect to work for a term, meeting each week to discuss poems in progress, hoping for a portfolio of well-revised poems by the end of the term. For a senior thesis in poetry, I expect the student to have in mind shaping a short volume of poems. These poems may be on a theme or part of some cycle; these generally work better when there is some unifying theme. I’m also interested in working with students on nonfiction essays and theses, such as pieces of writing related to a travel experience or an exploration of some topic. I will, on occasion, work with students on short stories as well.