ENG 4200
About: The Final Project
Proposal due: T 10/31 at the beginning of class in hard copy
Due: Th 12/14 at 2:45pm

This class encourages you to pursue a final project best suited for your post-college life and career goals. Are you interested in applying to graduate school in literature? Then you should write a research essay you can use as a writing sample. Are you hoping to become a creative writer? Then you should try writing a novelette. Are you a technical writer or a freelancer or someone generally interested in writing for different kinds of publics or readerships? Then you should take on the creative nonfiction/critical essay project. Are you a person who is eager, for whatever reason, to explore something experimental, different, genre or medium-bending like a website or an art installation or the materials for a new kind of 7th grade English class, or something I’ve never thought of? If so, talk to me. We might be able to make it work.

The purpose of this final project, however – whatever project you decide to pursue – is the same. Your project needs, first and foremost, to demonstrate that you’ve achieved the course objectives. Remember, students enrolled in a 4000-level course will
• engage a focused topic in literary study. The topic for this course is genre-based (the novel and various competing genres like histories, romances, biographies as well as specific formal qualities of the novel: believability or realism, interiority/character, didacticism, social commentary or engagement) and historical based (the novel in the eighteenth century and the novel now)
• engage critical questions raised about these texts made by literary scholars in peer-reviewed journals and similar contexts,
• undertake original research in response to the topic,
• write one or more substantial literary-critical essays in response to the topic

Your reader responses constitute substantial literary-critical essays, and so you are free to do something a little different with your final project. But this project must still demonstrate that you are “engaged with critical questions raised about” the texts assigned in this course “by literary scholars in peer-reviewed journals and similar contexts.” That means that whatever final project you do, you have to read, incorporate, and engaged in dialogue with scholarship on a cross-section of the specific novels we’ve read in this course as well as on the genre and history of the novel more generally. You also need to “undertake original research in response” to the course. That means that you have to find a new angle or a new text – a way, in other words, of adding something new to the conversations experts are having in the secondary sources you consult.

So whatever project catches your imagination, keep in mind that it has to be assessed using these objectives. To recap: your project must
• be clearly related to the course topic by engaging assigned texts, as well as key terms and contexts introduced in class discussions
• show evidence that you consulted the library’s database in order to find, read, and comprehend an appropriate range of specialized, scholarly sources on the course topic as well as on assigned texts
• add a new piece of information or insight to what we already know or think about the novel’s forms and histories and/or the specific novels assigned in the class.

Your final project grade will primarily be based on how well you demonstrate having achieved the course objects.

Just as importantly, however: this project should be fun! It should excite you. It should be something that challenges you, but also something that you really want to try and see if you can do it. You should want to work and work hard on this thing. And when finished, it should represent your best work and effort; it should be something you can show to your family, or prospective employers, maybe even the whole internet. And in order for you to pursue something that you’re really passionate about, something that’s new and interesting, I’m giving you considerable freedom when it comes to the final project.

I’ve offered you three starting ideas that you can grab onto and run with:

• a traditional 10-12 page (2,500-3,000 words not counting works cited) research essay that advances a new thesis that is well-supported by and in dialogue with at least 10-15 recently-published secondary sources and at least one primary (i.e. eighteenth-century) source not assigned in the course (1 reading response may serve as the basis for the research essay)

  OR

• a series of 4-6 creative nonfiction essays or critical essays that fall in the category of popular criticism (5,000-7,500 words total) suitable for submission to a professional publishing venue; these essays should reflect on the novel’s histories as well as its forms and be suitably engaged with research on secondary and/or primary (i.e eighteenth-century) sources (2 essays may be based on reading responses)

  OR

• a novelette (10,000-12,500 words) inspired by assigned readings and the course theme and suitably engaged with research on secondary and/or primary (i.e eighteenth-century) sources (up to 3 reading responses may be incorporated into a novelette)

The varying word lengths and how many reader responses each of these three projects can incorporate reflect my sense of how each requires slightly different kinds, but not a different overall quantity, of workloads when it comes to research and writing. A student who writes a research essay will need to engage with more sources and each one more deeply than the student experimenting with a novelette; both students have to do research, of course. Both students have to engage with that research. But a novelettist doesn’t have to worry quite as much as the research-essayist that they have found every single relevant source on their topic, that their argument and evidence are water-tight, or that their citations perfect. Somewhere in between the novelette and the research essay sits the creative nonfiction or critical essay with a slightly different mix of research- and writing-demands. In other words, I think that all of these three possible projects constitute about the same balance of intellectual-, research- and writing-labor in the grand scheme of things.

If you have another idea for a project, pitch me; just keep in mind overall quantity of work it will entail and how it will balance intellectual-, research-, and writing-labor. And, of course, you should be able to explain to me how your project will achieve the course objects: how will it
relate to the course topic and assigned readings, rely on and secondary sources, and proffer original research?

Whatever project you pursue, you need to include a 500-word (single-spaced, Times New Roman 12pt font) introductory essay at the beginning. The purpose of the essay is first and foremost to explain how the project meets the course objectives, using the language of the objectives themselves. The secondary purpose of this essay is related: to very specifically explain what’s important and new about your project: what it adds to (or how it changes) the things we think we know about the novel’s form and history.

