Department of English
Goals for the Undergraduate English Major

The Broad Goal: Literate Citizens

We aim to prepare our students to be literate citizens. By "literate" we mean that our students should be knowledgeable about literature and should read, write, and speak with sophistication. Reading well, in the sense of being able to interpret, initiates this literacy. We want our students to be able to make sense of a wide range of literary and cultural texts, and to exercise a range of interpretive skills, from discerning the emotional coloring and figurative meanings of a text, to following an argument and detecting illogic, to recognizing the network of public meanings that suffuse texts. As the worldliness embedded in literature leads us back to the world from which it emerges, so should our students' literacy develop from reading literature to interpreting the world. This interpretive ability finds expression in discussion but more pointedly in writing of all kinds, creative, analytical, and reflective. We encourage students to understand writing as a social act, a way of participating in and shaping our contemporary culture and society. Reading and writing may begin as solitary activities, whose solitariness we want to celebrate and preserve. But a student graduating from the major should see how those acts have their own histories and social frameworks, and how reading, discussing, and writing are communal efforts intertwined with their lives as citizens, indispensable for their lives as social members of English department classes, the university, the commonwealth, and the world.

Learning Objectives:

Attentive reading:
Learn to read literature and other expressive forms with concentration, not only to grasp content but also to appreciate the patterns and effects of style, structure, and genre. Learn to read criticism and theory patiently and astutely.

Imaginative analytical and persuasive writing:
Conceive, draft, revise, and polish, with guidance from peers and professors, essays that 1) offer well-organized, significant, multi-dimensional analyses of texts, 2) manifest a voice and sense of style, and 3) show mastery of standard grammar and punctuation.

Proficient writing in other genres:
Compose creative fiction, poetry, or nonfiction prose; produce lucid and accurate technical writing; or write efficient business or professional communication. Learn
various forms of expression and the various purposes, and rhetorical situations, of the exchange of ideas and information.

**Articulate speaking and discussion:**
Participate in small, spirited classes that 1) develop reading, speaking, and listening skills, 2) heighten one’s awareness of one’s own and others’ positions, and 3) improve one’s ability to do productive work with others.

**Initiative in research & technology:**
Develop discernment and imagination in library research, both technological and traditional, and become creative users of computerized forms of communication.

**Knowledge of literary history, criticism, and theory:**
Become familiar with literature in English from the beginnings to the present, including not only British and American literature but also literatures in English from around the globe, and including both well-established and newer authors and traditions. Become aware of some key texts, terms, or debates in criticism/theory.

**Self-conception as readers and writers in a social world:**
Graduate from the major with a sense of oneself as a literate and verbally skilled citizen who sees culture historically and dynamically and who therefore can participate thoughtfully in writing, interpreting, or teaching its texts, whether these are literary, legal, managerial, political, technical or scholarly, whether for government, nonprofit organizations, businesses, or schools.