The Thesis Option: ENGL 695 and 696  
Winthrop University Department of English  
Revised Spring 2012

The most sophisticated piece of scholarship a student produces during the M.A. program, the Master’s thesis demonstrates that the student can generate a recognizably professional project. Students who choose the thesis option will take six “thesis hours” during their final two semesters; these hours replace six hours of normal course credit for the M.A. in English. Normally we expect that students who undertake the writing of a thesis will have demonstrated strong research and writing skills in their first 18 hours of graduate work; usually, a GPA of 3.3 is expected for a thesis candidate, though exceptions can be made by the Graduate Director after consultation with your teachers and the Graduate Committee. By decision of the department’s Graduate Faculty, you may not enroll in any thesis hours while you have incompletes on your transcript.

The thesis should range between sixty and eighty pages, including at minimum five chapters (including the introduction and conclusion) and an appropriate Works Cited listing; the length can be greater, but generally should not exceed 100 pages. Students who are submitting a creative writing thesis (e.g. a collection of short stories or poems) are expected to include a critical preface to their work, discussing appropriate theoretical and/or technical issues, sources of influence, and other relevant matters, as might be expected in a published edition of their works. The length of a creative writing thesis will depend on the nature of the work produced; the writer, Thesis Director, and Graduate Director will confer early in the writing process to make sure that the intended work will be of acceptable length.

The student must find a faculty member to serve as Thesis Director. Only members of the Graduate Faculty may supervise a Master’s Thesis. This faculty member must in advance agree to supervise and evaluate the thesis, along with two other faculty members who will serve as second and third readers. Your other readers should be members of the Graduate Faculty, but in appropriate circumstances any member of the tenure-track faculty may serve as a thesis reader. Normally, your readers will be faculty members from the Department of English; however, in appropriate circumstances, you may request a tenure-track faculty member from another Winthrop department (or in very special cases where Winthrop has no faculty members with appropriate expertise) from another accredited institution to serve as readers of your thesis. Consult with your director and the Director of Graduate Studies if you have questions about the eligibility of a faculty member to serve on your committee.

Students who are seeking to pursue the Thesis Option need to register for ENGL 695 in their second to last semester, ENGL 696 their last semester. They must submit the “Application to Register for Thesis Hours” when they are advised for the first semester of thesis work. The completed “Thesis Supervision” form must be submitted to the Graduate Director before a student can register for ENGL 695. The Thesis Director will be the professor of record for both semesters of the student’s work. The Director may use plus-minus grading, whole letter grades, or S/U grading, at her/his discretion; this choice is indicated on the Thesis Supervision form. The form will also record whether the thesis director is to receive a bound, print copy of the final thesis.

Students should become familiar with the Graduate School guidelines for formatting and margins as early as possible, submitting all drafts of their work in that format. Early in the ENGL 696 semester, students must schedule an appointment with Margaret Williamson in the Graduate School to have sample printouts of their title page, Table of Contents, a chapter first page, and a body page of the
thesis checked for compliance with the Graduate School’s presentation standards. Do NOT wait until just before the submission deadline to do this; it will cost time, aggravation, money, and possibly your opportunity to graduate if you have not formatted your materials properly.

Ø During ENGL 695*, the student’s minimum tasks are to receive approval of the Thesis Proposal and Bibliography (see guidelines) from his or her Thesis Director and the Director of Graduate Studies in English, as well as complete one chapter of his or her thesis for distribution to their entire committee. In conjunction with the Director, the student will choose and obtain the permission of two other appropriate faculty members to serve as readers on his/her thesis. Before receiving a final grade in ENGL 695, the student must submit the “Record of Thesis Committee” form to the Graduate Director.

Ø During ENGL 696**, the student will complete and defend the thesis by the approved deadline. (Students completing a thesis must also complete oral comprehensive examinations.) The final draft for the defense must be submitted to the entire committee at least a week before the defense date.

The defense date must be arranged before mid-semester break and the actual defense must take place no later than three working days before the Graduate School’s submission deadline to allow time for late revisions, appropriate manuscript preparation, and obtaining signatures; remember that the Dean may wish to read the complete thesis before approving it. Part of the learning involved in writing a thesis is developing the time- and project-management skills needed to produce a work on this scale; observe these deadlines carefully!

**Important Note:** The Graduate School generally requires that completed theses be submitted about three weeks before the end of the semester. Students should consult the calendar on the Graduate School website before scheduling their work for ENGL 696.