Some of these sentence models might help you craft your introductory essay:

- “My project engages with the history and/or form of the novel by…”
- “More specifically, my project takes on the [key term] in order to…”
- “In order to explore this [key term] in more depth, I consulted sources on [A, B, and C].”
- “The essay, “Title” by [First Name Last Name] was especially important to my work. In this essay, Last Name argues/claims/finds/considers…”
- “Likewise, Scholarly Monograph Book Title by [First Name Last Name] also shaped my understanding of Q. Last Name explores/studies/shows/examines…”
- “Some other sources I looked at were [include names and abbreviated titles]…”
- “In all of the sources I consulted, I discovered a pattern: ….”
- “My project adds another piece to the puzzle of/finds instead/goes in a different direction by…”
- “In other words…”
- “I illustrate this by engaging with/reading/analyzing/adopting [primary text(s): eighteenth-century and/or contemporary novels]”
- “In so doing, I offer new insight/a new take on the [form/history] of the novel by…”

Your introductory essay will be an important component I use in determining your final grade for the project, so don’t wait until the last minute to start writing it.

**Grading Criteria:**

**A:** The project is excellent. Not only are its mechanics of style as well as grammar impeccable, so too does the project demonstrate an astute awareness of the conventions that structure other similar projects. In other words, research essays demonstrate a knowledge of how to make and provide evidence for a new, but grounded, claim; critical essays demonstrate a knowledge of how to balance reflection with research; novelettes demonstrate a knowledge of how to develop characters, settings, plots. Overall, the project illustrates significant and ongoing effort as well as care. The project is deeply, thoughtfully, comprehensively engaged with assigned texts, key terms used in the course, and class discussions, as well as with independently-conducted research.

**B:** The project is very strong. Its basic mechanics of style as well as grammar are impeccable, although its awareness of the conventions that structure other similar projects may sometimes seem unsteady or still in progress. Research essays may need work on their thesis or their
evidence; critical or creative nonfiction essays might need to do more to appeal to or convince their readers; novelettes might benefit from a clearer command of how a work’s themes require attention both to form as well as content. On the whole, however, the project develops its claims admirably – with attention both to precision as well as to comprehensiveness. The project illustrates significant and ongoing effort as well as care, and it is thoughtfully engaged with assigned texts, key terms used in the course, and class discussions, as well as with independently-conducted research.

C: The project sometimes feels a little haphazard. Parts of it seem underdeveloped or hastily undertaken. Basic errors in mechanics may compromise its ability to appeal to its audience. The project may also not sufficiently rely on secondary sources. The project may not, in the end, stand as an example of originality or its originality may be unearned because crucial sources were not consulted or reviewed. On the whole, the project seems like it could have been developed more substantially. The project might, in other words, illustrate significant effort, but not ongoing effort. Its engagement with assigned texts, key terms used in the course, and class discussions, as well as with independently-conducted research is incomplete.

D: The project is incomplete, or the project clearly encountered substantial roadblocks while it was being undertaken. Basic errors in mechanics consistently compromise its ability to appeal to its audience. The project demonstrates little engagement with specialized or appropriate secondary sources. The “original research” component is therefore likewise difficult to detect. Finally, the project may not be sufficiently engaged with the course topic, doing little to illustrate comprehension or review of assigned texts, key terms used in the course, and class discussions.

F: No project was submitted, parts or all of the project violate Wright State’s academic integrity policy, or the project did not fulfill the requirements of the assignment.

**Frequently Asked Questions:**

Is this for real?
Yes.

If I decide to write something creative, does it have to be any good?
Yes.

How will you know if it’s any good or not?
Because of my expertise in literary histories and forms.

Do I have to do the project I proposed? My ideas have changed…
You cannot radically change your project after you turn in your proposal. You can finesse your topic or your plan, but you can’t – for example – switch from an essay about one topic to an essay about a completely different topic or switch from writing a novelette based on one text to one based on a different text. Neither can you switch from writing a novelette to a series of critical essays or from writing a research essay to writing a novelette, or similar. It’s important to see your plan through: to keep your workflow steady and on task.
I can’t find any sources for my project. What do I do?  
Trust me. There are sources. You should chat with a librarian. I’m also great at finding sources; shoot me an email.

I’ve found too many sources for my project. What do I do?  
Settle on one key term or method; consider settling on fewer primary texts. Talk to a librarian or visit the writing center. Send me what sources you’ve found via email, and I may be able to help you narrow things down.

I’ve found sources, but they aren’t in our library?  
You have to order them through OhioLINK or ILL. A librarian can help you do this.

Can I use sources I found on the internet?  
It depends what you mean by this. The library’s databases are “on the internet.” Those are fine. Sometimes, there are interesting and useful sources on the internet-internet, and you can (sometimes, even: should) use those. But if more than a couple of the sources you use in your project are things you found on Google, well, that’s: not cool.

Can I incorporate work from my other courses into my project?  
You may draw on ideas or texts from other courses, but you may not turn in writing – in whole or in part – that you have previously submitted or plan to submit for consideration in another course.

Will you publish my project?  
No. But I’m happy to help you start that process, if you’d like to do that.

It’s so hard to say something new or original! What do I do?  
Try saying something smaller, more specific: wiggle your way into the conversation. Little things matter more than we think – which is a good point for you to make!

I am not going to complete my project before the deadline; something unexpected has happened. Can I turn my project in to you later?  
No. It’s crunch time for all of us at the end of the semester. I cannot accept late projects or projects via email except in documented emergencies that require me to get in touch with Student Services on your behalf. Plan for the unexpected.

Do I have to print my project out? It’s a lot of pages!  
Yes. I’m sorry for this, but it is what it is. Feel free to single-space and print double-sided to save costs.