**Even More Important Note:** Your Director and committee will need time to read and respond to each chapter, and they must find this time in between dealing with their own assigned courses and other departmental and university responsibilities. Make sure that you discuss how much time they will need to read material during your ENGL 695 and ENGL 696 semesters; many thesis drafts arrive on readers’ desks in the midst of advising, committee work, and student research paper conferences, all of which can slow down the process of returning material to you. If you establish a calendar with your director and readers, you’ll all have clear expectations of when material will be submitted and how long the turnaround time may be.

A bound, printed copy of the final thesis must be ordered for the Department’s archives, whether you choose electronic submission or not.

* Students may not enroll in ENGL 695 or ENGL 696 while having any outstanding incompletes in other courses.

**Students who receive a “C” or lower in ENGL 695 may not take ENGL 696.
Thesis Proposal Guidelines

Due Date: Check "Important Dates" but generally the Friday before midterm break)

In order to complete your thesis in an efficient and thorough manner, you must complete a Thesis Proposal during your first semester of thesis hours (ENGL 695). While the form below requires signatures only from your Thesis Director and the Director of Graduate Studies, you are expected to distribute your Proposal to your entire committee.

Your proposal should include an essay of between five and seven pages, and a working bibliography of at least 15 secondary sources correctly documented in MLA format (you should anticipate the number of sources to increase dramatically through the course of your project.) Your essay should include the following:

REQUIRED FORMAT

Your title should be left justified in the top left corner of your essay, with spaces below for the approval of your Thesis Director and the Director of Graduate Studies in English.

“Clipping the Furies’ Wings”: Women’s Ways of Knowing in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” The Awakening, and The House of Mirth”

(Your Name)

_____________________________, Thesis Director

_____________________________, Director of Graduate Studies

Your proposal must include the following:

Title of the Thesis

While this may be a working title, a title indicates that you have considered the significance of your work and how it fits within the existing scholarly work on the subject.

Problem, Question at Issue

In your introduction, you are to lay the foundation for your study, explaining the question that has arisen regarding your field of study. Questions you might address include the following: How did this issue arise? What issues relate to the one you have chosen? Why is yours significant? What critical approach(es) will you be using to develop your position, and why? This portion of the proposal should demonstrate that your interest in this subject is more than superficial, indicating your enthusiasm for and commitment to the project.

Review of Literature

This section should survey those works that have already addressed the issue in some manner or those scholars who have examined topics that closely relate to your topic. If appropriate, trace the history of
scholarship for your question at issue. Questions you might address include: How have other scholars approached the topic? Is their work satisfactory or helpful? What are the flaws and oversights that exist in current research? Finally, be sure once again to reiterate how your study will fit within the overall scholarly conversation about your subject. For a creative thesis, this section should situate your work in its appropriate creative context; you will need to write a critical preface for your thesis, and this may well be a draft of that preface.

Plan of Action

While you will certainly not have completed your research by this time, it is important for you to indicate that you do have a plan of action for completing your project. Questions you might address include the following: What are other areas of research do you need to pursue? Why are those steps necessary? How will you obtain the works that are not currently available in Dacus? In addition to your research, how do you envision your writing process? In other words, at one point will you feel prepared to begin drafting your first chapters?

Timeline

After examining the schedule recommended by the Graduate School for completing your thesis (see Graduate Webpage), as well as concerning your own course work and research schedule, develop a timeline for your project. Specify when you will have each section of your thesis completed, when the first draft of the entire project may be completed, etc. Make sure you have discussed the appropriateness of this timeline with your Thesis Director as well. Remember that your readers will need ample time (approximately two weeks) to read and respond to your work as you plan this schedule.

Conclusion

For your conclusion, summarize your expectations and reiterate the significance of your project. Summarize in general the areas of research you plan to pursue, and once again state how your thesis will contribute to the overall field. Finally, describe your plans for the thesis beyond graduation—how will you use it? Do you plan on attempting to publish any parts of the thesis? Will you present some of this work at conferences? How will this work further your teaching?

Working Bibliography

Your working bibliography is intended to demonstrate that you have begun a thorough review of published, peer-reviewed literature relevant to your topic, and that you are capable of conducting more than a convenience search for material. This bibliography must consist of at least 15 secondary sources, correctly documented in MLA format. Not all these sources may be used in the final thesis if your topic does not require them; we expect that the Works Cited for the final thesis will be far more extensive than this. If your director requests it, the working bibliography may be accompanied by brief annotations about the content and potential usefulness of each source for your research.